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ASYLUM AND MIGRATION OVERVIEW 2024 IN ESTONIA

NATIONAL REPORT (PART 2)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the most significant developments in 2024 in 10 key areas of migration and asylum in Estonia: legal migration, international protection, temporary protection and other measures in response to persons fleeing the war in Ukraine, integration and inclusion of migrants, citizenship and statelessness, borders, visas and Schengen, irregular migration, trafficking in human beings, return and readmission, and migration and development cooperation.

The year 2024 was marked by continued geopolitical instability in the European Union's neighbourhood, significantly influencing migration dynamics across the EU and in Estonia. Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine remained a key driver of displacement, prompting the Council of the EU to extend the temporary protection mechanism until March 2026. At the same time, the escalating conflict in Gaza, which began in late 2023 and intensified throughout 2024, contributed to further displacement from the Middle East. Political unrest and a series of military coups in parts of West Africa also added to the complexity of the global migration landscape, fuelling irregular migration flows toward Europe. While these developments did not have a direct and significant impact on Estonia, the country has been indirectly affected as part of the European Union, particularly in the context of common migration and asylum responsibilities.

According to Statistics Estonia, as of January 2025, the population of Estonia decreased by 0,34% to a total of 1 369 995. According to preliminary data, in 2024, there were 10,721 births and 15,832 deaths recorded in Estonia. Based on registered migration data, 18 634 persons immigrated to Estonia and 17 260 emigrated from Estonia as well. While in the last two years the positive migration balance has been able to compensate for the exceptionally low number of births, in 2024 the population as a whole also

decreased by more than 4,692 people. Starting from 2022, the main reason for increased immigration has been the arrival in Estonia of Ukrainian war refugees. In 2024, over 7,000 people, or 38%, of the immigrants were Ukrainian citizens, 3829 Ukrainian citizens left Estonia¹.

Statistical information compared to year 2023:

- The total number of first-time issued temporary residence permits (TRP) was 2868, marking a decrease of 33%. The number of TRP-s decreased across all bases of residence permits - family migration -31%, labour migration - 40%, study migration - 8%, and business migration -16%.
- The number of short-term employment registrations decreased by 24%. Foreign workers from Ukraine, Moldova and Uzbekistan, were the top 3 citizenships of short-term employment registrations.
- In 2024, 1,328 persons submitted applications for international protection (as compared to 2023, the number of applicants decreased by 66% in 2024), and international protection was granted to 1,369 individuals (the number of beneficiaries of protection decreased by 65% as compared to 2023). Top three countries by nationality for those who received refugee status were Russian Federation (17), Belarus (7) and Turkey (5). Subsidiary protection was granted mainly to Ukrainian nationals (1330).
- Estonia received 6094 applications for temporary protection and 46,491 applications to extend temporary protection.
- Estonian citizenship was granted to 751 persons which is 30% less than in 2023. Most often the Estonian citizenship was granted to persons with undetermined citizenship (409 persons) and citizens of the Russian Federation (200 persons).
- Estonia issued a total of 14 343 visas in 2024 (8883 short-term C visas and 5460 long-term D-visas), which was an 8% decrease compared to the previous year when in total 15 647 visas were issued.
- In 2024, the total number of issued return decisions dropped 24% compared to previous year. According to the PBGB data, in 2024 784 return decisions were issued, while in 2023 1031 return decisions were issued. 85% of these were decisions for voluntary departure. Number of persons who actually left the country remained high with the return rate being 92%.

Legal migration continued to be influenced by the war in Ukraine. While there were no major cross-cutting developments in Estonia in 2024 regarding legal migration, there were some legislative changes. The State Fees Act was amended, as the fees under the Ministry of the Interior had remained unchanged for many years and no longer covered the costs of the procedures carried out. In addition, amendments to the Aliens Act entered into force, transposing EU Directive 2021/1883 (the revised EU Blue Card Directive) into national law.

¹ EMN Estonia, Migration statistics 2020-2024 Available here: <https://www.emn.ee/randestatistika-valjaanded/>

Regarding international protection the main focus was on implementing the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which will entail large scale changes in the legal system. On 3 September 2024, the Minister of the Interior issued a decree establishing a working group tasked with preparing and overseeing the implementation of Estonia's national plan. The working group was set up retroactively as of 6 June 2024, and the national implementation plan was formally adopted on 6 December 2024. The main objective of this national plan is to ensure a coordinated and structured approach to implementing the Pact in Estonia, in line with the requirements for all Member States to finalise their national implementation plans by 12 December 2024.

Due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, Estonia focused on providing swift temporary protection and facilitating longer-term integration of Ukrainian war refugees. On one hand, the temporary protection procedure was automated in August to make the procedure more efficient and reduce waiting times. On the other hand, changes were made in providing general medical care by requiring Ukrainian refugees to register with a family doctor, but measures were also taken to support more effective integration by tailoring the adaptation programme to better meet the specific needs of Ukrainian refugees.

One of the most significant developments in the field of integration in 2024 was the launch of the transition to fully Estonian language education in kindergartens and grades 1 and 4. The transition was initiated by a government decision made in 2022 aimed at strengthening national cohesion and ensuring high quality education in Estonian for all children. This marks the largest education reform since Estonia regained independence in 1991.

Estonia continued with development of its South-Eastern border section, focussing on preparedness for crises and population protection. Of the total land border (135.6 km), 80 % of the planned volume of delay fences had been installed by the end of 2024.

In May 2024, 1st stage of a new national Visa Register went live. New Visa Register was taken into use by officials processing visa applications externally at the Estonian foreign representations or internally at the PBGB service centres. The controller of the data base is the PBGB.

As of February 2024, Russian Federation decided to close the Ivangorod border crossing point (on Estonian side Narva border crossing point) to road transport. Border crossing point was closed due to renovation. The border crossing remained open to pedestrians. According to the Russian Federation, the renovation work will last until late 2025. The Narva border crossing point has been the main land corridor between the EU and Russia since Finland closed its border crossings further north.

From 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025 Estonia holds the presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (the CBSS). In Estonian priorities set for the presidency, the Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings (TF-THB) will focus on co-operation with third countries, namely Central Asian and Balkan regional anti-trafficking networks for tackling crimes of trafficking where the Baltic Sea region is the destination.

In March 2024, the bilateral return readmission agreement between Estonia and Uzbekistan entered into force (agreement was signed on 23 October 2023).

1. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Article 9 (1) of Council Decision 2008/381/EC establishing the EMN, each National Contact Point is required to provide an annual report describing the migration and asylum situation in the Member State, which includes policy developments and statistical data.

This report is based on both primary and secondary data obtained via desk research or from the key stakeholders in the field of migration and asylum. Where necessary, publicly available information was used, such as policy papers, statistics, reports, news and public websites. Most of the information has been collected from the stakeholders through formal inquiries and expert interviews.

The key stakeholders involved in the making of this report include:

- The Estonian Police and Border Guard Board (hereinafter PBGB) who is responsible for migration and border management and thus one of the main sources of information and statistical data.
- Relevant ministries, incl. Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, and Ministry of Education and Research.
- Non-governmental organisations (NGO-s), incl. Estonian Refugee Council, Estonian Human Rights Centre, Mondo, Johannes Mihkelson Centre.
- Other contributing agencies and organisations, incl. Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, Social Insurance Board, Statistics Estonia, Estonian Business and Innovation Agency's "Work in Estonia" program, IOM Tallinn office, UNHCR Representation for the Nordic and Baltic countries, Integration Foundation, Red Cross Estonian Office, Education and Youth Board.

The information and data presented in this report were obtained from these organisations unless specified otherwise. The data collection and desk research were carried out in December 2024 – April 2025.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The primary institution responsible for policy-making in the area of migration and asylum is the **Estonian Ministry of the Interior**. These policies are mainly implemented by the PBGB, subordinated under the Ministry. The PBGB is involved in processing of all applications of TCNs (including asylum seekers and applicants for temporary protection, persons staying in the country irregularly, as well as applicants for residence permits and applying for Estonian citizenship) as well as the applications of the citizens of the European Union. Although the decision-making capacity (e.g. granting a residence permit, etc.) lies with the PBGB, the decisions are taken in close cooperation with the Estonian Ministry of the Interior, the Estonian Internal Security Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund etc.

The **Ministry of Social Affairs** is responsible for policy-making regarding services for the beneficiaries of temporary and international protection, unaccompanied minors as well as victims of trafficking in human beings. Its subordinate organisation, the **Social Insurance Board** coordinates organisation of those services.

The **Ministry of Justice** coordinates policymaking in relation to victims of human trafficking and non-discrimination.

In close cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, the **Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications** develops policies in relation to skilled migration. The subordinate agencies responsible for executing these policies are **Estonian Business and Innovation Agency** (responsible for talent attraction and retention), which also coordinates the **Work in Estonia** programme and the **International House of Estonia**.

The **Ministry of Education and Research** gives its input to Ministry of the Interior concerning study migration and researchers' mobility. In August 2021, the new governmental body the Education and Youth Board (Harno) was established under the administration of the Ministry of Education and Research.

The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** is responsible for visa issues, development cooperation, humanitarian aid policy, and via the diplomatic corps, advances relations with third countries. Since 2021 the Ministry is also responsible for the diaspora policy (which was formerly task of the Ministry of Interior).

The **Ministry of Culture** is the main institution responsible for developing integration policies, and since spring 2021 also the adaptation policy for newly-arrived migrants. Its subordinate institution Integration Foundation offers for example various language learning possibilities and coordinates the activity of Tallinn and Narva Estonian Language Houses.

In addition, several NGO-s and other organisations play a role in supporting the implementation of migration and asylum policies. The **Estonian Refugee Council** is responsible for providing the support person service to the beneficiaries of international protection. The Estonian branch of the **International Organization for Migration** (IOM) is responsible for providing the assisted voluntary return service for persons with no legal basis to stay. **AS Hoolekandeteenused** is responsible for the Vao and Vägeva reception centres of applicants of international protection. **NGO Mondo** focuses on education/health, subsistence, environmental and digital competence programmes in different countries and global education in Estonia.

THE LEGAL SYSTEM

- The **Aliens Act** regulates the entry of third-country nationals, their stay, residence and employment as well as the bases for legal liability of aliens.
- The **Citizen of the European Union Act** regulates the bases for stay and residence of citizens of the European Union and their family members.
- The **Act of Granting International Protection to Aliens** (AGIPA) regulates the granting international protection to person, the legal status and basis for stay.
- The **Citizenship Act** regulates issues related to citizenship.
- The **Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act** (OLPEA) provides the basis and procedures regarding obligations to leave, prohibition of entry and the assistance for travel through Estonia.
- The **State Borders Act** defines the state border, the border regime and the liability for violation and illegal crossing.

- The **Administrative Procedure Act** provides the general principles of administrative procedures.

All of the above-mentioned legislation has been passed by the Estonian Parliament and signed into law by the president. There are also numerous regulations of the ministers responsible for the area.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABIS – Automated Biometric Identification System
AGIPA – Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens
AMIF – Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
ESTPOL – Estonian Police and Border Guard Board´s special unit
EU – European Union
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
IOM – International Organization of Migration
MIGIS – Migration Surveillance Database
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
OLPEA – Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry
PBGB – Police and Border Guard Board
SIB – Social Insurance Board
SIS – Schengen Information System
TPD – Temporary Protection Directive
TRP – Temporary residence permit
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

2. OVERVIEW OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

As a new key development in 2024 was the adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum on 11 June, marking a turning point in the EU's common migration policy. Although the new rules will only begin to apply from June 2026, the Pact lays out a comprehensive legal and policy framework, aiming to create a more balanced and unified approach among EU Member States. It focuses on enhancing responsibility-sharing and solidarity, with key elements addressing asylum procedures, irregular migration, returns, and crisis management.

In response to the adoption of the Pact and the accompanying Common Implementation Plan, Estonia took significant national steps to ensure readiness for the new EU framework. On 3 September 2024, the Minister of the Interior issued a decree establishing a working group tasked with preparing and overseeing the implementation of Estonia's national plan. The working group was set up retroactively as of 6 June 2024, and the national implementation plan was formally adopted on 6 December 2024. The main objective of this national plan is to ensure a coordinated and structured approach to implementing the Pact in Estonia, in line with the requirements for all Member States to finalise their national implementation plans by 12 December 2024. This work reflects Estonia's commitment to contributing to a common, fair, and effective European migration system.

Due to continuation of Ukrainian war, Estonia was focusing on providing swift temporary protection and integrating Ukrainian war refugees.

The beginning of the 2024/25 academic year marked the launch of the transition to fully Estonian language education in kindergartens and grades 1 and 4, initiated by a 2022 government decision aimed at strengthening national cohesion and ensuring high quality education in Estonian for all children. This marks the largest education reform since Estonia regained independence in 1991.

The year 2024 saw a range of debates on migration-related issues. Firstly, national debates over foreign labour in Estonia continued to intensify in 2024. As the immigration quota has remained a limiting factor for businesses seeking to hire skilled workers from outside the EU, the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry stated in October that the sector-specific distribution of the quota system is outdated and does not address the core issue. Discussions resulted to the Minister of Economy and Industry suggestion, that current limit could be raised from 1,303 persons per year – 0.1 percent of Estonia's permanent residents – to 2,600 persons under normal circumstances, but when economic growth is over 2 percent per year it could increase to 3,900 per year. These debates continued in 2025.

Additionally, national debate emerged in Estonia over whether foreign nationals—particularly citizens of countries supporting aggressor states—should retain the right to vote in local elections. The discussion gained significant attention both domestically and internationally, centring largely on national security concerns. Proponents of the restriction argued that allowing citizens of hostile regimes to take part in local

democratic processes could pose a security risk, especially during times of geopolitical instability. However, critics raised concerns about the potential negative impact on social integration. They warned that stripping voting rights from well-integrated residents could alienate communities that have otherwise demonstrated loyalty to Estonia.

On 26 March 2025, the Estonian Parliament voted in favour of amending the Constitution to revoke the right of Russian and Belarusian citizens and persons with undetermined citizenship to vote in local elections. As a result, persons with undetermined citizenship will be able to vote for the last time in the local elections held in October 2025. According to the authors of the amendment, this timeline gives affected individuals sufficient opportunity to apply for Estonian citizenship if they wish to participate in future elections. The bill was officially promulgated by President Alar Karis in April 2025.

3. LEGAL MIGRATION

3.1 OVERARCHING AND CROSSCUTTING DEVELOPMENTS

A need for amendments regarding state fees arose in 2024 as the fees in the field of the Ministry of the Interior had remained unchanged for many years and no longer covered the costs associated with the operations carried out. On 12 June 2024, the Government of the Republic of Estonia approved Amendments to the State Fees Act and Amendments to Other Associated Acts to raise several state fee rates from the beginning of 2025². The Act amends the rates of the state fees for applications for the acquisition and restoration of citizenship and release from citizenship, applications for identity documents, applications for residence permits, for long-stay visas and for the registration of short-term employment, population register acts and more. Reduced state fees still apply for children, pensioners, disabled people and, in the case of travel documents, beneficiaries of international protection.

Although there were no major crosscutting developments in 2024, legal migration in Estonia still continues to be influenced by the war in Ukraine.

3.2 STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR 2024 IN LEGAL MIGRATION

The migration balance in Estonia for 2024 was 1,374 people, which is significantly lower than the average of the past 10 years. Ukrainian citizens continued to dominate among incoming migrants, with 7,013 arrivals recorded. However, this figure is nearly half of what it was in 2023 and almost five times lower than in 2022. In total 18,634 persons came to live in Estonia. In 2024, emigration from Estonia, on the other hand, reached its highest level, which means that immigration exceeded emigration by 1,374 persons. Before the war, about 500 Ukrainian citizens left Estonia annually, but last year, emigration among Ukrainians rose to nearly 4,000 people. This surge is also the main reason why emigration in 2024 reached its highest level in the past decade.³

The total number of first-time issued temporary residence permits (TRP) by PBGB was 2868, marking a decrease of almost 33% compared to the previous year. A decrease, which among other reasons, can be explained by sanctions imposed in 2022, occurred in all categories of legal migration. The number of TRP-s issued for employment decreased by 40%, for family migration by 31%, for entrepreneurship by 16% and for studying by 8%.

Table 1. First-time TRP-s issued by PBGB by type of migration, 2020-2024 (Source: PBGB)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
First-time TRP-s	4710	6087	5989	4261	2868
Employment	2089	2249	2463	2054	1235
Studying	533	1078	551	424	389
Family migration	1958	2642	2867	1686	1154

² Act Amending the State Fees Act and Related Acts, available:

<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/129062024003>

³ Statistics Estonia "1,369,995 people: Estonia's population declined", ERR (23.04.2025), available:

<https://www.stat.ee/en/news/1369995-people-estonias-population-declined>

Entrepreneurship	111	106	85	85	71
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The Top 5 nationalities to whom first-time TRP-s was issued, were Ukraine (552), India (268), Russian Federation (218), Turkey (157) and Azerbaijan (108).

Table 2. First-time TRP-s by type of migration and TOP 5 nationalities, 2024 (Source: PBGB)

First-time TRP	Ukraine	India	Russia	Turkey	Azerbaijan
Employment	Ukraine	India	Uzbekistan	Philippines	Moldova
Studying	Pakistan	China	Azerbaijan	India	USA
Family migration	Russia	Ukraine	India	Turkey	Nigeria
Entrepreneurship	Turkey	Iran	China	Ukraine	USA

The full-scale aggression in Ukraine has significantly reshaped the landscape of labour migration into Estonia. While foreign workers from Ukraine, Belarus, and the Russian Federation previously dominated, there is now a noticeable shift, particularly in the replacement of Belarusian and Russian nationals, by a more diverse influx from Central Asian countries. Ukrainian citizens still make up a substantial share of the foreign workforce but considering Russia's aggression, the overall composition of foreign labour is becoming more varied. The first factor causing this is the sanctions adopted by the government in the aftermath of the war, restricting both Russian and Belarusian citizens from working and moving to Estonia. The second variable is the ban on military-aged men in Ukraine to leave the country. In addition, the war has affected economy as a whole. The number of first-time temporary residence permits for employment decreased by a record 40% compared to 2023. The decline was especially sharp in specific categories: permits issued for top specialists fell by 47% and for employment in startups by 84%. The number of short-term employment registrations decreased by 24%. Third-country nationals whose short-term employment was registered in 2024, were most often still citizens of Ukraine (1635), Moldova (1082), Uzbekistan (521), India (287) and Georgia (235). Top 5 areas of occupation for registering short-term employment were manufacturing, agriculture and forestry, construction, service and electronic communications service sector.

Table 3. Number of short-term employment registrations 2020-2024 (Source: PBGB)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Short-term employment registrations	22 110	32 927	24 388	7061	5379

The number of people who hold long-term resident's residence permit decreased by 2%. The largest three groups among the long-term residence permit holders are citizens of Russian Federation (51%) and persons with undetermined citizenship (43%), followed by 3% of citizens of Ukraine.

Table 4. Number of persons holding long-term residence permits, 2020-2024 (Source: PBGB)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Long-term residence permits	155 262	150 943	147 345	143 827	140 617

The Police and Border Guard Board offers a free migration counselling service in Estonian, English, and Russian. The main goal of the counsellors is to support foreigners in settling in Estonia and to serve as partners to employers, entrepreneurs, educational institutions, and other stakeholders who invite foreigners to Estonia. In 2024, more than 14,200 phone calls were answered, over 7,500 email inquiries were responded to, nearly 800 online counselling sessions and more than 300 in-person consultations were conducted, and 26 information sessions were organized.

3.3 WORK-RELATED MIGRATION

The number of permanent residents of Estonia has decreased compared with 2024, thus, the immigration quota for the year 2024 was 1303 and for the year 2025 is 1298. However, once again the government set the maximum annual immigration quota that the Aliens Act allows. Since 2022, the quota has been divided between sectors to reserve a fair proportion of the quota based on residence permit statistics and short-term employment registrations from recent years. This form of distribution provides relief in areas where labour shortages are most pressing, thus inhibiting the growth and development of companies. Immigration quota in Estonia regulates labour migration and provisions were made for specific industries and by the order of the Minister of the Interior⁴, the quota was divided as follows:

- 150 TRP-s for employment in transport and warehousing sector;
- 35 TRP-s for employment as a journalist accredited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- 34 TRP-s for employment in the professional activities in the capacity of a sportsman, coach, referee or sports official by summons of a respective sports federation;
- 15 TRP-s for employment in a performing arts institution as person engaged in creative activities;
- 5 TRP-s on the basis of a treaty.

Thus, out of the 2025 quota, 239 residence permits are reserved for the above areas, but over a thousand are freely allocated. In 2024, the situation was similar.

However, there are several exemptions not subject to the quota, including TRP for short-term employment, TRP for employees working in a growth company, ICT workers and foreigners working in startups or engaged in startup entrepreneurship. The quota also does not cover family-related immigration, immigration for study or work as an academic, for the purpose of acting as a major investor or working as a top specialist receiving 1.5 times the average salary in Estonia. Additionally, the quota does not include citizens of the European Union and their family members, citizens of the United States, United Kingdom and Japan, or people seeking international protection. In 2024 Article 115 of the Aliens Act was amended adding an additional category of exemption from the quota: an alien who, as a former holder of the Blue Card of the European Union, holds a long-term resident's residence permit of a member state of the European Union.⁵

⁴ Bills of the Government of Estonia, available at:

<https://eelroud.valitsus.ee/main/mount/docList/2338dfc5-4dc9-4af8-8f5e-de7f0ec4eedd#sDNRRGc6>

⁵ Aliens Act, available: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/105042024002>

National debates over foreign labour in Estonia continued to intensify in 2024. As the immigration quota has remained a limiting factor for businesses seeking to hire skilled workers from outside the EU, the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry stated in October that the sector-specific distribution of the quota system is outdated and does not address the core issue⁶. According to the Chamber, allocating quotas by sector is ineffective, as the demand for residence permits under the quota has consistently exceeded supply since 2017—except in 2024. Dividing the quota among sectors does not prevent it from filling up too quickly. According to the Ministry of Interior, the pandemic, the economic downturn and the changed security situation was likely to be behind the bulk of the downturn⁷. At the same time, Minister of Economy and Industry said at the government's weekly press conference that the immigration quota limit could be raised depending on the state of the economy⁸. The minister suggested the current limit could be raised from 1,303 persons per year – 0.1 percent of Estonia's permanent residents – to 2,600 persons under normal circumstances. But when economic growth is over 2 percent per year it could increase to 3,900 per year.

In the fall of 2024, the Labour Inspectorate in cooperation with European Labour Authority (ELA), compiled a new information material for foreigners: "Coming from abroad to work in Estonia"⁹. The information sheet is an important tool to prevent various types of intentional or unintentional irregularities linked to labour migration, as it contains important information that a foreigner should know before starting work (including content of the employment contract, amount of salary, working hours, termination of the employment contract etc.). This information is available in the following languages: Estonian, Azerbaijani, English, Moldovan, Romanian, Russian, Turkish, Tajik, Ukrainian, Uzbek.

Regarding the Labour Inspectorate, of the 2411 applications submitted to the Labour Dispute Committee, 621 were related to migrant workers. This means that one in four labour disputes in Estonia involves foreign workers. A key factor is that many workers from abroad are unaware of their rights, making them more vulnerable to exploitation. The most common issues arise in sectors such as construction, transportation, warehousing, and administrative and support services.

Highly qualified workers

In April 2024, amendments to the Aliens Act entered into force transposing the EU Directive 2021/1883 (revised EU Blue Card directive) into national law.¹⁰ The amendments specify among other things the definition of higher professional qualifications and the educational requirements that EU Blue Card holders must meet in terms of their education. It also regulates the higher professional skills which are

⁶ „Allocation of Immigration Quotas Does Not Address the Real Problem“, Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (23.10.2024), available here: <https://www.koda.ee/en/news/allocation-immigration-quotas-does-not-address-real-problem>

⁷ „2024 temporary residence permit quota still hundreds short of being filled“, ERR (08.10.2024), available here: <https://news.err.ee/1609484782/2024-temporary-residence-permit-quota-still-hundreds-short-of-being-filled>

⁸ „Government mulls tripling immigration quota“, ERR (03.10.2024), available here: <https://news.err.ee/1609478018/government-mulls-tripling-immigration-quota>

⁹ Labour Inspectorate webpage, available: <https://www.ti.ee/en/foreign-worker/coming-abroad-work-estonia>

¹⁰ Aliens Act, Available: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/105042024002>

considered equivalent to the knowledge, skills and competence attested by higher education qualifications for the purpose of applying for a Blue Card. Among other, the period of validity of the required employment contract was shortened from one year to six months. Also, the Blue Card holder may be unemployed for a total of up to three months if they have held a Blue Card for less than two years, and for a total of up to six months if they have held a Blue Card for at least two years. The amendments also stipulate the conditions for mobility for EU Blue Card holders and establishes more favourable conditions for family reunification.

A study by Work in Estonia on the recruitment and need for foreign specialists in the Estonian industrial sector, launched in 2023 and carried out by the Institute of Baltic Studies, was completed in 2024.¹¹ The study focused on foreign recruitment in the manufacturing sector and revealed that manufacturing companies face similar challenges to other sectors, such as IT. Despite the economic downturn, interest in hiring foreign labour remains high, especially among larger companies. Most companies prefer recruiting locally first, but in cases requiring specific expertise, they also turn to international recruitment. Notably, the demand spans various roles and skill levels—not only for top specialists. The findings underline the need for flexible migration policies and broader support measures beyond just high-skilled workers.

Medium and low skilled workers

Even though there were no major legal amendments regarding medium and low skilled workers, actions were still taken to improve the field. In November 2024, a free seminar for road transport companies was held under the leadership of the ELA in cooperation with the Labour Inspectorate, the Police and Border Guard Board and the Estonian Ministry of Climate. During the seminar, operators gained practical insights from experts on driving and resting rules, remuneration and work permits.

In the beginning of 2023, an amendment to the Aliens Act entered into force introducing new temporary residence permit for short-term employment. PBGB was prepared to receive high volumes of applications as the new residence permit was believed to alleviate the labour shortage. However, the number of applications remained quite modest in 2023 (273 new temporary residence permits for short-term employment) but was expected to increase in the following years. Contrary to expectations, only 65 new temporary residence permits for short-term employment were issued in 2024. TOP 3 nationalities included Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Philippines.

Entrepreneurs and Start-ups

Although there were no major legal changes concerning entrepreneurs and start-ups, a new incentive introduced in early 2023 to support the hiring of foreign talent in growth companies has seen an increase. In 2024, 23 temporary residence permits were issued for employment in growth companies — nearly double the number issued in 2023. TOP 3 nationalities included Brazil, USA and Colombia.

¹¹ Institute of Baltic Studies, A study by Work in Estonia on the recruitment and need for foreign specialists in the Estonian industrial sector. Available: <https://www.ibs.ee/wp-content/uploads/Uuringuaruanne-WiE-toostus.pdf>

According to Estonian Tax and Customs Board statistics¹², Estonia's startup sector has faced a 1,4% workforce reduction due to economic downturns, now numbering 14 396 employees from last year's 14 580. The top ten companies, including Wise (2006 employees), Bolt (1329 employees), and Playtech (661 employees), are responsible for 45% of the jobs created in the startup sector. Foreign talent plays a key role in Estonia's startup sector, with 31% of employees holding foreign citizenship—5% from EU countries and 26% from non-EU nations. According to the statistics by the Estonian Tax and Customs Board, companies in the Estonian startup sector paid 367 million EUR in employment taxes, up 4% from the previous year's 352 million EUR. Major contributors included Bolt (41.8 M EUR), Wise (38 M EUR), Playtech (18.1 M EUR), Yolo (15.6 M EUR), and Pipedrive (14.5 M EUR).

In October 2024, Estonia hosted Tech Tour — Europe's largest community of technology entrepreneurs and investors¹³. The event brought together leading industry investors and a carefully selected group of DeepTech and DefenceTech companies. It attracted a cross-border network of active investors to the region, alongside some of the most promising innovative companies from Estonia, the Baltics, the Nordics, and across Europe.

E-residency

In 2024, the number of issued e-resident's digital IDs increased by 2% compared to previous year. In 2024, the TOP 5 countries of origin for e-residents were Spain, Ukraine, Germany, Turkey and France. The total number of e-residents was 120 383 and TOP 5 citizenships Ukrainian, German, Spanish, Finnish and Russian.

Table 5. Decisions to issue e-resident's digital ID-s to e-residents, 2020-2024
(Source: PBGB)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
E-resident digital IDs	12 955	13 977	12 636	14 309	14 549

3.4 OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

In July 2024, the Labour Inspectorate prepared instructions for Estonian employers on how and in which language to communicate and sign a contract with employees who have come to work in Estonia from a foreign country¹⁴. The main objective of this initiative is to emphasize how important it is that both parties to the employment relationship understand the content of the employment contract in the same way. Although there is no direct legal obligation to translate the instructions, the purpose of the instructions must be taken into account, which is to inform the worker of the hazards in the working environment and how to work safely. This will help to avoid situations

¹² Estonian Tax and Customs Board statistics on Estonia's startup sector. Available at: <https://investinestonia.com/estonian-startups-hit-e3-9b-revenue-mark-as-deeptech-takes-centre-stage/>

¹³ TechTour, available at: <https://techtour.com/>

¹⁴ Labour Inspectorate instructions for Estonian employers. Available at: <https://www.tooelu.ee/et/uudised/1241/mis-keeles-peab-valismaalt-tulnud-tootajaga-suhtlema>

where an untranslated part of the instructions leads to an error. In addition, Labour Inspectorate dedicated the entire month of July to foreign employees, in the framework of which they published relevant material in various information channels.

3.5 STUDENTS AND RESEARCHERS

The number of TRP-s issued for studying has continued to decline, decreasing by 8% compared to 2023. Main reason behind the decrease is Russian aggression against Ukraine, imposed sanctions and halting cooperation with higher education institutions in Russian Federation. Before the aggression, Russia was one of the main destination countries for Estonian universities and higher education institutions. Large number of students used to come from Pskov, St Petersburg and Moscow. However, due to sanctioning, the number of students from Russia has decreased by nearly 65%. In addition, the EU-funded Dora Plus program scholarships have ended, visa refusals for international students from third countries have become more frequent, and the cost of studying has risen.

In the academic year of 2024/2025, there are 3954 foreign students in Estonia from 120 countries. In total, foreign students make up 8,7% of the Estonian student population. The number of students admitted from the United States, Azerbaijan, Latvia, and Germany has increased the most, whereas those from Russia and Nigeria have experienced the most significant decline. In the 2024/2025 academic year, Estonia received 1251 new international students, which is 5% more than last year. 3 most popular fields of study among foreign students are business, administration and law, and humanities and arts. Majority of foreign students study in English—language programmes. At the same time, the number of students enrolled in Estonian-language study programmes is also increasing – 6% study in Estonian-language undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Although there were no major legal developments in this area, the Education and Youth Board of Estonia has successfully carried out several activities to achieve its objectives. Under their leadership, the vision document "*Study in Estonia 2030*"¹⁵ has recently been developed to guide Estonia's advancement as a destination country for international students over the next years. The document envisions Estonia as an attractive and inclusive study destination by 2030, with international students represented across all levels of higher education. A key objective is to strengthen the global visibility and competitiveness of Estonian higher education.

For the fifth time, Statistics Estonia, commissioned by the Education and Youth Board, analysed how much income working international students generated for Estonia during the 2022/23 academic year, both while studying and after graduation¹⁶. Although the number of international degree students studying in Estonia decreased compared to previous years, they still paid over 16 million euros in income and social taxes. Meanwhile, alumni who graduated the year before contributed almost 7 million euros. This represents an increase of 2.5 million euros from the previous academic year for students, while alumni contributions decreased by 1.5 million euros. It turned out that

¹⁵ A vision document by Education and Youth Board of Estonia. Available at: [Study in Estonia 2030.pdf](#)

¹⁶ Information on income working international students generated for Estonia during the 2022/23 academic year. Available: <https://www.stat.ee/en/news/working-international-students-and-graduates-contributed-over-23-million-euros-taxes-previous-academic-year>

slightly more than half of the international students enrolled in Estonian higher education institutions during the previous academic year worked in Estonia alongside their studies for at least one day. International students are most likely to work alongside their studies in the fields of information and communication technology (ICT), engineering, manufacturing and construction, as well as business, administration and law. For example, 70% of ICT students worked during their studies in the 2022/23 academic year. Compared to previous years, more international students are now working in educational institutions, particularly universities. Employment in the service sector, however, has declined year by year.

3.6 FAMILY REUNIFICATION

As of 1 January 2024, marriages can be contracted in Estonia between two adults regardless of their gender.¹⁷ Also, the term “registered partner” was added alongside with spouse allowing registered partners to obtain a residence permit and visa. Even though same-sex couples have been able to register their relationships as civil partnerships for several years already, the change in the law extends rights for these couples. Both marriage and registered partnerships bring rights and obligations for couples which do not extend to those in de facto relationships. These are mostly linked to home, assets, parentage and obtaining support.

The above-mentioned amendments concerning the transposition of the EU Blue Card directive also establish more favourable conditions for family reunification to treat them in the same way as the family member holding the EU Blue Card when moving from one Member State to another.

¹⁷ Act on Amending the Family Law Act and Related Acts. Available at: [Perekonnaseaduse muutmise ja sellega seonduvalt teiste seaduste muutmise seadus–Riigi Teataja](#)

4. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

4.1 STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE YEAR 2024 IN INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

In Estonia, the number of asylum applicants and beneficiaries of international protection has remained relatively low, except during the war in Ukraine and the EU’s decision to implement the temporary protection directive to provide Ukrainian refugees with residence permits in a streamlined process that does not overly burden national asylum systems. Since 1997, a total of 9572 third-country nationals have applied for international protection (except temporary protection) in Estonia. International protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection status) has been granted to 7995 foreigners, including 213 persons who received protection and came to Estonia as part of the EU migration agenda. In 2019 Estonia decided not to continue with resettlement and relocation activities¹⁸. Therefore, there were no persons resettled or relocated to Estonia within the framework of European Agenda on Migration in 2024.

In 2024, Estonia received 1328 first-time applications for asylum, marking a decrease of 67% compared to the record high 3980 first-time applications submitted in 2023. In 2024, 36 third-country nationals received refugee status and 1333 subsidiary protection status. Top three countries by nationality for those who received refugee status were Russian Federation, Belarus and Turkey. Subsidiary protection was granted mainly to Ukrainian nationals followed by Syrians. The increase in the number of asylum applications in the recent years can be attributed to the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine and the need to provide legal basis for stay in the country for those Ukraine nationals who left Ukraine before 24th of February (e.g. already stayed in Estonia) and were now unable to return but did not fall under the scope of the TPD.

Table 6. Number of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection and the number of beneficiaries’ family members (2020-2024). Source: PBGB

	Applicants for international protection	Beneficiaries of international protection	Residence permits for family members of beneficiaries of international protection
2020	46	26	0
2021	76	46	1
2022	2,940	2,107	32
2023	3,980	3,918	31
2024	1,328	1,369	4

¹⁸ Resettlement: In the EU context, the transfer, on a request from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and based on their need for international protection, of a third-country national or a stateless person, from a third-country to an EU Member State, where they are permitted to reside with one of the following statuses: (i) refugee status within the meaning of Art. 2(d) of Directive 2011/95/EU (Recast Qualification Directive), (ii) a status which offers the same rights and benefits under national and EU law as refugee status (see EMN Glossary).

4.2 INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION PROCEDURE

There were no overreaching or crosscutting legal or policy developments in relation to international protection in 2024. One of the reasons for not having any overreaching developments was that the focus is on implementing the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which will entail large scale changes in the legal system. On 3 September 2024, the Minister of the Interior issued a decree establishing a working group to ensure a coordinated approach in preparing and implementing the national implementation plan for the Pact on Migration and Asylum. The decree was implemented retroactively from 6.06.2024. The national implementation plan was adopted on 06.12.2024.

Additionally, the focus remained on providing temporary protection to Ukrainians and their inclusion into Estonian society. Moreover, preparations were made for an evaluation from EUAA, which will give an important input to the legislative system regarding international protection.

Russia decided close the Narva-Ivangorod border crossing point to vehicles as of 1 February 2024, claiming it needs to carry out construction works at the Ivangorod border crossing point. Consequently, the Police and Border Guard Board decided to close the Narva border crossing point to all vehicles. As the number of border crossings decreased due to the fact that Russia closed the Narva-Ivangorod border crossing point to vehicles, it was not purposeful to keep the border crossing point opened from Estonian side during the night. As of 1 May 2024, the border crossing point is closed during night hours (from 23:00 to 7:00). It is possible to cross the border on foot during daytime.

The Supreme Court made a decision¹⁹ regarding granting international protection and the causal link between potential persecution. The Circuit Court obligated the Police and Border Guard Board to grant international protection to the person, as the individual lacked the possibility to refuse compulsory military service in their country of origin on moral grounds, and also in consideration of the individual's limited political activity against the regime of the country of origin while in Estonia. The Chamber did not agree with this conclusion. Firstly, the Circuit Court did not clearly and unequivocally justify in its decision on which of the legal grounds for persecution (race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, political opinion) the inability to refuse military service would lead to persecution. Secondly, the Chamber found that the Circuit Court had failed to establish several relevant facts (including whether and for how long the applicant had stayed in their country of origin as an adult), which were necessary to rule out misuse of the right to asylum through deliberately provoking persecution.

4.3 RECEPTION OF APPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

¹⁹ Decision no 3-23-935/27 of the Supreme Court, available at:
<https://www.riigikohus.ee/et/lahendid?asjaNr=3-23-935/27>

No legislative changes related to reception were undertaken during the year. However, the regulation on internal procedure rules of the accommodation centre for applicants was amended (in force as of 26.04.2024) to be more in line with the practical daily challenges in reception and to align with EUAA standards and indicators on reception. The aim of the amendments was to introduce certain updates into the regulation, including on substance usage, absence from the accommodation centre, complaints mechanisms etc and introduces new aspects such as maintaining a personal file.

In 2024 various AMIF project were implemented with the core focus on the service provision for daily life support and social assistance, including counselling, practical help for everyday living, and referral to other services when necessary. The support services were provided with the assistance of the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) under the project "*Support Services in Accommodation Centres for Applicants and Beneficiaries of International Protection*". The aim of the project is to provide applicants and beneficiaries of international protection residing in accommodation centers designated by the Social Insurance Board with additional services and support that promote independent coping, as well as assistance upon their initial arrival in Estonia.²⁰

To improve accommodation conditions and reception infrastructure, activities continued under the project "*Improving Infrastructure for Reception and Ensuring Readiness of Additional Accommodation Facilities*". In 2024, the focus was primarily on improving accessibility conditions. As a result of the project, the facilities of the centre have been renovated, including the creation of conditions for receiving applicants and beneficiaries of international protection with special needs.²¹

The Supreme Court addressed the grounds for detention in asylum and return procedures, particularly with regard to the risk of absconding and detention based on a threat to national security.²²

4.4 OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

On 01.01.2024 amendments to the Family Law Act and other related acts entered into force. With the amendments marriage equality was established and same-sex couples were granted the right to marry. In connection to establishing the marriage equality in Estonia, the provisions regarding family members in the Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens were amended. According to the new provisions family members of an applicant for international protection are: 1) his or her spouse; 1¹) their registered

²⁰ Order No. 1-3/87 of the Minister of the Interior, available:

<https://siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2023-07/Varjupaiga-%2C%20R%C3%A4nde-%20ja%20Integratsioonifondi%20meetme%201.2%20%E2%80%9ESotsiaalvaldkonnas%20kolmanda%20riikide%20kodanike%2C%20sh%20rahvusvahelise%20kaitse%20taotlejate%20ja%20kaitse%20saanute%20vastuv%C3%B5tutingimuste%20t%C3%B5hustamine%E2%80%9C%20toetuse%20andmise%20ti.pdf>

²¹ Ibid

²² Order no 3-23-2204 and 3-23-2232 of the Supreme Court, available at:

<https://www.riigikohus.ee/et/lahendid?asjaNr=3-23-2204/41> and <https://www.riigikohus.ee/et/lahendid?asjaNr=3-23-2232/38>

partner; 2) his or her unmarried minor child, including an adopted child; 3) an unmarried minor child, including an adopted child, of them and their spouse or registered partner; 4) his or her parent or guardian if the applicant is a minor for the purposes of the Estonian law, except in the case his or her active legal capacity has been expanded for the purpose of getting married and his or her spouse is considered to be his or her family member.

Family members of a refugee and of a person eligible for subsidiary protection are: 1) his or her spouse; 1¹) their registered partner; 2) an unmarried minor child, including an adopted child, of them and their spouse or registered partner; 3) an unmarried and minor child, including an adopted child, under their custody or under the custody of their spouse or registered partner. In the case of shared custody the agreement of the other party sharing custody is required; 4) an unmarried adult child of them or their spouse or registered partner in case the child is unable to cope independently due to the child's state of health or disability; 5) a parent or grandparent maintained by them or their spouse or registered partner in case the country of origin does not provide support resulting from other family ties.

On 10 December, the Statutory Fees Act²³ was amended increasing the state fees for identity document procedures and third-country national status procedures. With the amendment the exemption to not charge for consideration of an application for a residence permit card from a person who submits the application for residence permit card for the purpose of issue of a temporary residence permit extended to the person based on the Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens was annulled. The first residence permit card is still exempt from state fee.

The amendment, which comes into force on 1 January 2025, was made to bring state fees into line with actual costs, as well as to change the behavioral habits of customers by encouraging the use of self-service environment if possible. The extension of the residence permit card is not exempt from the state fee as the person is eligible to work in Estonia.

4.5 INITIATIVES BY NGO-S, INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND THINK-THANKS

In 2024, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi paid a visit to Estonia. During his visit to Estonia, he acknowledged the efforts of organisations working with refugees – such as the Estonian Refugee Council, Mondo and the Estonian Human Rights Centre – in addressing language barriers, providing counselling and community-based protection to better support the inclusion of refugees in Estonian society.²⁴

²³ Statutory Fees Act, available: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/506012025010/consolide>

²⁴ The UN High Commissioner for Refugees visited the Estonian Refugee Council and met with people of refugee background in Tallinn, available: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/en/un-high-commissioner-refugees-visited-estonian-refugee-council-and-met-people-refugee-background>

Estonian Refugee Council (ERC) continued to provide counselling service for refugees and people with migrant backgrounds and adaptation trainings to facilitate the smooth integration and self-sufficiency of refugees in Estonia. For example, in year 2024 ERC provided counselling to over 1100 people either at the ERC office, via email or phone.²⁵

UNHCR and partner Estonian Human Rights Centre provided legal counselling and information for asylum-seekers and refugees regarding asylum procedures, access to temporary protection, and access to rights and services to aid their inclusion and integration. In 2024 344 people received full counselling sessions.²⁶

In 2024, ERC conducted 85 protection monitoring visits with 31 in the last quarter alone, while EHRC carried out 26 in the course of 2024, including visits to Tallinn Airport and the Port of Tallinn. Refugees raised concerns over the uncertainty of their legal status and availability of material assistance. On the other hand, access to education for children and integration activities, as well as Estonian language courses, are viewed positively.²⁷

Estonian Refugee Council also offered mental health support to crisis-affected people through the MindSpring Programme. the MindSpring programme to refugees all over Estonia. It is a group-based program for refugees that supports coping in a foreign country. Participating in the programme raises group members' awareness and provides new knowledge and skills. The group meetings are led by trained coaches with similar experiences, backgrounds, and languages as the participants, who understand their issues, thereby creating trust and a sense of security. In 2024 over 100 people were supported with the MindSpring programme.²⁸

Additionally, ERC continued supporting the self-sufficiency of crisis-affected people by assisting them in starting small businesses or finding a suitable job. As such the second season of an entrepreneurship programme "Empowering Women" for women with refugee backgrounds finished in April during which 15 teams received business and mentoring support to refine their business ideas. Third season of the "Empowering Women"²⁹ started in November where a total of 41 teams were selected to proceed to a four-month incubation programme, including 14 teams with refugee backgrounds. In May a new employability programme "Edge Up"³⁰ was launched which is aimed at job

²⁵ Estonian Refugee Council's Overview of 2024, available: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/en/estonian-refugee-councils-overview-2024>

²⁶ UNHCR Estonia Operational Update - Q4 2024, available: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/116121?_gl=1%2A1ff704q%2A_gcl_au%2AMTgxODg3OTc2MC4xNzQ5NjMzNzA0%2A_rup_ga%2AMTAwMTAyODU1LjE3NDk2MzM3MDQ.%2A_rup_ga_EVDQTJ4LMY%2AczE3NDk2MzM3MDMkbzEkZzEkdDE3NDk2MzM3NjEkajIkBDaKaDA.%2A_ga%2AMTAwMTAyODU1LjE3NDk2MzM3MDQ.%2A_ga_QW3CM62FW3%2AczE3NDk2MzM3MDQkbzEkZzAkDE3NDk2MzM3MDQkajYwJGwwJGgw&fbclid=IwY2xjawK2KylleHRuA2FibQIxMABicmlkETBSelkzVXA1RnNTSWIISmdnAR5B23QM-VM0t0oSsLqwmFg2LUHbPmukxKMv-imIcfdrgHDLsuDKhHN1b3FQ_aem_zp--Tgs_TFqx1tfPBbs4nQ

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Estonian Refugee Council's Overview of 2024, available: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/en/estonian-refugee-councils-overview-2024>

²⁹ "Empowering Women" incubation programme selects 41 top business ideas, available: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/en/empowering-women-incubation-programme-selects-41-top-business-ideas>

³⁰ New Employability Programme Helps Job Seekers With Refugee Backgrounds Enter Labour Market, available: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/en/new-employability-programme-helps-job-seekers-refugee-backgrounds-enter-labour-market>

seekers with a refugee background who wish to enter the labour market or move to a more suitable position. The programme is active in Estonia and Latvia. Additionally, an employability programme UPBEAT³¹ launched in the summer in collaboration with the Estonian Refugee Council, Startup Refugees, and Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, with the aim to increase the competitiveness of young people with refugee and migrant backgrounds in entrepreneurship and the labour market through learning about artificial intelligence (AI).

³¹ AI-Inclusive Employability Programme Enhances Refugees' Competitiveness in Entrepreneurship, available: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/en/ai-inclusive-employability-programme-enhances-refugees-competitiveness-entrepreneurship>

5. TEMPORARY PROTECTION AND OTHER MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO PERSONS FLEEING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

5.1 LEGAL STATUS

On 24 February 2022, Russian Federation invaded Ukraine which instigated Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. The Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which was adopted following the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, was triggered for the first time by the European Council's response to the unprecedented Russian invasion in Ukraine to offer quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the war. On 2 March 2022, the European Commission rapidly proposed to activate the TPD and on 4 March, the Council unanimously adopted the decision giving those fleeing the war in Ukraine the right to temporary protection³².

Estonia activated the TPD on 9 March 2022 with a Decree of the Government³³, which allows the citizens of Ukraine and their family members as well as beneficiaries of international protection in Ukraine and their family members, who fled the country after Russian military aggression started on 24 February, to apply for temporary protection.

In order to provide a quick response to the start of the aggression in Ukraine and foresee necessary exemptions for legal entry and stay for those fleeing the war as well as for those already in Estonia who were now unable to return, exceptions for Ukrainian citizens and their family members to enter into and stay in Estonia were made based on the order of the Director General of the PBGB on 24 February 2022 no 1.1- 4.1/810 . The order was in force from 24 February until 30 June and allowed:

- Ukrainian citizens and their family members to enter Estonia and stay in Estonia who did not have a biometric passport or whose basis for stay in Estonia should otherwise have expired;
- Ukrainian citizens and their family members who lived in Ukraine until 24 February 2022 and left Ukraine on or after 24 February 2022, who did not have a valid Estonian visa and had not yet received a residence permit of temporary protection;
- Persons and their family members who had been granted international protection in Ukraine, irrespective of their citizenship and who did not have a valid visa and had not yet received a residence permit of temporary protection;

³² Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2022.071.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2022%3A071%3ATOOC

³³ Decree of the Government of Estonia to activate Temporary Protection Directive. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/308032022010>

- Ukrainian citizens who were legally staying in Estonia before 24 February 2022 and who did not have a valid visa.

The PBGB's order was replaced by amendments to the Aliens Act, which were passed on 14 May and specify the legal basis for entry arrival and temporary stay in Estonia. Legal basis for entry into and stay in Estonia as of 24 February 2022 was granted to persons eligible for temporary protection and Ukrainian citizens who stayed in Estonia prior to 24 February 2022.

On 21 March 2023, an amendment to the Aliens Act entered into force that allows those Ukrainian citizens who were in Estonia before the start of aggression in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and to whom temporary protection may be applied, to formalize their right for temporary stay in Estonia as a long-term visa thus enabling them to travel.

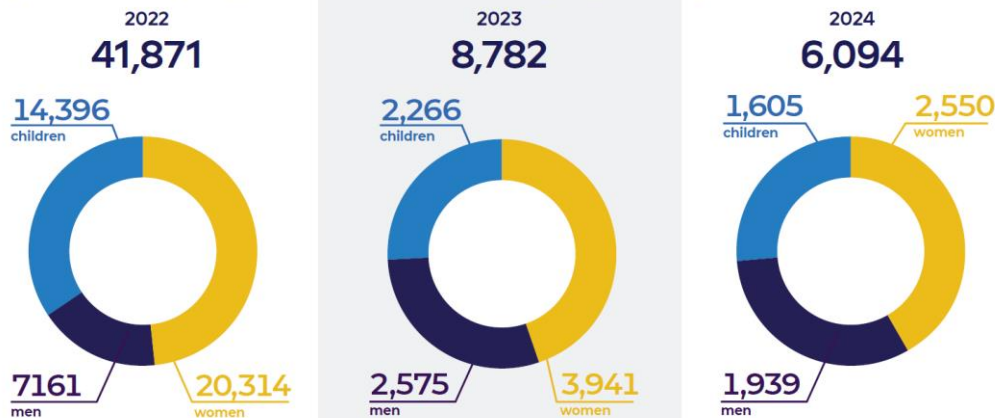
In September 2023, EU Council decided to extend the temporary protection for people fleeing from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine from 4 March 2024 to 4 March 2025. In Estonia, it was decided that in case an application for temporary protection was made after the decision, temporary protection would last until March 2025. Before that deadline, temporary protection lasted for a year, after which the person had to submit a new application for an extension. Similarly, if an extension application was submitted in September 2023 onwards, temporary protection would be extended until March 2025. The aim of this amendment was to reduce administrative burden by avoiding the need to extend the residence permits again for a few months until the temporary protection ends in March 2025.

In Estonia, the temporary protection procedure was automated as of August 2024. For the applications submitted by the persons who do not have a risk profile, the Police and Border Guard Board (PBGB) only needs to confirm that their actual residence is in Estonia. When an application is submitted, the system can automatically make a decision after making an automated check to the Population Register.

On 25 June 2024, the Council of the European Union adopted a decision to extend the validity of temporary protection until March 2026. Temporary protection applied for before 1 August 2024 will be valid until March 2025. Temporary protection applied for from 1 August 2024 onwards will be valid until March 2026.

Figure 1. Applications for temporary protection 2022-2024 and extensions of temporary protection in 2023-2024 (Source: PBGB)

Applications for temporary protection from Ukrainian war refugees (2022-2024)



Renewals of temporary protection for Ukrainian war refugees (2023-2024)



5.2 ACCESS TO RIGHTS

Accommodation

The Social Insurance Board updated guidelines to local governments regarding the compensation of costs related to the housing of beneficiaries of temporary protection. Before 11 September 2024, Ukrainian refugees in Estonia who were granted temporary protection were eligible to apply for a one-time rent compensation to assist with housing costs. This support aimed to help them transition from temporary accommodations to permanent housing. To qualify for the rent compensation, applicants needed to meet the following criteria: they had to be granted a temporary protection status, they needed a registration for the place of residence, lease agreement, and documentation of expenses. Starting from 11 September 2024, war refugees from Ukraine who have been granted temporary protection and have received a residence permit for the first time, and who submit a rent compensation application within six months of receiving their initial residence permit, will be eligible to apply for rent compensation.

Healthcare

The Estonian Health Insurance Fund stopped receiving additional state funding to cover the cost of medical care for Ukrainian war refugees starting from 2024. Until the end of 2023, the state provided extra funding, which allowed the Health Insurance Fund to sign separate general medical care agreements with the clinics such as Tallinn Specialist Medical Centre, Meliva, and Confido to ensure access to care for war refugees. As of 1 January 2025, Ukrainian war refugees will receive family doctor services on the same

basis as Estonian residents. This means that all war refugees who have remained in Estonia and are not yet listed with a family doctor must find one to continue receiving general medical care³⁴.

Education

The beginning of the 2024/25 academic year marked the launch of the transition to fully Estonian-language education in kindergartens and grades 1 and 4, initiated by a 2022 government decision³⁵ aimed at strengthening national cohesion and ensuring high-quality education in Estonian for all children. This marks the largest education reform since Estonia regained independence in 1991, with nearly €500 million in state investment planned by 2030. Broad cooperation among institutions—including the Estonian Language Institute, universities, education authorities, and NGOs—ensures a smoother transition, particularly in Ida-Viru County, where historical Russian-language education has created parallel systems that hinder civic integration.

A central focus of the reform is improving Estonian-language proficiency among educators and ensuring the availability of qualified teachers. Since September 2023, over 500 teachers have been hired in Ida-Viru County, many in summer 2024, while hundreds of others are enrolled in language and development programs. Relaxed language requirements introduced in 2024 temporarily allow B1-level teachers to work, but full compliance is expected by August 2025. Additional measures include language courses in key cities, EU-funded opportunities, and expanded teacher training programs, with more than 1,500 state-funded study places created in 2023 and 2024. Methodological training, such as the “Language Step” program, further supports educators in multilingual classrooms through integrated language and subject teaching.

Employment

On 1 January 2024, a new law regulating labour market measures, the Labour Market Measures Act, and the accompanying Government Regulation, the Employment Programme, came into effect³⁶. Two minor changes concerning third-country nationals were introduced in these acts. First, third-country nationals working in Estonia under short-term employment registration gained access to career services through the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES). Second, a measure supporting the employment of beneficiaries of international protection, which was previously offered temporarily through an ESF-funded program, has now been incorporated into the Employment Programme as a regular, more permanent labour market service.

³⁴ Health Insurance Fund, as of 1 January 2025, Ukrainian war refugees will receive primary healthcare on equal terms with Estonian residents. Available at: <https://tervisekassa.ee/uudised/ukraina-sojapogenikud-hakkavad-perearstiabi-saama-vordsetel-alustel-eesti-elanikega>

³⁵ Act Amending the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act and Other Acts (Transition to Estonian-Language Education). Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/128122022008>

³⁶ The Labour Market Measures Act, and the accompanying Government Regulation, the Employment Programme. Available at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/515112023002/consolide?utm_source=chatgpt.com

5.3 OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

In 2024, the reception of beneficiaries of temporary protection in Estonia was fully integrated into the regular reception system for asylum seekers, and all beneficiaries of temporary protection were accommodated—under the coordination of the Social Insurance Board—in reception centres intended for international protection applicants. As part of the reception service, both target groups were provided with basic living conditions and necessary support services throughout the entire procedure period.

In 2024, the Estonian Human Rights Centre initiated 17 court cases against decisions made by the Police and Border Guard Board (PPA). They were based on complaints by Ukrainian citizens due to delays in decisions regarding the extension of temporary protection, which resulted in the loss of social benefits, health insurance, and registration in the population register. The legal disputes were also initiated regarding recognition of the validity of documents issued in the occupied territories in Ukraine and changes in the Police and Border Guard Board's procedural practice regarding the extension of temporary protection, including the requirement for documents that are not mandatory under the applicable legal norms for extending residence permits or processing applications for international protection³⁷.

The Chancellor of Justice provided a legal explanation after being contacted by an individual whose partner, a Ukrainian citizen, had their child allowance and large family benefits suspended. According to the Social Insurance Board, many families who arrived in Estonia from Ukraine have been receiving benefits simultaneously from both countries. However, the Family Benefits Act³⁸ in Estonia states that a resident is not entitled to family benefits if they are already receiving a similar benefit from another country (§ 4(4)). Under the social security agreement between Estonia and Ukraine, family benefits are paid by the country where the family resides. If both countries' laws entitle the family to benefits, the responsibility falls to the country where the child lives (Article 10 of the agreement). In such situations, the Social Insurance Board may suspend payments while requesting confirmation from the relevant Ukrainian authority—or directly from the recipient—regarding any benefits being received. Although this process may be inconvenient for individuals, it is necessary to ensure that state support from Estonia is provided only to those who are legally eligible.

An e-service "Settling in Estonia" was published under the national portal www.eesti.ee in 2023 and in 2024, two sub-services were added: finding a school place and family benefits. "Settling in Estonia" brings together essential e-services for new immigrants, such as registering a place of residence, participating in the adaptation program, finding a family doctor, learning Estonian, obtaining a driver's license, enrolling in school, accessing information about family benefits and allowances, opening a bank account, and declaring income.

³⁷ In 2024, the Estonian Human Rights Centre initiated 17 court cases against decisions made by the Police and Border Guard Board (PPA). An expert from Estonian Human Rights Centre responded to EMN Estonia inquiry on 21 April 2025.

³⁸ Family Benefits Act. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/509022018001/consolide>

The "Settling in Estonia" service is supported by a practical guide titled "Adaptation Roadmap"³⁹, published in 2024 by the Integration Foundation. The roadmap covers 17 key topics to support the adaptation of newcomers arriving and living in Estonia. It provides an overview of Estonia's legislation, everyday life, and necessary procedures. The material includes detailed information on registering and finding accommodation, employment, starting a business, taxation, healthcare services, education, and language learning opportunities. It also introduces social and support services, cultural life, and ways to participate in society.

In 2024, the recipients of temporary protection were given the opportunity to continue learning Estonian at A2 and B1 levels as part of the Integration Foundation's adaptation program "Settle in Estonia." Previously, it was only possible to learn Estonian at the A1 level as a recipient of temporary protection.

In 2024, the regulation of the adaptation program was updated under the leadership of the Ministry of Culture as follows: A one-day short-format alternative to the 4-day training was developed for Ukrainian citizens who have received temporary protection, as practice showed that people arriving from Ukraine to Estonia do not require a 4-day training.

In 2024, the Ministry of Culture continued to support the safeguarding of the Ukrainian language and culture among Ukrainian war refugees up to 19 years of age through a grant application round⁴⁰.

On 1 January 2024, amendments to the Family Law Act and other related acts entered into force. With the amendments marriage equality was established and same-sex couples were granted the right to marry. In connection to establishing the marriage equality in Estonia, the provisions regarding family members in the Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens were amended. According to the amended provision family members of a person eligible for temporary protection are: 1) his or her spouse; 1) their registered partner; 2) an unmarried minor child, including an adopted child, of them and their spouse or registered partner. The amendments ensured that marriage equality is also guaranteed to the beneficiaries of temporary protection. IOM Estonia continued data collection through the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) (<https://dtm.iom.int/estonia>) to inform ongoing response efforts. The surveys aimed to better understand the profiles, intentions, and needs of refugees from Ukraine residing in or transiting through Estonia. The DTM has been regularly surveying displaced people across the eleven countries included in the Regional Refugee Response Plan for Ukraine since April 2022. In Estonia, it was activated in March 2023⁴¹.

In the first half of 2024, IOM implemented a range of initiatives across Estonia to support the adaptation and well-being of Ukrainian refugees. These included four

³⁹ Adaptation Roadmap, A comprehensive and practical guide designed to support the adjustment of newcomers arriving and living in Estonia by Integration Foundation, "Adaptation Roadmap". Available at: <https://integratsioon.ee/en/roadmap-adaptation>

⁴⁰ Grant Application Round "Support for the Preservation of the Ukrainian Language and Culture for Ukrainian War Refugees up to 19 Years of Age". Available at: <https://www.integratsioon.ee/taotlusvoor-toetus-ukraina-sojapogenikest-kuni-19-aastastele-noortele-ukraina-keele-ja-kultuuri-2025>

⁴¹ IOM Estonia continued data collection through the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). Available at: <https://dtm.iom.int/estonia>. IOM Estonia expert responded to EMN Estonia inquiry on 26 May 2025

focused adaptation courses for 85 adults in Saaremaa and Kohtla-Järve, covering employment and parenting in Estonia. Three 10-week school programmes introduced 106 Ukrainian children to Estonian culture, language, and daily life in Räägu, Puhja, and Kohtla-Järve. Additionally, 113 children participated in summer camps in Topu and Saaremaa, engaging in educational and recreational activities that fostered friendships and language skills. In Narva and Sillamäe, 21 Ukrainian women, primarily single mothers, joined mental wellbeing sessions that offered peer support and self-care strategies to help manage integration challenges and stress⁴².

In 2024, approximately 115 people participated in the activities of the Johannes Mihkelson Centre's project "A Mobile and Cohesive Community", including Estonians, Greeks, Egyptians, and Ukrainians. The project ran from August 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024. Several Ukrainians received valuable language support within the project, which has since enabled them to cope better in their workplaces⁴³.

In 2024, the Estonian Refugee Council organized community events and various group activities across Estonia to support people with a refugee background in adapting to a new society. More than 2,600 people participated in their community activities in 2024. In September 2024, the Estonian Refugee Council and Garage48 launched a new round of the "Empowering Women" entrepreneurship programme to support refugee women in Estonia, particularly from Ukraine's conflict-affected regions of Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, and Poltava. The initiative focused on building crisis-resilient micro-businesses through a structured process including an Idea Garage, a hackathon, and an incubation phase, complemented by over 117 mentoring sessions and mental health support. Backed by USAID/BHA and partners like Acted, the programme provided over €30,000 in in-kind support to 15 women, helping foster economic independence and community resilience⁴⁴.

In 2024, NGO Mondo, in partnership with DocuMental Care Clinic and MTÜ Shokkin Group, provided services to support the mental health of Ukrainian refugees in Estonia. The project donor was U.S. Department of State and within the project, consultations were carried out via online meetings with Ukrainian specialists in the Ukrainian language⁴⁵.

⁴² In the first half of 2024, IOM implemented a range of initiatives across Estonia to support the adaptation and well-being of Ukrainian refugees. IOM Estonia expert responded to EMN inquiry on 6 May 2025

⁴³ Johannes Mihkelson Centre's project "A Mobile and Cohesive Community". A Johannes Mihkelson's Centre expert responded to EMN Estonia inquiry on 14 March 2025

⁴⁴ In 2024, the Estonian Refugee Council organized community events and various group activities across Estonia to support people with a refugee background in adapting to a new society. Available at: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/en/estonian-refugee-councils-overview-2024>

⁴⁵ Project by NGO Mondo: 'Supporting Ukrainian Refugees to overcome Trauma and Settlement to Estonia'. Available at: <https://mondo.org.ee/en/projects/supporting-ukrainian-refugees-in-estonia/>

6. INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION

6.1 NATIONAL INTEGRATION STRATEGY

In 2024, the cohesion of Estonian society was most significantly affected by the ongoing full-scale war waged by Russia against Ukraine and the initiated transition process to fully Estonian education. The debate over the draft law restricting voting rights of citizens from third countries (and stateless persons) and the draft law on the separation of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate from the Moscow Patriarchate also had a considerable impact on society. Public sentiment is also shaped by the general socio-economic coping ability, including the overall rise in the cost of living, the introduction of new taxes, and persistent inflation⁴⁶.

Estonia is home to many people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and given the future trends, Estonia is becoming increasingly diverse. Unfortunately, language-based and spatial segregation and the resulting inequalities are present in many areas. Through extensive cooperation and inclusion, the Cohesive Estonia Development Plan 2021–2030⁴⁷ was created to shape a more connected and inclusive society in Estonia. It was initiated and led by three ministries: the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These ministries also coordinate its implementation. Among other topics, the development plan focuses on promoting adaptation and integration. This falls under the area of responsibility of the Ministry of Culture of Estonia. According to the 2024 progress report of the development plan⁴⁸, the most important advancements in the field of integration in 2024 were the beginning of the transition to fully Estonian language education, publishing the results of 'Integration Monitoring 2023' and active participation in the Integration Foundation's Adaptation Programme.

In the 2024/2025 academic year, the Ministry of Education and Research begun transition to Estonian-language education in kindergartens and grades 1 and 4, decided by the Government of Estonia in 2022⁴⁹. The aim of the decision is to provide all children in Estonia with quality education in Estonian and strengthen national cohesion. By 2030, the state will invest nearly 500 million euros in the transition, which is the largest education reform in Estonia since regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. A wide range of support measures were being implemented in 2024 with the involvement of various partners, including the Institute of the Estonian Language, universities, Education and Youth Board, parents' associations, the Unemployment Insurance Fund, the Integration Foundation, VeniVidiVici, the Substitute Teachers

⁴⁶ The Ministry of Culture, Aspects that shaped the cohesion of Estonian society in 2024. Available at: https://www.kul.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2022-02/cohesive_estonia_strategy.pdf

⁴⁷ The Cohesive Estonia Development Plan 2021–2030. Available at: https://www.kul.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2022-02/cohesive_estonia_strategy.pdf

⁴⁸ The 2024 progress report of the Cohesive Estonia Development Plan. Available at https://kul.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2025-06/Sidus%20%C3%BChiskond_2024.%20aasta%20tulemusaruanne.pdf

⁴⁹ Act Amending the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act and Other Acts (Transition to Estonian-Language Education). Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/128122022008>

Association, and many others. This cooperation helps ensure a smooth transition and supports the development and sustainability of the education system.

One of the pillars to ensure the smooth transition to all-Estonian education is an increase in the volume of Estonian-language instruction at all levels of education and ensure the availability of educational staff with the required Estonian language proficiency. Since 1 September 2023, more than 500 teachers started working in Ida-Viru County schools, about 330 of them having joined in the summer of 2024. Ensuring the successful transition is especially critical in Ida-Viru County due to several reasons. In Ida-Viru, schools have historically operated in Russian due to a five-decade long Soviet occupation, creating a parallel system that hinders mutual understanding and civic participation. Transitioning to Estonian-language education helps foster a stronger sense of belonging among young people and promotes a unified national identity.

As of the end of 2024, there were 285 teachers working in schools who needed to upgrade their Estonian language proficiency from level B2 to level C1. Additionally, 261 teachers with B1 proficiency were working in schools thanks to a temporary relaxation of requirements introduced in the summer of 2024. These teachers must meet the full language requirements by August 1, 2025. For comparison, in 2022, there were over 1,800 teachers whose Estonian language skills did not meet the required standards. In the autumn of 2024, two groups of teachers began a nine-month development and support program designed for those teaching in small classes and/or working with students with special educational needs. Starting from April 1, 2024, the Education and Youth Board's academic recognition information centre, Estonia's ENIC/NARIC Centre, provided support and guidance to school leaders when assessing qualifications for positions such as primary and general education teachers, subject heads, and support specialists. As of January, to May 2024, 196 education professionals participated in language courses provided by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, and 218 took part in courses offered by the Estonian Language Institute. In 2024, the Ministry of Education and Research, in cooperation with the Integration Foundation, offered Estonian language courses for education workers. These courses were available in four Estonian cities (Tallinn, Kohtla-Järve, Sillamäe, and Narva) at B1, B2, and C1 levels. Additionally, other language learning opportunities offered by the state, such as those through the Integration Foundation, were also available. Furthermore, language learning courses funded by EU structural funds opened in 2024, enabling at least 2,500 education workers to learn Estonian in the coming years.

The second important pillar to ensure the smooth transition to all-Estonian education is the availability of teachers. The increase in the general teacher salary minimum to 1820 euros in 2024 also contributes to that. Interest in studying to become a teacher continued to grow— in 2024, universities received 1,000 more applications for teacher training programs than in 2023. The state provided additional funding to universities in both 2023 and 2024, allowing them to admit 445 more teacher training students. In total, more than 1,500 state-funded study places were created in the field of teacher education in both 2023 and 2024.

To support the transition, the year 2024 also began with a range of methodology training sessions for education workers. As part of the "Raising Competence in Language Learning" activity within the "Estonian Language Learning and Development" program,

also known as "Language Step", co-financed by the European Social Fund and the Ministry of Education and Research, learning events are being organized for language teachers, education workers, and language experts. These events aim to enhance the methodological and didactic skills in language learning and integration. The Estonian Language Institute, as the program's implementer, offers various experience-sharing seminars and integrated subject and language training for all Estonian education workers, including native language teachers and support specialists. The integrated subject and language learning methods, including those used in language immersion, help teach students whose first language is not Estonian, promoting differentiation and individualization in a multilingual classroom. In addition to the Estonian Language Institute, Tallinn University, Tartu University, and Tartu University's Narva College also offer various methodological training programs for Estonian educators.

In March 2024, the results of the 'Integration Monitoring 2023'⁵⁰ were published. Estonian Integration Monitoring is a monitoring study on integration conducted every two to three years, which analyses and evaluates the integration and adaptation processes in Estonia, to understand the development of culturally diverse Estonia, its characteristics and challenges. The results of the monitoring serve as the primary source for formulating integration policies in Estonia. The monitoring consists of a quantitative survey of the permanent population, a quantitative survey of new immigrants, and a qualitative media survey that looked at how the Russian military aggression in Ukraine has affected media choices among people in Estonia. The results show that Estonia has made significant progress in the integration field in the long term. A comparison of the 2023 integration monitoring results with previous surveys reveals that over the past fifteen years, significant progress has been made in integrating Estonian residents of various nationalities, including native Russian speakers, into Estonian society. The 2023 integration monitoring survey shows that the share of people from other nationalities with active knowledge of the Estonian language (i.e., fluent, understands, reads, writes) has risen to 46%, while the proportion of those with no knowledge of the language has decreased from 20% to 4%. The transition to full Estonian-language education is expected to further accelerate this progress in the coming years.

The biggest barrier to integration progress, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, is the ongoing lack of trust between Estonians and the Russian-speaking population. This is reflected in the reluctance of more than half of Estonians to include citizens of other nationalities in the governance of Estonian society, as well as the continued low level of trust among the Russian-speaking population in the Estonian state and its institutions. The study also confirmed that, for both Estonians and residents of other nationalities, overall integration—and specifically trust in the Estonian state and willingness to defend it—are closely linked to economic well-being, as well as the belief that the state protects the rights of all residents and takes their interests into account when making important decisions.

⁵⁰ Integration Monitoring 2023 results. Available here:
<https://www.kul.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2024-04/EIM%202023%20aruanne.pdf>
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6.2 INVOLVEMENT OF MULTI-STAKEHOLDERS INCLUDING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

In 2024, the Swiss–Estonian Cooperation Programme, particularly its "Supporting Social Inclusion" measure, made significant strides in enhancing integration efforts in Estonia⁵¹. With a total funding of €19.2 million from Switzerland, supplemented by €3.5 million in national co-financing, the programme aims to improve the participation of individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Estonian society. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Ministry of the Interior will implement the Social Inclusion Programme. The Ministry of Culture's activities within the support measure focus on cultural and linguistic integration. With support from Switzerland, a digital transformation in the integration sector is being prepared, volunteers are being involved in integration-related activities, and advisory services for adaptation, including language learning, are being developed. Additionally, Estonia's cultural landscape will be introduced, and a media literacy programme will be created.

In 2024, Estonia celebrated the Year of Cultural Diversity, a nationwide initiative led by the Ministry of Culture and coordinated by the Integration Foundation. The programme aimed to highlight and preserve the multifaceted cultures within Estonian communities, promoting integration and societal cohesion. It featured a diverse array of events across all counties, including cultural festivals, workshops, and exhibitions, fostering dialogue among various ethnic and cultural groups. A significant highlight was the Day of Nationalities in September, which showcased the rich tapestry of cultures through concerts, films, and community activities. The year also saw the establishment of the Integration Award, recognising individuals and organisations contributing to integration efforts.

In 2024, the Tallinn Migration Centre actively supported the integration of people with a migration background. The newly renamed centre registered over 13,000 consultations and developed both individual counselling services and cooperation with networks and representatives of national minorities. In 2024, the Tallinn Integration Partnership—an integration cooperation network—continued its work. The network also includes the Estonian contact point of the European Migration Network (EMN). In cooperation with sociologists from the Tallinn Strategy Centre, an analysis of the 2023 Integration Monitoring results was conducted based on Tallinn-specific data, with the goal of identifying areas requiring further investigation through a planned integration-focused research⁵². The research titled 'Value Spaces, Identity, and Usage of Local Services among Immigrants in Tallinn' was launched in December 2024 in cooperation with the Institute of Baltic Studies. The research explored how recent immigrants perceive Tallinn as a living environment, adapt to everyday life, and engage with public services. According to the research, immigrants in Tallinn generally hold positive views

⁵¹ Swiss–Estonian Cooperation Programme. Available at: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/estonia/en/home/schweizer-beitrag/second-swiss-contribution/projekte.html>

⁵² Research 'Value Spaces, Identity, and Usage of Local Services among Immigrants in Tallinn'. Available at: <https://uuringud.tallinn.ee/uuring/vaata/2025/Tallinna-sisserandajate-vaartusruumid-identiteet-ning-kohalike-teenuste-kasutamine>

of Tallinn, especially appreciating its safety, cleanliness, effective and free public transportation, Estonia's advanced digital infrastructure (e-government services), and a compact, well-maintained urban environment closely integrated with natural spaces. To further support immigrant integration in Tallinn, the research recommends enhancing language education, fostering intercultural social interactions, and improving the clarity and accessibility of practical information regarding public services.

On December 16, 2024, the Minister of Culture signed a directive establishing the project "Supporting Community Activities that Promote Integration." The aim of the project is to increase the participation of new immigrants, people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and returnees in community activities. The total project budget is €5.2 million, with 70% funded by the European Social Fund and 30% co-financed by the state via the Ministry of Culture.

In 2024, the Estonian Refugee Council (ERC) is running a programme for the fourth year to help kindergarten specialists in Ida-Viru County and Tallinn create more inclusive and integrated learning environments⁵³. The initiative provides experience-based consultations to 30 teachers across five kindergartens, focusing on improving skills for working in multicultural settings and involving Russian-speaking families in Estonian-language education. The project is carried out in cooperation with the British Council in Estonia.

6.3 EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF ADULTS

In 2024, the regulation of the adaptation program was updated under the leadership of the Ministry of Culture as follows:

- The recipients of temporary protection were given the opportunity to continue learning Estonian at A2 and B1 levels as part of the adaptation program "Settle in Estonia." Previously, it was only possible to learn Estonian at the A1 level.
 - A one-day short-format alternative to the 4-day training was developed for Ukrainian citizens who have received temporary protection, as practice showed that people arriving from Ukraine to Estonia do not require a 4-day training.
 - Previously, Estonian language courses at the B1 level within the adaptation program were only accessible to individuals with international protection status. Starting from 2024, people arriving in Estonia through regular migration can also take Estonian language courses up to the B1 level as part of the adaptation program.
 - In 2024, the regulation was amended to include the option to complete the adaptation program modules through e-learning.
- The activities of the "Settle in Estonia" adaptation program are implemented in Estonia by the Integration Foundation, which is under the Ministry of Culture's area of administration.

⁵³ Estonian Refugee Council's and British Council's joint programme to help kindergarten specialists in Ida-Viru County and Tallinn create more inclusive and integrated learning environments. Available at: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/en/estonian-refugee-council-supports-creation-inclusive-learning-environments-kindergartens-ida-viru>

6.4 LABOUR MARKET AND SKILLS

On 1 January 2024, a new law regulating labour market measures, the Labour Market Measures Act, and the accompanying Government Regulation, the Employment Programme⁵⁴, came into effect. Two minor changes concerning third-country nationals were introduced in these acts. First, third-country nationals working in Estonia under short-term employment registration gained access to career services through the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES). Second, a measure supporting the employment of beneficiaries of international protection, which was previously offered temporarily through an ESF-funded program, has now been incorporated into the Employment Programme as a regular, more permanent labour market service.

6.5 BASIC SERVICES

The Social Insurance Board gave guidelines to local governments regarding the compensation of costs related to the housing of Ukrainian war refugees. Starting from 11 September 2024, refugees who have been granted temporary protection and have received a residence permit for the first time, and who submit a rent compensation application within six months of receiving their initial residence permit, will be eligible to apply for rent compensation.

An e-service "Settling in Estonia" was published under the national portal www.eesti.ee in 2023 and in 2024, several sub-services were added: finding a school place and family benefits. "Settling in Estonia" brings together essential e-services for new immigrants, such as registering a place of residence, participating in the adaptation program, finding a family doctor, learning Estonian, obtaining a driver's license, enrolling in school, accessing information about family benefits and allowances, opening a bank account, and declaring income.

The "Settling in Estonia" event-based service is supported by the Integration Foundation through the practical guide "Adaptation Roadmap",⁵⁵ published in 2024. The roadmap covers 17 different topics to support the adaptation of newcomers arriving in and living in Estonia. It provides an overview of Estonian legislation, daily life, and necessary procedures, such as registering and finding a place of residence, information on employment, starting a business, taxation, healthcare services, including mental health, education, and language learning opportunities. Additionally, it introduces social and support services, culture, and ways to participate in society.

6.6 FIGHTING RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

⁵⁴ The Labour Market Measures Act, and the accompanying Government Regulation, the Employment Programme. Available at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/515112023002/consolide?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁵⁵ Adaptation Roadmap, A comprehensive and practical guide designed to support the adjustment of newcomers arriving and living in Estonia by Integration Foundation, "Adaptation Roadmap". Available at: <https://integratsioon.ee/en/roadmap-adaptation>

The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025⁵⁶ calls on member states to increase efforts in combating racism. In 2024, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Research, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications continued coordinating the implementation of the EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025 in Estonia. The aim of the cooperation, initiated in 2023, is increasing policymakers' knowledge of racism and enhancing mutual exchange of information. Each ministry is responsible for activities within its respective field. In 2024, two meetings took place, where information and good practises were exchanged.

In 2024, the report of the survey "Racial Discrimination in Estonia"⁵⁷ was published. The survey was carried out by Civitta Estonia on behalf of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner. The aim of the survey was to provide an overview of the situation of dark-skinned people in Estonia, including their experiences of discrimination, harassment, and violence based on skin colour, their meaning and impact. Although the interviewees had unpleasant experiences discrimination in Estonia, they still strongly felt that Estonia is safe and do not perceive any physical threat to their well-being and health on a daily basis. In addition to the negative experiences, it was pointed out that in most cases, the experiences in the public space are still positive, and they feel rather safe and happy. Positive experiences related to how eyewitnesses supported the interviewee in harassment situations and demonstrated their solidarity were also highlighted.

⁵⁶ The EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-anti-racism-action-plan-2020-2025_en

⁵⁷ Survey report "Racial Discrimination in Estonia". Available at: https://www.volink.ee/volink-live-web-prd/s3fs-public/2024-12/Report_2024-ENG.pdf

7. CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

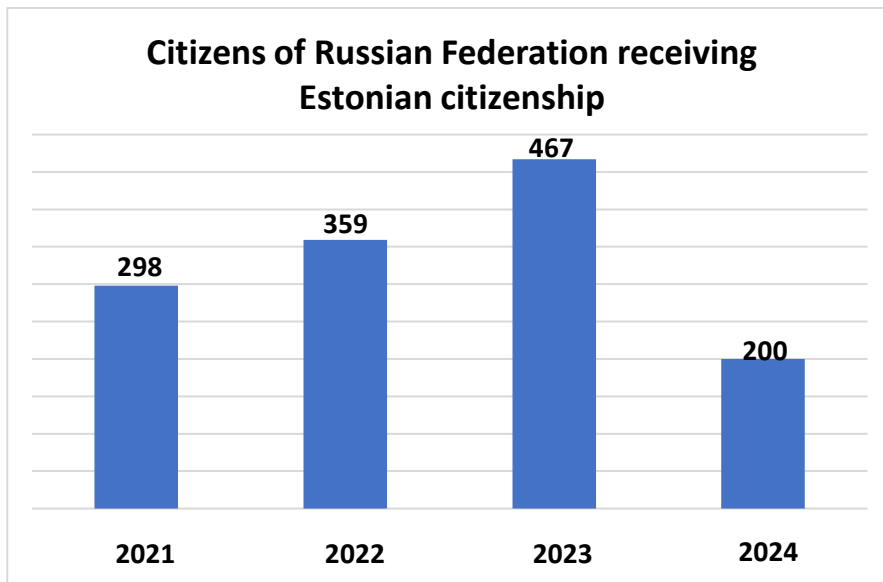
7.1 ACQUISITION OF CITIZENSHIP

Estonian citizenship is a legal covenant between the Estonian citizen and the Estonian state that entails rights and obligations for both parties. No one may be deprived of citizenship by birth. An Estonian citizen may not simultaneously hold the citizenship of any other country. Estonian citizenship is lost by accepting the citizenship of another country. A child may hold more than one citizenship if his or her parents have different citizenships, but upon reaching 18 years of age, the child must within three years give up either his or her Estonian citizenship or the citizenship of the other country. Estonian citizenship can be:

- acquired by birth if at least one parent has Estonian citizenship;
- obtained through naturalisation;
- reinstated in the case of persons who lost Estonian citizenship as minors;
- lost by way of release of Estonian citizenship, depriving one of citizenship or by accepting the citizenship of another country.

Russian aggression in Ukraine affected less the field of citizenship in 2024 than in previous years. Over the last years, the number of citizens of the Russian Federation who have acquired Estonian citizenship increased steadily but decreased in 2024.

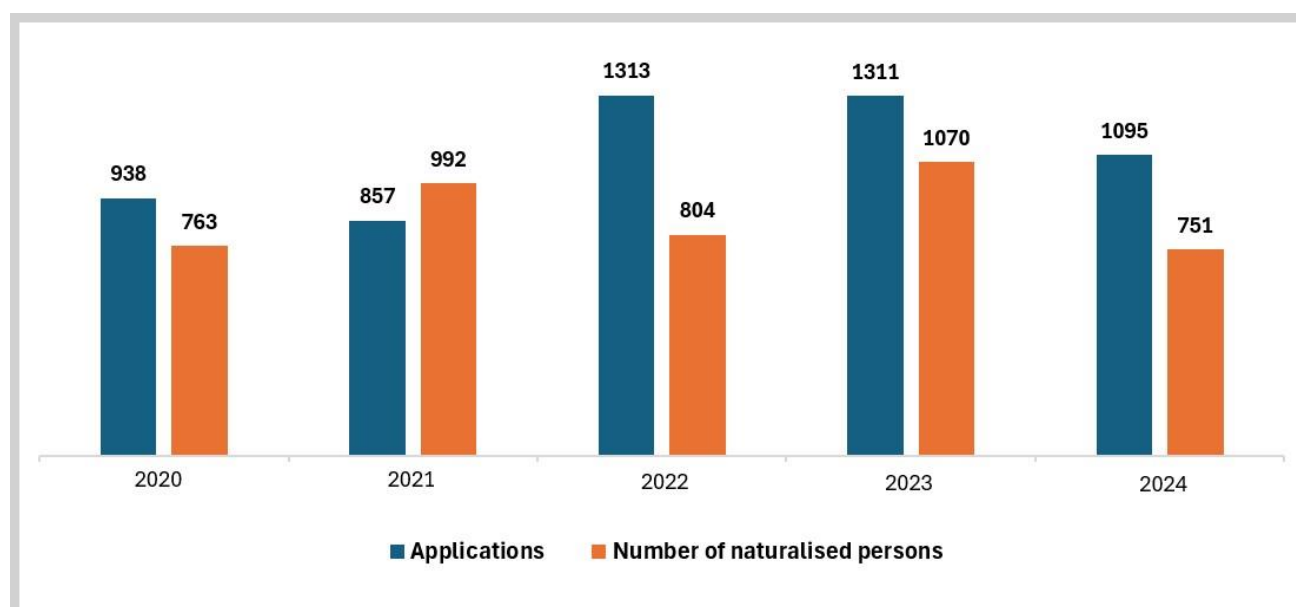
Figure 2. Citizens of Russian Federation receiving Estonian citizenship, 2021-2024
(Source: the PBGB)



In 2023, a total of 1311 persons applied for Estonian citizenship and in 2024, a total of 1095, which marked a decrease. In 2024, Estonian citizenship was granted to 751 persons. Most often the Estonian citizenship was granted to persons with undetermined citizenship (409 people, 54%) and citizens of the Russian Federation (200 people, 26%), Pakistan (21 people, 2,7%), Ukraine (20 people, 2,6%) and Belarus (20 people, 2,6%).

Persons with undetermined citizenship (holders of the so-called grey passport) are persons who settled in Estonia before July 1, 1990, and continue to live in Estonia. The number of persons with undetermined citizenship who are long-term residence permit holders has decreased year by year (from 127,318 persons in 2004 to 60,857 persons in 2024). In addition, as of 2024, there were 3,024 persons with undetermined citizenship with a valid temporary residence permit living in Estonia; the number of such individuals is also on a downward trend (for comparison, in 2004 the number of persons with undetermined citizenship with a temporary residence permit was 27,029). The main reasons for such a trend include the mortality or the acquisition of the citizenship of Estonia or another country.

Figure 3. Citizenship applications and number of naturalised persons 2020-2024
(Source: the PBGB)



7.2 STATELESSNESS DETERMINATION, STATUS AND RIGHTS GRANTED

Estonia does not allow dual citizenship, and in order to obtain Estonian citizenship, one must first renounce one's citizenship of another country. For Russian citizens, this means contacting the Russian embassy and submitting an application for resumption of Russian citizenship. Due to the increasing volume of applications after the war broke out in Ukraine, there were soon reports that the Russian Embassy in Estonia was delaying the procedure or in some cases, preventing the renunciation of citizenship. In 2023, the Russian Embassy in Estonia announced that due to staff reductions, citizenship procedures were temporarily suspended. As of early 2024, the Russian Embassy in Estonia continued to suspend the processing of citizenship renunciation applications.

The amendments to the Family Law Act⁵⁸ that entered into force on 1 January 2024, which legalized marriage equality, directly affected the Citizenship Act⁵⁹, as it needed

⁵⁸ Family Law Act. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/107052025017>

⁵⁹ Citizenship Act. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/130012025004>

to be harmonized with the new legal framework on family law. The following amendments went into force on 1 January 2024:

1. **Definition of a single parent:** The Citizenship Act was amended to clarify that in situations where a child may obtain Estonian citizenship at the request of one parent (if that parent is raising the child alone), a parent in a registered partnership can also be considered a single parent. This amendment recognizes that in same-sex or registered partnerships, one parent may in practice be raising the child alone and should therefore have the same right to apply for the child's citizenship.
2. **Citizenship for the partner of a foreign armed forces member:** The previous law addressed restrictions on granting or restoring citizenship in connection with a spouse of a foreign armed forces member. The 2024 amendment extended these provisions to include registered partners, acknowledging that such partnerships can be just as close and lasting as marriages.

In 2024, a national debate emerged in Estonia over whether foreign nationals—particularly citizens of countries supporting aggressor states—should retain the right to vote in local elections. The discussion gained significant attention both domestically and internationally, centring largely on national security concerns. Proponents of the restriction argued that allowing citizens of hostile regimes to take part in local democratic processes could pose a security risk, especially during times of geopolitical instability. However, critics raised concerns about the potential negative impact on social integration. They warned that stripping voting rights from well-integrated residents could alienate communities that have otherwise demonstrated loyalty to Estonia. Notably, the latest integration monitoring showed that Russian citizens living in Estonia include a slightly higher proportion of well-integrated individuals and Estonian patriots than even Estonian citizens of other ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, data indicated that very few Russian citizens and persons with undetermined citizenship actually participate in local elections, suggesting their impact on electoral outcomes is minimal. These findings prompted many to argue that the proposed restrictions might be disproportionate and could harm social cohesion.

On 26 March 2025, the Estonian Parliament voted in favour of amending the Constitution to revoke the right of Russian and Belarusian citizens and persons with undetermined citizenship to vote in local elections. As a result, persons with undetermined citizenship will be able to vote for the last time in the local elections held in October 2025. According to the authors of the amendment, this timeline gives affected individuals sufficient opportunity to apply for Estonian citizenship if they wish to participate in future elections. The bill was officially promulgated by President Alar Karis in April 2025.

8. SCHENGEN GOVERNANCE AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN BORDER MANAGEMENT AND VISA POLICY

In 2024, the main focus regarding border management, visa and Schengen was as in previous years, on strengthening Estonian eastern border (which is also an EU external border), preparing to a changing landscape of hybrid threats and instrumentalised migration and on continuing restrictive measures due to the aggression of Russian Federation in Ukraine.

8.1 EXTERNAL BORDER CONTROL MANAGEMENT

In 2024, there was one legislative change in the area of external border management – in relation to amendments to the Schengen Border Code Regulation (EU) 2024/1717⁶⁰ on 13 June 2024 (which is a directly applicable EU legislation), setting out the conditions for reintroducing and prolonging checks at internal borders were introduced. In case of serious threat to public policy or internal security in a Member State in an area without border control, that Member State may, only as a measure of last resort, in exceptional situations, reintroduce border controls. Member States are permitted to extend internal border controls based on security risks or migratory flows for a period of 6 months. They may renew the reintroduction with periods of 6 months to a maximum of 2 years. The new code also introduces alternative measures to counter unauthorised movements of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Schengen area. A new procedure will enable a Member State to transfer third-country nationals, apprehended in its border area and found to be staying illegally, to the Member State from which they directly arrived. The apprehension should take place in the context of a bilateral cooperation framework.

The Schengen Borders Code was amended regarding internal border controls by adding Articles 23, 23a, 25, 25a, 26, 27, 27a, 28 and 33.

In relation to traffic at the external border, as of 1 February 2024, Russian Federation decided to close the Invangorod border point (on Estonian side Narva border crossing point) to road transport. Border crossing point was closed due to renovation. The border crossing remained open to pedestrians. According to the Russian Federation, the renovation work will last until late 2025. The Narva border crossing point has been the main land corridor between the EU and Russia since Finland closed its border crossings further north. Under the same circumstances, Estonia changed the opening hours of the Narva border crossing point and established the opening hours for border crossing of the pedestrians from 07:00 to 23:00, i.e. the border crossing point is closed at night.

⁶⁰ Regulation (EU) 2024/1717 of the European Parliament and of the COUNCIL of 13 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders, available here https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401717



Photo: Radar spring 2025, made by Police and Border Guard Board

Closure of the Narva border crossing point for road transport affected also other Estonia's southeastern border crossings, Luhamaa and Koidula border crossing points, resulting in a significant increase in traffic. In connection with the closure of Finland's external crossing points, trucks with Finnish registration plates came to Estonian border crossing points, which had not happened before. Also, Russian citizens with Finnish residence permits came to cross the Estonian border.

In 2024 Estonia continued with development of its South-Eastern border section. By the end of 2024, additional 23.5 km of technical surveillance was operational. Also 20.7 km of delay fences were installed on the land border. Of the total land border (135.6 km), 80% of the planned volume of delay fences had been installed by end of 2024. Additionally, five new monitoring positions were installed on the Narva River by autumn 2024.



On 11 December, the European Commission [approved](#) granting an additional €19.4 million to strengthen surveillance at the Estonian eastern border, which will help strengthen the security of the EU as a whole. The funds will be used for upgrading electronic surveillance equipment, improving telecommunication networks, deploying mobile identification devices, and countering drone attacks. These measures aim to ensure real-time situational awareness and enhance the mobility of border patrols. The primary beneficiary of this support is the Estonian Police and Border Guard Board. Funding is part of a €170 million package allocated through the Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMVI) to six countries to counter hybrid threats on the EU's eastern border.

In 2024, Estonia received in the framework of the specific action "Promoting innovation in border checks and/or border surveillance by taking up research results – INNO" – BMVI/2024/SA/1.1.5." a grant of € 4,4 million, funded by European Commission, to implement a project "Piloting of Multi-Layer Counter-UAS position". The project aims to test innovative technological solutions at the EU external border through the establishment of a counter-drone position, capable of detecting and intercepting flying objects near the Russian border. Action focuses on promoting the uptake (validation, piloting in real environment, procurement and/or deployment) of new technologies and methods for border management, especially those coming from Union-funded research and innovation projects on border management.

In 2024 there were two major changes, which were in preparatory phase for 2025:

- the preparatory activities for the establishment of a PBGB Crisis Reserve. To cope with crises, a 1,000-reserve group is being set up in Estonia to assist the PBGB in the event of civil unrest or migratory pressure. In a situation of migratory pressure, the PBGB Crisis Reserve secures the external borders of the Republic of Estonia. Crisis Reserve group will be established in cooperation between the PBGB and the Defense Forces. The Estonian Defense Forces (EDF) reservists will

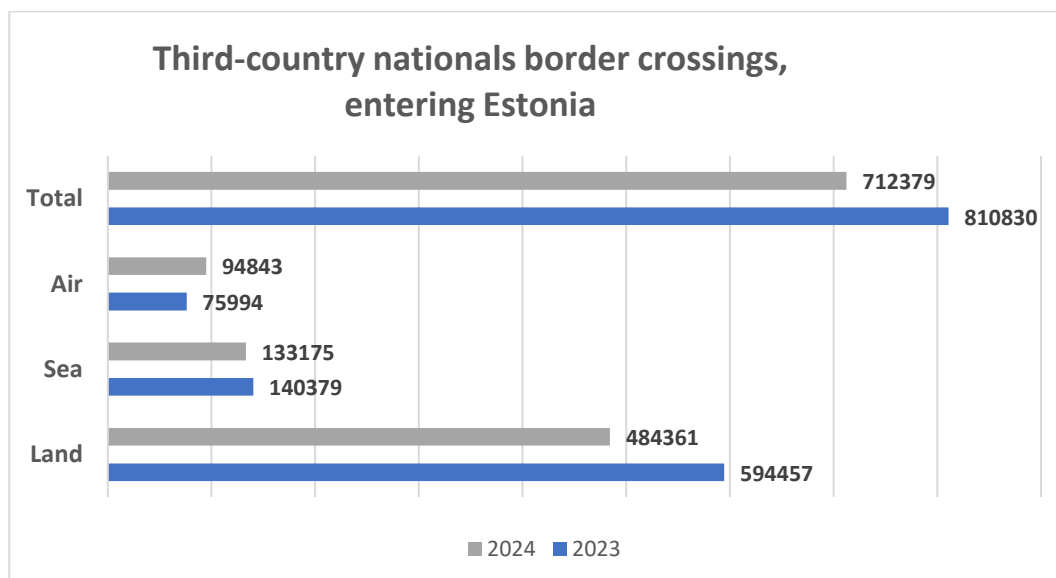
be trained by the military police to help bolster Estonia's readiness to counter potential internal and external threats.

- planned a new legislation – the Civil Crisis and National Defense Act, which merge three previous laws (Emergency Act, State of Emergency Act and National Defense Act) and covers preparations for and the coordinated management and resolution of crisis situations, states of emergency, states of war and other significant events (mass influx of migrants, mass unrest etc). For example, if a mass influx of migrants takes on the dimensions of a crisis situation, the Civil Crisis and National Defense Act applies to crisis management. The act is designed to establish comprehensive legislation for the resolution of both national defense and civil crises and to set clearer expectations of the government, authorities, local governments and providers of vital services. The development of the new law began in April 2021 and is expected to enter into force in 2026.

8.2 BORDER-CROSSING STATISTICS (THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS ENTERING ESTONIA)

In 2024, the number of persons entering Estonia at the external border crossings was as in previous two years significantly affected by the situation in Ukraine and sanctions imposed towards Russian citizens. The total number of border crossings (on entering the country) was 712 379. Majority of which were border crossings by land (484 361 crossings), followed by sea (133 175 crossings) and by air (94 843 crossings).

Figure 4. Third-country nationals border crossings (entering Estonia), 2023-2024 (Source: the PBGB)



The main third-country nationals crossing the land border were Russian citizens (337 232 crossings), persons with undetermined citizenship (74 988 crossings) and Belarus citizens (20 975 crossings). At the sea border, the main citizens were from United States (33 902 crossings), Philippines (30 298) and India (13 015). At the air border, the majority were citizens of United Kingdom (34 615), Russia (13 114) and Ukraine (11 465).

8.3 NATIONAL VISA POLICY

In December 2024, a draft amendment to the Aliens Act concerning the appeal procedure on the visa decisions and the duration of temporary stay was submitted to Riigikogu. The main objective of the draft act is to ensure that third-country nationals are granted the right to appeal to an administrative court after a dispute procedure on:

- decision refusing to grant a visa, revoking a visa, annulling a visa or refusing to extend the period of stay fixed by a visa; and
- decision refusing to extend the period of temporary stay in Estonia or terminating the period of temporary stay early.

Currently, Estonia has a two-stage appeals procedure: a third-country national can appeal against a visa decision or the length of temporary stay, first to the administrative authority which issued the decision and then to, where appropriate, to related Ministry (the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs carry out the procedures within the scope of their competence. Person has no right of appeal to a court against a visa decision or a decision on the length of temporary stay, or against a decision on an appeal. The draft amendment introduces a one-step appeals procedure and allows the third-country national to appeal against the visa decision or the decision on the period of stay before an administrative court. The same act will regulate the remedying of deficiencies in the appeal and will increase the state fee for reviewing the appeal.

On 20 May 2024, 1st stage of a new national Visa Register went live. New Visa Register was taken into use by officials processing visa applications externally at the Estonian foreign representations or internally at the PBGB service centres. The controller of the database is the PBGB. With the introduction of the new Visa Register, the procedural functionalities for processing of both C and D visa applications were transferred to a new technological solution (information system). A follow up project on the development of the Visa Register was also launched, whereby all other procedures such as extension of stay, revocation/cancellation of visas, will also be migrated into the new technological solution. These developments are planned for 2025. The previous Visa Register was technically and substantively outdated, hence there was a need for a modern database to ensure smoother and quicker visa application processing benefiting both visa processors and applicants. The new system will meet future EU requirements.

Prior to introducing the new Visa Register, a comprehensive training in Ankara was held under the framework of the Border Management and Visa Policy Instrument (BMVI) for officials processing visa applications to facilitate a smooth transition and learn specifics of the new database.

Due to the changes made in the Community Code on Visas (Visa Code No 810/2009) in June 2024, Estonia was dealing with the changes of its implementation and also with the developments in the national Visa Register. According to amendments there were changes on the visa fee rates set out in Article 16 (adults have to pay for a C visa a fee of €90 and children, aged 6-11 (incl.), €45). Changes were also made in visa application form and the information to be collected in it.

In addition, as a follow-up to the feedback received from the Schengen evaluation that took place in Estonia in 2023, the archive part of the national visa register was amended and the process of issuing visas at the border was streamlined with regard to the requirement for prior consultation of individuals.

8.4 VISA STATISTICS

Since 2022, the main driver of cross-border migration in Estonia has been the restrictions and sanctions imposed on citizens of the Russian Federation⁶¹ in connection with the war in Ukraine. As several Estonian missions abroad have suspended accepting visa applications, a small number of C visas were issued in 2024 (8,883 visas, a change of +0.1% as compared to the previous year). However, the number of D visas issued remained at a record low (5,460 visas, a change of -19% as compared to the previous year).

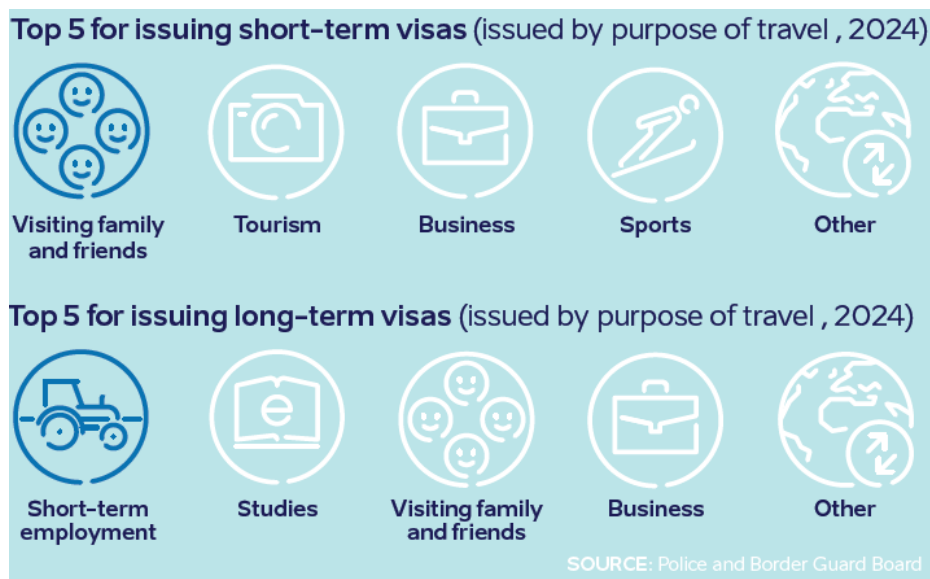
Figure 5. Visas issued by Estonia, 2020-2024 (Source: the PBGB)

Estonian visas issued in 2020-2024



Figure 6. Top 5 for issuing a short-term and long-term visa, 2024 (Source: the PBGB)

⁶¹ Due to Russia's war in Ukraine, several restrictions and sanctions have been imposed since 2022, which were also in force in 2024. Starting from March 2022, Estonian foreign missions in Moscow, St.Petersburg, Pskov, and Minsk and visa centers of external service providers in the Russian Federation and Belarus suspended acceptance of visa applications. The embassies remained closed in 2024 as well. In April 2022, the Government of the Republic imposed a sanction to restrict the employment and business activities of citizens of the Russian Federation and Belarus in Estonia. From September 2022, an order of the Government of the Republic came into force, temporarily restricting the crossing of the external border for citizens of the Russian Federation with a short-stay visa. Starting from September 2023, motor vehicles bearing Russian license plates were prohibited from entering Estonia from across the external border, as such vehicles fall within the scope of relevant sanction.



Starting from 2020, a foreigner can apply for both a short-term and a long-term visa for remote working (the so-called digital nomad visa) if the purpose of the foreigner's temporary stay in Estonia is the performance of work duties irrespective of the location.

In 2024, 100 long-stay visas were issued for remote work purposes, which is 33% less than the previous year, when 149 digital nomad visas were issued. The main recipients of digital nomad visas were citizens of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, India, and Turkey.

8.5 SCHENGEN GOVERNANCE (INCL. SCHENGEN EVALUATION)

In November and December 2023, Schengen evaluations were carried out in Estonia. A regular Schengen evaluation took place in areas of police cooperation, large information systems, data protection, return, external border and visa policy. The report of the regular Schengen evaluation of Estonia was adopted by the European Commission on 8 October 2024. Estonia submitted an action plan for the implementation of the recommendations on 9 December 2024, on which the European Commission will give its assessment. Upon receipt of the European Commission's assessment, there will be a 6-month deadline for the submission of the follow-up action plan.

In compliance with the Article 33(2) of (EU) 2018/1861 and Article 43(2) of (EU) 2018/1862, Estonia started to use fingerprint searches at border controls. Previously the fingerprint searches at the border were not possible. Objective of the change is to exchange the information entered into SIS and improve the cooperation within EU member states.

9. IRREGULAR MIGRATION

9.1 PREVENTING AND TACKLING IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN LEGAL MIGRATION CHANNELS

To increase Estonian capacity to react in case of mass influx, the Police and Border Guard Board conducted large-scale training on mass influx and riot control during the Green Victory exercise. The exercise also included training in identifying and separating individuals in need within large crowds. This was the most extensive exercise in recent years focused on responding to mass unrest, involving over 1000 participants. The exercise was divided into three sub-exercises, with activities taking place in different parts of Estonia. The exercise included a scenario where people dissatisfied with the government staged a violent protest, setting cars on fire. The police responded with force, using water cannons and tear gas. Unrest was originating from anger over the government accepting refugees into Estonia. According to the second part of the exercise, which dealt with repelling migrants at the border, participants simulated a situation where some migrants managed to enter illegally the country. The training also included exercises on how to repel migrants and prevent them from illegal border crossings.

Activities were carried out in a framework of the AMIF supported project 1.03.24-0007 "Increasing the capacity to cope with mass influx".

To increase capacity to protect Estonian and EU external border and react in situation of crisis, the Estonian Defence Forces organised in 2024 an exercise Decisive Lancer. In the framework of the exercise, the PBGB, the Defence Forces, the Defence League and other partner agencies, ministries and regional crisis committees practised unified action to resolve crisis and war situations and to better understand their roles in different phases of a crisis and war situation and make cooperation even more effective. A hybrid and instrumentalised attack of mass immigration against the Republic of Estonia was part of the overall scenario of the exercise. In the framework of the exercise, the PBGB carried out tasks to deal with crisis and war situations. Over 1300 people took part of this exercise.

To ensure public order and stability in the region, there was one ESTPOL9 police unit rotation to Latvia in 2024. During the period 29 July to 11 August 2024, PBGB ESTPOL 9 deployed one rotation to the Republic of Latvia to support the Latvian Border Guard to tackle irregular migration at the Latvian-Belarus border. ESTPOL9 consisted of 11-members team with combined capabilities. The assistance was provided on the basis of Cross-Border Cooperation, so-called Host Nation Support Agreement, which was signed between the Latvian Border Guard and the PBGB on 19 September 2023.⁶²

⁶² BNS 29.07.2024 [Estonian police unit deploys to assist at Latvia-Belarus border](#)



Source: BNS 29.07.2024 [Estonian police unit deploys to assist at Latvia-Belarus border](#)
 Photo: Arvo Meeks

In order to foster communication within neighbouring countries, a PBGB special advisor ensured successful information exchange and cooperation with the police and border guard structures of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. An important result of this cooperation is the increased awareness of the PBGB officials of the situation in the region, which allows the PBGB to respond promptly to challenges as irregular migration. Study visits were carried out to partner countries and management meetings held to maintain a strategic network. There has also been significant increase of cooperation with Estonian foreign missions. Activities are carried out in a framework of the AMIF supported project 1.03.24-0007 "Increasing the capacity to cope with mass influx".

9.2 FALSIFIED DOCUMENTS AND IRREGULAR BORDER CROSSINGS

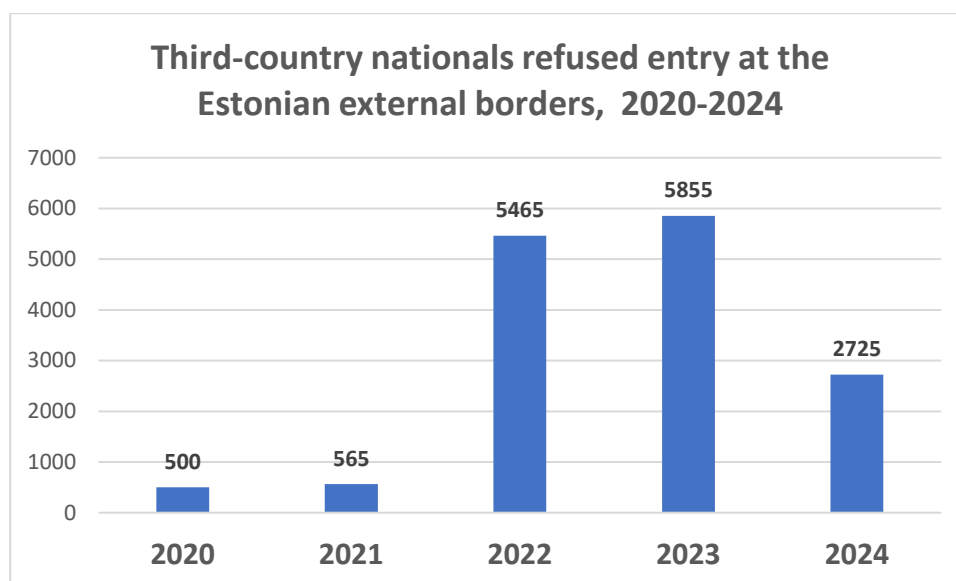
In 2024, the PBGB detected 284 falsified documents, of which 159 documents were detected at the external border and 125 within the country. More than half (57%) of these documents were falsification of driving, ownership or road traffic documents, and a third (33%) were falsification of travel documents (passports, ID cards) and documents proving the reason for stay (residence permits, visas).

In 2024, 110 persons were detected from irregular migration at land border crossing points. Mainly these were citizens of Ukraine, Russian Federation, Moldova, Central Asian countries, Iran, Pakistan, Congo and Cuba.

9.3 MONITORING AND IDENTIFYING IRREGULAR MIGRATION ROUTES

Since 2022, the external border crossings have been influenced by the Russian invasion to Ukraine, resulting in refusals of entry to Russian citizens at the Estonian external border.

Figure 7. Third-country nationals refused entry at the Estonian external borders, 2020-2024 (Source: Eurostat, MIGR_EIRFS, extract made on 25.05.2025)



Main third-country nationals refused entry at the border were citizens of Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, Israel and Georgia.

According to the PBGB data, there were 278 persons (44 % less than a year ago), who were found illegally present, of whom 143 persons were apprehended at the border crossings points, 26 between order crossing points (at the green border) and 109 in the inland area. Mainly they were citizens of Russia, Ukraine and India.

9.4 LABOUR EXPLOITATION

According to the Labour Inspectorate information severe labour exploitation, defined as trafficking in human beings, is rare in Estonia's work culture, but cases of labour exploitation are on the rise. Exploitation has become a business model for some companies. The system, or legal loopholes, are exploited as well as people. Malicious employers exploit the Estonian people, but also the vulnerability of migrant employees arriving from abroad. The foreigners do not know the language or the laws in force, which creates a fertile ground for exploitation. The recruitment of foreigners may comply with legal requirements on paper and intermediaries in the home country paint a pretty picture of Estonia for job seekers, but it often results in double hours, lower or unpaid wages, etc.

Of the 2,411 labour disputes received in 2024, 621, or 25%, concerned foreign employees. Compared to 2023, that's an increase of 137 cases. This means that one in four complaints concerned foreign employees. Sixty-five per cent of the applications contained pay claims and one in two contained claims for compensation and holiday pay. One in five of the claims challenged the termination of an employment contract, and nearly 10% of claims requested the establishment of an employment relationship. The total amount of claims amounted to EUR 5.5 million. The most problematic sectors were construction, transport and storage, and administrative and support activities. Compared to 2023, the share of labour disputes involving foreign employees has

increased significantly in both the transport and the administrative and support activities sectors.⁶³

⁶³ Yearbook of the Labour Inspectorate 2024, available here:
<https://www.ti.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2025-04/Yearbook%20of%20the%20Labour%20Inspectorate%202024.pdf>
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10. TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

10.1 NATIONAL STRATEGIC POLICY DEVELOPMENTS ON DETECTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING, NATIONAL REFERRAL MECHANISM AND PROVISION OF SERVICES

In 2024, there were 3 registered crimes of victim of trafficking in human beings under Article 133 of the Penal Code. From total victims 1 case was investigated for sex trafficking and 2 cases were investigated for forced labour. 1 individual was convicted under Article 133 (2) and Article 175 of the Penal Code. In 2024 two persons were granted a residence permit for the participation in criminal proceedings.

No major changes took place in the national legislation, but some policy changes are in planning as on 24 June 2024 a new EU directive (Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims) entered into force. In 2024 discussions were held in Estonia regarding the changes it will bring to national legislation.

From 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025 Estonia holds the presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (the CBSS)⁶⁴. The CBSS is a multi-level forum for cooperation between the countries of the Baltic Sea Region, which aims to strengthen and intensify mutual cooperation on priority issues such as safety, sustainability and regional identity. In Estonian priorities set for the presidency, the Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings (TF-THB) will focus on co-operation with third countries, namely Central Asian and Balkan regional anti-trafficking networks for tackling crimes of trafficking where the Baltic Sea region is the destination. Particular emphasis will be placed on prevention, investigation and victims' assistance, with a special focus on migrant labour and persons engaged in prostitution. Further opportunities will be explored to organize training courses on the basis of the Handbook for Embassies and Diplomatic Missions on How to Assist and Protect Victims of Human Trafficking.⁶⁵

There was a change in law enforcement (procurator) structure - in Estonia, the prosecutor's office is divided into five districts, and four districts have one or two specialized prosecutors dealing with trafficking in human beings and related crimes (the fifth district is dealing only with economical and corruption crimes). As from 2024 there is a State Prosecutor whose responsibility is to be the Estonian contact prosecutor in the matters of trafficking in human beings. With this change, the specialized prosecutors

⁶⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs homepage: <https://vm.ee/en/international-relations/regional-cooperation/council-baltic-sea-states>

⁶⁵ The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) is a multi-level forum for cooperation between the countries of the Baltic Sea Region, which aims to strengthen and intensify mutual cooperation on priority issues such as safety, sustainability and regional identity. The Council of the Baltic Sea States, Estonian Presidency available here: https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/estonian-presidency-2024-2025_priorities.pdf

in districts may be relieved of administrative work and can concentrate on dealing with the substantive management of criminal cases.

National referral mechanism (NRM) for assisting victims of human trafficking is in the writing process under the leadership of the Ministry of Social Affairs and between national stakeholders. Discussions on it took place in the united training in November 2024. This is the first NRM done in Estonia. So far, the guidance of referral and assistance adopted in 2019 has been used. The final version of NRM written guidance will be ready in first half of 2025 and the negotiations will begin on the finalization procedure and how it should be regulated among stakeholders. The NRM that will be made mandatory in 2025 for all the relevant counterparts, consists of following parts: Victim identification and initial support; support and protection; criminal proceedings; long-term support and rehabilitation; safe return. In addition, there is comprehensive supporting material for the implementation of the national referral mechanism, which will also be published in 2025. The main objective of NRM is to ensure that the human rights of victims of trafficking in human beings are guaranteed and to provide an effective way to refer victims of human trafficking to services. In addition, NRMs can help improve national policies and procedures on various victim-related issues such as residence and deportation policies, victim assistance, compensation, etc. The NRM can prepare national action plans and set targets and assess whether the targets have been met.

Social Insurance Board (SIB) operates human trafficking prevention and victims' assistance counselling in Estonian, Russian and English language and it is run as part of the national social services and it is also part of NRM. SIB informs people about opportunities, conditions, rules and risks of work, study and marriage abroad and assist labour-, sexual exploitation and human trafficking victims. In year 2024 for the first time to counselling came 301 clients (in 2023 there were 290 clients), the number of counselling sessions all together was 862 times. 85% of clients were third-country nationals, from a total of 19 different countries (mostly Ukrainian citizens, but also from Central Asian countries such as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, etc). These persons have mostly work-related problems in Estonia, where employers take advantage of their vulnerability, lack of information, lack of language skills, etc.⁶⁶

10.2 TRAININGS AND PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In 2024, several joint trainings with authorities acting in a field (the Labour Inspectorate, the PBGB, prosecutors, victim assistance organisations, etc) took place. For example in May 2024, there was a special training day for the labour inspectors and other officials in different levels (counselling lawyers, heads of labour dispute committee, supervision inspectors etc) for 50 people in total to discuss over the case law of the current cases with PBGB and to gain recent information of the THB trends, data in Estonia, also information on the victim support and cooperation with other state agencies in detecting possible THB cases. At training, among other things, the possibilities of enhancing cooperation between relevant institutions (the Social Insurance Board's victim assistance and the PBGB and Labour Inspectorate) were discussed.

⁶⁶ Estonia Social Insurance Board expert responded to EMN inquiry on 21.01.2025

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Justice, 3 two-day trainings were held in 2024 as part of the EU ISF project "Development of cooperation to identify and assist victims of human trafficking in Estonia" (4 more trainings are planned for 2025), attended by the Unemployment Insurance Fund, the Labour Inspectorate, the Police and Border Guard Board, the Prosecutor's Office, the Social Insurance Board, Officials of the Union of Estonian Youth Associations, Estonian Youth Workers' Union. The aim of the training is to provide the participants with knowledge of the nature of human trafficking and the correct guidelines for action when identifying cases, including cooperation between authorities.

To improve Estonian specialists' knowledge on identification and assistance of victims of human trafficking in 2024, a number of anti-trafficking related trainings took place, which also focused on third-country nationals. In September 2024 the 2-day seminar "Prevention of trafficking of human beings in the Baltic Sea, Eastern Europe and Central Asian regions" was held under the auspices of the presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) of Estonia with CBSS countries and with Central-Asian countries (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan), Ukraine and Moldova. The objective of the seminar and the trainings was to establish cooperation contacts between regions and countries among the specialists working with THB cases and to raise awareness, that possible labour exploitation of third country nationals in Estonia is the matter to give attention to.

Additionally, Estonia in cooperation with the Secretariat of the CBSS organized the training courses on the basis of the Handbook for Embassies and Diplomatic Missions on How to Assist and Protect Victims of Human Trafficking. In November 2024 the training course targeted to Estonian diplomats, especially consuls, took place in hybrid format. There were around 60 participants. Also, handbooks were shared with consuls.

In 2024, the Ministry of Justice created two new training materials:

- 1) Online training for hotel and restaurant staff: abuse and human trafficking how to recognise and prevent them? It is available in [Estonian](#), [English](#) and Russian, free of charge. After completing one can receive a certificate via e-mail.
- 2) Learning materials on THB for high school students and teachers published in the NGO Mondo Global Education Center [in Estonian](#).

Both e-training resources were created in the frame of the EU ISF project „Alert helpers! – Building collaborative capacity for identification and assistance of THB victims in Estonia“. In addition, the homepage of Ministry of Justice serves as an information hub for different target groups about THB (mainly in Estonian): [Inimkaubandus | Justiits- ja Digiministeerium](#)

On 28 November 2024, a free seminar for road transport companies was held under the leadership of the ELA in cooperation with the Labour Inspectorate, the Police and Border Guard Board and the Estonian Ministry of Climate. In December 2024, ELA materials were shared on the social media channels of the Labour Inspectorate (e.g. [LinkedIn](#)).

In addition, the Estonian Labour Inspectorate is also a member of the Nordic-Baltic HUB. The HUB operates on a project-based basis with the general objective of promoting

decent working conditions for workers, fair competition and developing joint inspections between countries. A joint meeting was held in December to discuss HUB's activities in the field of undeclared work and labour exploitation for 2025. The meeting also decided to establish a forum for labour crime analysts, whose main goal is to improve the capacity of labour inspection authorities in the Nordic and Baltic countries to combat work-related crime.

In June-July 2024, the Labour Inspectorate prepared instructions for Estonian employers on how and in which language to communicate and sign a contract with employees who have come to work from a foreign country (available only in Estonian: <https://www.tooelu.ee/et/uudised/1241/mis-keeles-peab-valismaalt-tulnud-tootajaga-suhtlema>). In addition, according to the Labour Inspectorate's last year communication plan, the entire month of July was dedicated to foreign employees, within the framework of which they published relevant material in various information channels. The Labour Inspectorate produced an [information materials](#) "Information sheet for employees from outside Estonia" in 10 languages.

In 2024, the Labour Inspectorate and PBGB have enhanced their cooperation. For example, the Labour Inspectorate published on its [website](#) for the first time a list of companies that were planned to be inspected during this calendar year, some of them in cooperation with PBGB.

10.3 COOPERATION WITHIN MEMBER STATES AND WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

To strengthen cooperation between Member States officials and national authorities, the Labour Inspectorate cooperates closely with other Member States, in particular neighbouring countries. Cooperation agreements have been conducted with the Baltic States, Norway, Finland and Poland.

In June 2024, a Nordic-Baltic Seminar on "Cooperation between supervisory authorities in the fight against undeclared work", organised jointly by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the ELA, took place in Finland. In addition to Estonia, six countries took part in the event, represented by different authorities involved in the fight against undeclared work in different countries.

The Estonian Labour Inspectorate is also a member of the Nordic-Baltic HUB. The HUB operates on a project basis with the overall objective of promoting decent working conditions for workers, fair competition and the development of transnational joint controls. A joint meeting was held in December 2024 to discuss the HUB's 2025 activities in the field of undeclared work and labour exploitation. The meeting also decided to set up a forum of labour crime analysts, whose main objective is to improve the capacity of Nordic and Baltic labour inspectorates to fight labour-related crime.

In 2023-2024 cooperation was enhanced with UNODC and their regional anti-trafficking network of the Central-Asian countries. The main reason for establishing cooperation with Uzbekistan and the broader Central Asian region is the growing number of foreign workers arriving in Estonia from this area each year. In 2023 one study visit to Uzbekistan took place with Estonian human trafficking experts from PBGB, Social Insurance Board, Labour Inspectorate, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice. Following the study visit, a webinar on assisting victims of human

trafficking was held on 4 June 2024 with civil associations in Uzbekistan. As a follow up activity, a pocket guide on labour migration between Uzbekistan and Estonia – *Guide to safe labour migration between Uzbekistan and Estonia*, was developed. Guides are available in English and Russian.



The objective of the visit to Uzbekistan was to strengthen cooperation between specialists in the field of trafficking of human beings and creating a guidance document to help safe labour migration in the region. The overall objective of the project is to aid prevention of serious undercover crime, more specific areas of the project are organized crime, trafficking of human beings and fighting corruption. Activity was carried out in the framework of the ISF supported project "Prevention of serious undercover crime."

To enhance cooperation with third countries on the prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings in October 2024, the Labour Inspectorate hosted a 22-member delegation of the Government of the State of Sarawak, Malaysia. Estonia was one of the countries the delegation visited during their study visit. The purpose of the study visit was to learn about government digitalization, particularly in the areas of immigration and labour management. The delegation members were also keen to learn about the steps involved for foreigners in taking up employment in Estonia.

11. RETURN AND READMISSION

11.1 GENERAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AND ACTIONS IN THE AREA OF RETURN

In 2024, all Member States applying the Schengen acquis in full have been evaluated as part of thematic evaluation to address key common obstacles as well as identify best practices in the area of return. Thematic evaluation was included in the annual evaluation programme 2024 in accordance with Council Regulation (EU) 2022/922. The thematic evaluation "Towards an effective EU return system" covered the following aspects:

- link between discontinuation of legal stay and the start of the return process;
- the identification of third-country nationals, including through the use of large-scale IT systems supporting the application of the Schengen acquis;
- link between authorities responsible for issuance of the return decision and other actors who get in contact with the returnees during the return process, in particular return counselling;
- non-compliance with voluntary return and link to forced return.

Objective of evaluation was to ensure a uniform, harmonised and efficient implementation of the Schengen acquis, by providing an overview of Member States' performance in specific areas of the Schengen acquis, drawing horizontal findings relevant to the entire Schengen area, in accordance with EU legislation and common standards. The Council shall adopt the recommendations in spring 2025.

On 1 July 2024, amendment to Article 26⁶⁷ of the Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act came into force⁶⁷. With the amendment, the health care provider to detainees in detention center changed. Previously, the service was provided with the support of the AMIF project, but now the medical examination of the persons to be expelled and provision of necessary health services for them is organized by the Health Insurance Fund. Health care in prisons (including in detention centre for detainees and returnees) constitutes a part of the national health care system. Health care in prisons is financed within the limits of the possibilities of the state budget.

11.2 RETURN-RELATED STATISTICS

In 2024, the total number of issued return decisions dropped 24% compare to previous year. According to the PBGB data, in 2024 784 return decisions were issued, while in 2023 1031 return decisions were issued. 85% of these were decisions for voluntary departure. Top 3 nationalities to whom return decision were issued were Russian Federation, Moldova and Uzbekistan. Number of persons who actually left the country remained high with the return rate being 92%.

⁶⁷ Imprisonment Act, Changes in the Imprisonment Act § 49 on organisation of health care in prisons (including in detention centre for detainees and returnees) entered into force on 1 July 2024.

Imprisonment Act provides the procedure for and organisation of execution of imprisonment, detention and custody pending trial Available here:

<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/504112013005/consolide/current>

The number of persons returned with support provided by IOM Estonia VARRE project (assisted voluntary return programme) declined by 63% compared to previous year from 91 returns in 2023 to 34 in 2024. Top 3 nationalities to whom return assistance was provided were Georgians, Russians and Uzbeks. According to IOM Estonia information⁶⁸, the main difference compared to 2023 was that there were fewer Central Asian migrants, as they were rather referred by the PBGB to the Frontex assistance package. IOM Estonia provided assistance also to returnees to the United States and the United Kingdom, which is quite exceptional in our regional programme. There was also a case of return with medical escort.

Table 7. Number of TCNs in return procedures (including TCNs returned as part of an assisted voluntary return programme), 2020-2024 (Source: PBGB)

	Number of individuals who left the country on the basis of a return decisions subject to compulsory execution	Number of individuals who left the country on the basis of a return decisions with the term for voluntary compliance	Number of persons who voluntarily left the country with support of the VARRE project
2020	108	989	128
2021	104	1,089	40
2022	111	971	41
2023	170	861	91
2024	142	633	34

In 2024 the Estonian Red Cross (EPR) took part as an observant of forced returns, in accordance the Return Directive (EU Council Directive 2008/115/EC, 16.12.2008), in 50 expulsion cases (including of 56 persons). EPR is an observer pursuant to the cooperation agreement concluded between the Ministry of the Interior and the Estonian Red Cross (EPR), as an international humanitarian organisation, under AMIF-supported project "Expulsion monitoring" (AMIF.1.03.24-0009). The EPR monitors the return of persons from a neutral position, without interfering in the removal process.

11.3 VOLUNTARY RETURN, ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION MEASURES

There were no legal, policy or practical changes in 2024. As from autumn 2023, Frontex JRS services are available to the returnees. The returnees are also able to receive reintegration services through the IOM VARRE (Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme from Estonia) programme.

11.4 FORCED RETURN AND DETENTION

In 2024 one joint return operation to Congo took place. Objective of joint operations is to improve the effectiveness of returns. Joint Return Operations (JROs) are carried out by Frontex.

⁶⁸ IOM Estonia expert responded to EMN inquiry on 26 May 2025
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11.5 ENHANCING RETURN MIGRATION MANAGEMENT INCLUDING COOPERATION AMONG EU MEMBER STATES AND WITH THIRD COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AND TRANSIT ON RETURN READMISSION AGREEMENTS

On 1 March 2024, the bilateral return readmission agreement between Estonia and Uzbekistan entered into force (agreement was signed on 23 October 2023).⁶⁹

Negotiations are ongoing with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to conclude bilateral readmission agreements.

Additionally, negotiations are underway with Azerbaijan to conclude an implementing protocol on the basis of the readmission agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan.

In July 2024, a draft implementing protocol was transmitted to the Albanian Embassy in Warsaw and Estonia proposed to open negotiations for its conclusion.

In 2024, the information days for the representatives of foreign embassies were held in Helsinki and in Stockholm. The purpose of the information days was to provide the representatives of the embassies of the third countries with an overview of Estonia's migration-related legislation, including the legal migration pathways and return procedures. The information days were carried out under AMIF supported project TAG4 "Cooperation with third countries in the field of return" aimed at facilitating the return process of persons who have no legal basis to stay in the country.

⁶⁹ Riigi Teataja RT II, 21.02.2024, 1 The agreement between Estonia and Uzbekistan is available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/221022024001>

12. MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

12.1 NEW DEVELOPMENTS AIMED AT FACILITATING SYNERGIES BETWEEN MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THIRD COUNTRIES

In 2024, Estonia carried out several activities that support development in third countries, including efforts related to Ukraine. For example, the Estonian Centre for International Development (ESTDEV), the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (EUIF) and the State Employment Service of Ukraine (SES) started a project with an aim to help rebuild and modernise the Ukrainian labour market.⁷⁰ The project introduces the best practices of the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund through various seminars, active learning methods and co-creation activities, and advises the Ukrainian National Employment Service on how to adapt them. The training will provide inputs for sectoral changes based on SES needs. Estonia also joined Skills4Recovery programme, alongside Poland and the European Commission, to train Ukraine's skilled workers and develop its vocational education system.⁷¹ The newly expanded Skills4Recovery programme, initially started by the German government in 2023, aims to equip 4,700 Ukrainian workers with the critical skills necessary for Ukraine's economic recovery during and after the war. The initiative's budget is 25.5 million euros and is co-financed by the European Commission, Germany, Poland, and Estonia.

Estonia also contributes to improving the living conditions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. A project supporting the self-reliance of Syrian refugee women, children and youth through digital competencies and entrepreneurship trainings was carried out in Lebanon.⁷² In addition, knowledge exchange sessions and community digital awareness raising events were held alongside with a crafts market where women have the opportunity to sell their hand-made products. The total number of project direct beneficiaries is 374. In Jordan, a project was launched to support refugee and local community livelihoods and food security through water-saving agriculture.⁷³ Given Jordan's extreme water scarcity, 40 vulnerable women-headed households are being trained in hydroponic farming, with 12 women setting up greenhouses on their land. In this process, they receive support from sustainable crop production experts who will support them through an online platform. Additionally, members of four women's community-based organizations are trained to deliver future hydroponic training, helping spread knowledge across the Ar-Ramtha community.

⁷⁰ ESTDEV, a project by the Estonian Centre for International Development, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund and the State Employment Service of Ukraine to help rebuild and modernise the Ukrainian labour market. [Available: Estonia to help Ukraine rebuild labour market | ESTDEV](#)

⁷¹ Skills4Recovery programme to train Ukraine's skilled workers and develop its vocational education system. [Available: Estonia, Poland and EU join German initiative to improve vocational education and training in Ukraine | ESTDEV](#)

⁷² ESTDEV, a project supporting the self-reliance of Syrian refugee women, children and youth through digital competencies and entrepreneurship trainings. Available: [Supporting the self-reliance of Syrian refugee women, children and youth in Lebanon through digital competencies and entrepreneurship trainings | ESTDEV](#)

⁷³ ESTDEV, a project to support refugee and local community livelihoods and food security through water-saving agriculture. Available: [Supporting sustainable refugee and local community livelihoods and food security in Jordan through water-saving agriculture | ESTDEV](#)

In July the Estonian Centre for International Development (ESTDEV) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to strengthen partnership on digital development.⁷⁴ Estonia and the United States are committed to working with partner countries on sustainable development initiatives, especially in the areas of digital transformation and e-governance, cybersecurity, and entrepreneurship and innovation. The MOU is valid for five years and can be extended upon mutual agreement.

According to ESTDEV, Estonia allocated 476 217 euros in total through its development cooperation funds to finance different scholarships for dedicated development cooperation partner countries and institutions in 2024. For example, the funds were used to support students learning in the field of educational innovation and the modernization of teacher education.

As part of the 'Digital Explorers II' project⁷⁵, launched in March 2023, Estonia hosted 20 young professionals from Kenya for four months, offering them IT-related work experience in Estonian companies and specialized training at Tallinn University. Six trainees from Kenya carried out their work at the Centre for Educational Technology which resulted in two solutions that allow teachers to create personalised study materials for students with the help of artificial intelligence. In addition to working alongside Tallinn University's IT professionals, Kenyan trainees interned at two other companies: Triumph Health and Kodally.

⁷⁴ ESTDEV and USAID memorandum of understanding. Available: [ESTDEV and USAID forge stronger ties with new MOU for development cooperation | ESTDEV](#)

⁷⁵ ESTDEV project 'Digital Explorers II'. Available: [Digital Explorers 2 | ESTDEV](#)



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EMN ASYLUM AND MIGRATION OVERVIEW

NATIONAL REPORT PART 2: ANNEXES

ANNEX B: IMPLEMENTATION OF EU LEGISLATION

In April 2024, amendments to the Aliens Act entered into force transposing the EU Directive 2021/1883 (revised EU Blue Card directive) into national law. The amendments specify among other things the definition of higher professional qualifications and the educational requirements that EU Blue Card holders must meet in terms of their education. It also regulates the higher professional skills which are considered equivalent to the knowledge, skills and competence attested by higher education qualifications for the purpose of applying for a Blue Card. Among other, the period of validity of the required employment contract was shortened from one year to six months. Also, the Blue Card holder may be unemployed for a total of up to three months if they have held a Blue Card for less than two years, and for a total of up to six months if they have held a Blue Card for at least two years. The amendments also stipulate the conditions for mobility for EU Blue Card holders and establishes more favourable conditions for family reunification.

On 24 June 2024 a new EU directive (Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims) entered into force. In 2024 discussions were held in Estonia regarding the changes it will bring to national legislation. Transposition of Directive (EU) 2024/1712 is foreseen for period 2025-2026.

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