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ANNUAL REPORT 2022 ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN ESTONIA

NATIONAL REPORT (PART 2)

This report summarises the most significant developments in 2022, including responses to the influx of persons fleeing the war in Ukraine, and in 10 key areas of migration and asylum in Estonia: legal migration, international protection, minors and other vulnerable groups, integration and inclusion of adult migrants, citizenship and statelessness, borders, visas and Schengen, irregular migration (incl. migrant smuggling), trafficking in human beings, return and readmission, and migration and development cooperation.

According to Statistics Estonia, as of 1 January 2023, the population of Estonia grew by 2% to a total of 1 357 739. In 2022 11,588 births and 17,245 deaths were registered. In the same period 42,022 persons immigrated to Estonia of whom three-quarters (31,594) were from Ukraine, while 10,422 people emigrated from Estonia. The data showed another significant change: women made up a greater share of immigrant totals – at around 60 percent – than men, for the first time this century. This was influenced by arrivals from Ukraine as 64% of those fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine were women.¹

The year 2022 was characterised by the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, which coincided with Estonia's Independence Day. The invasion led to the largest movement of refugees in Europe since World War II and a landmark decision of activating the Temporary Protection Directive (Council Directive 2001/55/EC, hereinafter *TPD*) unanimously. Estonia demonstrated strong and continuous support for Ukraine by providing more military aid as a share of GDP than any other NATO country, mainly due to knowing the devastation of Russian imperialism and occupation. Defence and security-related topics gained importance in both media as well as politics, resulting in several restrictions and a sanction on Russian citizens travelling.

Compared to year 2021:

- Total number of first-time issued temporary residence permits (TRP) decreased by 2%. The number of TRP-s for family migration and employment increased by 8%. TRP-s for studying decreased the most – 49%, followed by TRP-s for entrepreneurship which decreased by 20%.

¹ Available here: <https://www.stat.ee/en/news/population-estonia-grew-2-immigration-was-main-contributor-births-were-record-low>

- The number of applications for international protection marked a significant increase of 3800%. Out of the 2940 submitted applications, 61 decisions were made to grant refugee status and 2045 decisions were made to grant subsidiary protection status (mostly Ukraine nationals).
- The number of visas issued by Estonia decreased by 47%. Behind the decrease were restrictions and a sanction imposed on citizens of the Russian Federation and Belarus in relation to the war in Ukraine.
- The number of short-term employment registrations decreased by 26%. Factors contributing to this decrease included changing the cross-border labour flows resulting from the war in Ukraine and sanctions/regulations imposed to restrict the entry and employment possibilities for Russian and Belarussian citizens.
- Estonian citizenship was granted to 804 persons, which is 6% less compared to 2021.
- The number of return decisions remained almost the same: PBGB issued 1170 return decisions, which is 1% more than in 2021.
- In total, 41 871 applications for temporary protection were submitted, out of which 66% were submitted by women and 34% by men. Approximately one-third of the applicants were minors (under 18-years of age).

On 24 February, the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine, which instigated Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. In response to the unprecedented Russian invasion, the European Council triggered the TPD for the first time to be able to provide quick and effective assistance to people fleeing Ukraine. On March 4th, the Council unanimously adopted the decision giving those fleeing the war in Ukraine the right to temporary protection. Estonia implemented the TPD with a Decree of the Government of the Republic of Estonia, which entered into force on 9th of March. This decision allowed 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 24th of February, to register for temporary protection. Aliens Act was amended accordingly, providing Ukrainian citizens legal basis for entry and stay in Estonia, including for those who resided in Estonia prior to the start of the aggression and whose legal basis to stay would have otherwise expired. Amendments also eased conditions and requirements for short-term employment to ensure a smooth entry into the labour market.

In order to condemn Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Government implemented several restrictive measures regarding the entry and stay of citizens of Russian Federation and Belarus:

- On 10th of March, Estonian embassies in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Pskov and Minsk as well as Visa Centres for external service providers in the Russian Federation and Belarus stopped accepting visa applications.
- The Government of the Republic of Estonia approved a regulation on 8th of April "Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine". This sanction applies to citizens of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus applying for all types of Estonian visas (both Schengen C-type and national D-type visa) for employment, teleworking or engagement in business, including start-ups; issuing residence permits for employment or engaging in business (including start-ups and large investors); not registering short-term employment unless the Russian/Belarusian

citizen already has a legal basis for stay in Estonia. The sanction was amended four times by adding exceptions to whom the sanction does not apply.

- The Government of the Republic of Estonia approved an order on 8th of September "Temporary Restriction on Crossing of State Border by Citizens of Russian Federation" restricting temporary entry into Estonia for citizens of the Russian Federation who hold a valid short-term Schengen visa for the purposes of tourism, sports, culture, visiting friends or family regardless of their country of destination or visa issuing country.

Several major amendments were made to the Aliens Act which regulates the entry, temporary stay, residence and employment in Estonia:

- A new type of temporary residence permit for short-term employment was introduced (entered into force on 1st of January 2023). Residence permit for short-term employment will allow foreigners who have worked in Estonia on a short-term basis for at least nine months to apply for a residence permit that is valid for up to two years (also called a 1+2 scheme).
- New incentive for hiring foreign labour to a *growth company* was introduced (entered into force on 1st of January 2023). Growth company is defined as a company registered in Estonia with the purpose to continue developing a business model with high global growth potential, innovative and replicable that shall significantly contribute to the development of the Estonian business environment. This will allow growth companies (head offices, developmental units etc.) to stay in Estonia, attract skilled workforce and stimulate the technology sector.

Regarding borders and Schengen governance:

- State Border Act and other related acts were amended to ensure the protection of public order and national security in an emergency situation caused by a mass influx. The amendment stipulates that in the event of a threat to public order or national security, the PBGB may refuse to accept the application for international protection of any third-country national who has illegally crossed the external border in an emergency situation caused by a mass influx and send them back without issuing a return decision or an entry ban.
- In March, Estonia temporarily restored its Schengen border control on the Estonian-Latvian border with temporary checkpoints. In the end of May, temporary border control regime ended as the number of refugees arriving from Ukraine via Latvia significantly decreased and number of refugees arriving via Russia significantly increased.

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.

The EMN Annual Report on Migration (ARM) consists of two parts and a statistical annex. Part I and the statistical annex are intended to inform policymakers within the European Commission about national developments. The current document - Part II - however,

is aimed at a wider audience interested in an overview of the asylum and immigration situation in Estonia.

This report is structured to provide an overview of the most significant developments in 2022 regarding Russian aggression against Ukraine (responses to the influx of persons fleeing the war in Ukraine) and in 10 key areas of migration and asylum in Estonia: legal migration, international protection, minors and other vulnerable groups, integration and inclusion of adult migrants, citizenship and statelessness, borders, visas and Schengen, irregular migration (incl. migrant smuggling), trafficking in human beings, return and readmission, and migration and development cooperation.

The report covers the period from 1 January to 31 December 2022. However, in some instances, it will also refer to some developments that are planned to come into force in 2023. This is the seventeenth annual report by the Estonian National Contact Point.

METHODOLOGY

This report has been produced in accordance with the European Migration Network's general research guidelines. The structure and headings of the report are based on a model jointly agreed by the EMN. The division into topics follows the structure used by the European Commission, which has also been adopted by the EMN.

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, and Ministry of Education and Research.
- Non-governmental organisations (NGO-s), incl. Estonian Refugee Council, Estonian Human Rights Centre, Mondo.
- Other contributing agencies and organisations, incl. Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, Social Insurance Board, Statistics Estonia, Enterprise Estonia'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 2022 – April 2023.

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 **KredEx and EAS brands**² (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 Hoolekandeteenus** is responsible for the Vao and Vägeva reception centres of applicants of international protection. **NGO Mondo** focuses on on

² Former EAS – Enterprise Estonia. KredEx and Enterprise Estonia merged in the beginning of 2022.

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

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

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

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

2. OVERVIEW OF ASYLUM AND MIGRATION POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

POLITICAL CHANGES IN 2022

The coalition of the Reform Party and the Centre Party lasted until 3 June 2022 when the Prime Minister Kaja Kallas dismissed Centre Party ministers from government after several weeks of disputes. New coalition government led by Kaja Kallas as Prime Minister took office on 18 July. Coalition agreement was signed between the Reform

Party, Isamaa and Social Democrats. Coalition set to focus on strengthening comprehensive security, transitioning to Estonian-language education, increasing the economic security of Estonian people and supporting Ukraine at all international levels, including Ukraine's NATO and EU efforts. On 18th of July 2022, Estonia's new Minister of the Interior Mr. Lauri Läänemets from Social Democrats took office.³ Estonian Government continued to support the economic isolation of the Russian Federation and prepared for more Ukrainian refugees to arrive at its borders.

In 2022, headlines continued to be dominated by events in Ukraine. In August, the state removed monument called "Narva tank", which was a genuine T-34 Soviet-era model from a majority Russian-speaking town Narva followed by removing other Soviet-era memorials, monuments and relics to museums. Politics concentrated mainly on Ukrainian refugees, changed security situation, high inflation and energy crisis. In terms of migration and asylum policies, the Government and ministries continued with approved development plans from 2021: "Internal security development plan 2020-2030"⁴, "Cohesive Estonia Development Plan 2021-2030"⁵ and updated the action plan "Estonia 2035"⁶. Among other topics, the development plans set goals for Estonian migration, citizenship and identity management policy, integration and adaptation of newly-arrived migrants. Activities were also continued regarding the "Violence Prevention Agreement"⁷ which covers the prevention and combating of various forms of interpersonal violence. The main focus is on violence against children, while new topics include violence against the elderly and mental violence. Hate crimes, which have received less attention so far, have also been addressed to some extent.

3. RESPONSES TO THE INFLUX OF PERSONS FLEEING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

3.1 TEMPORARY PROTECTION FOR PERSONS FLEEING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

On 24 February, 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 in order to offer quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the war. On 2 March, 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 protection.⁸

Estonia activated the TPD on 9 March with a Decree of the Government⁹, 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

³ Available here: <https://news.err.ee/1608660640/estonia-s-new-coalition-agreement>

⁴ Available here: <https://www.siseministeerium.ee/stak2030>

⁵ Available here: <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/press-releases/the-riigikogu-discussed-the-cohesive-estonia-development-plan-until-2030/>

⁶ Available here: https://valitsus.ee/strateegia-eesti-2035-arengukavad-ja-planeering/strateegia/materjalid?view_instance=0¤t_page=1

⁷ Available here: <https://www.just.ee/en/crime-and-prevention-crime/violence-prevention-agreement>

⁸ Available here: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en

⁹ Available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/308032022010>

military aggression started on 24th of February, to apply for temporary protection. In order to better manage the high volume of applications for TP, PBGB implemented an online appointment system to apply for temporary protection via self-service portal and started to set up mobile service points in accommodation facilities where war refugees from Ukraine were staying.

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 24th of February 2022 no 1.1-4.1/8¹⁰. The order was in force from 24th of February until 30th of June and allowed:

- Ukrainian citizens and their family members to enter into 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 24th of February and left Ukraine on or after 24th of February, 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;
- Ukrainian citizens who were legally staying in Estonia before 24th of 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 May 14th and specify the legal basis for entry arrival and temporary stay in Estonia. Legal basis for entry into and stay in Estonia as of 24th of February 2022 was granted to persons eligible for temporary protection and Ukrainian citizens who stayed in Estonia prior to 24th of February 2022.

On 3rd of March 2022, by a regulation of the Government¹¹, a temporary border control was re-established on the Estonian-Latvian border with the purpose to streamline the entry process of people fleeing the war in Ukraine and to facilitate their initial contact with the country. Temporary checkpoints were re-established between Estonia and Latvia at four locations: three in Valga and one in Ikla. Initially, the temporary border control was introduced for 10 days, but it was extended until 25th of May 2022. On the same day, Tallinn City Government together with the Social Insurance Board (hereinafter *SIB*), PBGB and the Estonian Refugee Council opened its reception and information centre for Ukrainian refugees in Tallinn¹². The purpose of this center was to register the newly arrived refugees from Ukraine and address their most pressing needs for assistance. Reception points were also opened in Tallinn Bus Station (April 2022), in Narva (in July) and in other cities in order to ease the pressure on the capital city of Tallinn and better regulate the influx.

¹⁰ Available here: <https://www.politsei.ee/files/2022-07/kor-2022.8-1-.pdf?e8406bc3c6>

¹¹ Available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/116032022026>

¹² <https://www.tallinn.ee/en/news/tallinn-opens-refugee-reception-centre>

Figure 1. Applications for temporary protection, 10.03.2022-31.12.2022 (Source: PBGB)



3.2 ORGANISING ACCOMMODATION

On March 17th the Government approved in principle the coverage of urgent, essential, and temporary protection costs related to Ukrainian war refugees¹³ and on 14th of May, a regulation¹⁴ by the minister of Public Administration of the Republic of Estonia "Conditions and procedure for reimbursement of the costs providing essential assistance to Ukrainian war refugees to local governments" was passed. On the basis of the regulation, the Ministry of Social Affairs reimburses costs for accommodation expenses related to war refugees. The SIB reimburses for the costs of organising the reception of refugees and the payment of benefits, allowances, and social services. Expenses for the accommodation of war refugees are also covered to local governments through the SIB.

The Estonian state started to offer short-term emergency accommodation free of charge in various facilities including hostels, hotels, ships, renovated care homes etc., and support for finding a long-term place of residence for beneficiaries of temporary protection. SIB regional advisers started to provide assistance in finding suitable accommodation in dwellings owned either by private individuals, local governments, or the state (e.g. former dormitories).

In April, the SIB signed an agreement with the company Tallink Group¹⁵ to offer temporary accommodation on ferry MS Isabelle to Ukrainian refugees in Tallinn. The Tallink ship, which typically serves the company's Riga-Stockholm route, was chartered out from 7 April, for an initial period of four months with an option of extension. In December 2022, SIB signed a new contract with Tallink Group for offering short-term accommodation to Ukrainian refugees on the ship Isabelle. The new contract was signed

¹³ Available here: <https://www.valitsus.ee/en/news/government-will-cover-urgent-costs-receiving-war-refugees>

¹⁴ Available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/119042022003>

¹⁵ Available here: <https://news.err.ee/1608554254/estonian-state-tallink-sign-contract-to-charter-ship-for-refugee-housing>

for six months with the possibility to extend it by one month with the maximum duration of two months.

On 26 April, SIB sent administrative contract proposals to all local governments¹⁶ in Estonia to provide beneficiaries of temporary protection the possibility to apply for compensation of housing costs. Those who initially stayed in state-provided temporary housing were entitled, when transferring to more permanent accommodation arrangement, to coverage of one-time expenses related to entering into a rental contract for a dwelling granted for use to a beneficiary of temporary protection. Local governments started to pay compensation in the amount of 900 euros until 1st of June and continued with the sum of six times the subsistence level of a family i.e., 1200 euros. This lump-sum benefit is provided to a beneficiary of temporary protection, lessor or another person (e.g., a volunteer who assisted the war refugee) who has made expenses related to the living space of the refugee (e.g., purchasing furniture or household appliances, repair works etc.) in order to ease finding a long-term place of residence for beneficiaries of temporary protection.

In addition, the SIB and one of the biggest real estate portals in Estonia called Kinnisvara 24 launched a real estate site¹⁷ aimed to match Ukrainian refugees who are looking for accommodation and locals who have accommodation to offer for them.

3.3 ENTRY INTO THE LABOUR MARKET

In order to simplify the entry to Estonian labour market for people fleeing from the war in Ukraine and for those unable to return and to exempt them from requirements set for short-term employment, amendment to the Aliens Act was passed in May. According to the amendment, if a person has been granted a legal basis to enter into and stay in Estonia, provisions regarding short-term employment in Estonia do not apply to their employment. Employer is required to pay them a remuneration which is at least equal to the average annual gross monthly salary of Estonia of the area of activity in which employment is commenced (last published by Statistics Estonia) and multiplied by the coefficient of 0.8. The calculation of the average gross monthly salary of an area of activity is based on the letter code of the Estonian Classification of Economic Activities EMTAK. Remuneration requirement was lowered from the average gross annual salary to 0.8 of the average gross annual salary of the relevant field of activity to avoid possible labour related exploitation.

Ministry of Social Affairs in cooperation with the Statistics Estonia (*Eesti Statistikaamet*) started to analyse the employment situation of Ukrainian refugees under temporary protection and the Ukrainian citizens staying in the country on other grounds (residence permit, short-term employment, etc.). Data on individuals aged 15 to 75, including beneficiaries of international and temporary protection, was taken from the population register and information on the existence of an employment relationship obtained from the employment register. Analysis on the situation of Ukrainians in the Estonian labour market¹⁸ is being continuously updated.

¹⁶ Available here: <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/et/uudised/riik-toetab-sojapogenike-pikaajalise-eluasemega-soetud-kulude-kompenseerimist-17-miljoni>

¹⁷ Available here: <https://news.err.ee/1608556222/real-estate-portals-launch-webpages-aimed-at-refugee-accommodation>

¹⁸ Available here: <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/short-term-statistics/ukrainians-estonian-labour-market>

Regarding unemployment services, another amendment in the Aliens Act passed in May guaranteed persons who have been granted a legal basis for temporary stay in Estonia and who are not employed to be registered as a jobseeker pursuant to the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act and may be provided with services such as provision of information on the situation on the labour market, labour market services and benefits, job mediation and career counselling.

In September, in order to help Ukrainian refugees who have been or are being trained to become medical workers to enter into the labour market, the Ministry of Social Affairs provided an opportunity to continue their professional work in Estonia¹⁹. After completing the curriculum, Ukrainian nurses receive a nursing education and a bachelor's degree in accordance with European Union directives and can apply to be entered in the register of healthcare workers on an equal basis with other nurses who have graduated from an Estonian higher education institution.

3.4 ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

As of 9th of March when the TPD was activated in Estonia, it was important to assure that beneficiaries of temporary protection will receive security and social guarantees similar to those enjoyed by the Estonian residents i.e. the right to study, work and therefore receive health insurance. State started to organize free health examinations for war refugees to get an overview of their state of health, providing free vaccination (including vaccination against Covid-19) and if necessary, planning further treatment and issuing prescriptions via Estonian Health Insurance Fund²⁰ (Eesti Haigekassa) in Estonian family medicine centres. Alongside with medical care, free psychological help started to be provided via SIB's Victim Support Crisis Helpline and online chat [palunabi.ee](https://www.palunabi.ee)²¹ in Estonian, English and Russian. Ukrainian war refugees were also exempt from visit fees for emergency care in the main Psychiatry Clinics in Estonia (e.g., Psychiatry Clinic of the North Estonia Medical Centre etc.). In addition, Estonian Health Board published an overview of medical facilities and services for newly-arrived refugees from Ukraine²².

In June, the Education and Youth Board's Rajaleidja counselling centre²³ started to provide psychological counselling to war refugee children and youth whilst also employing 4 Ukrainian psychologists to provide psychological counselling in a trauma-informed way if necessary. From the beginning of August, three psychologists started working at the SIB to answer the victim help crisis line²⁴ in Ukrainian every day between 16:00 and 20:00. It is also possible to arrange video counselling in Ukrainian at a convenient time.

3.5 ACCESS TO EDUCATION

¹⁹ Available here: <https://www.sm.ee/uudised/dr-heidi-alasepp-ukraina-odedele-loodud-voimalus-eestis-erialasel-tool-jatkata>

²⁰ Available here: <https://www.haigekassa.ee/en/information-ukrainian-war-refugees>

²¹ <https://www.palunabi.ee/en/about-victim-support>

²² Available here: https://terviseamet.ee/et/ukraina?fbclid=IwAR11uKkdyg9_RID43WwXdLiUg6AbVuNbrRhy_EpJC1Sm2FFGiRakIQrsk_eg

²³ Available here: <https://www.harno.ee/uudised/haridus-ja-noorteametis-alustasid-tood-viis-ukrainast-parit-spetsialisti>

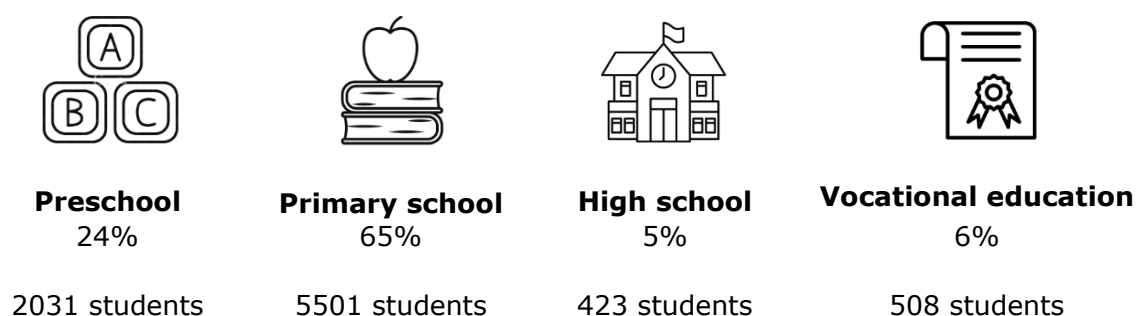
²⁴ Available here: <https://sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/uudised/sotsiaalkindlustusamet-avab-ukrainakeelse-noustamisliini>

As all children living in Estonia are subject to the compulsory school attendance from the age of 7 until the acquisition of basic education or up to the age of 17, local governments ensure school place for all children of that age as soon as possible. Children arriving from Ukraine are offered to continue their education in schools with Estonian as the language of instruction or, if the parent wishes, with Russian as the language of instruction. On 17th of March the Government of the Republic of Estonia approved in principle²⁵ the coverage of urgent, essential, and temporary protection costs related to Ukrainian war refugees. With this decision, The Ministry of Education and Research was reimbursed for the costs of basic, general, and vocational education.

In April, Tallinn City Government opened a school²⁶ for around 200 Ukrainian students and ten teachers on Räägu street, with some from Ukraine. For the start of the new academic year in September, the school could expand to up to 600 students. In May 2022, the Ministry of Education and Research founded the Freedom School²⁷ (Vabaduse Kool) for Ukrainian war refugee children and youth. The school, located in the centre of Tallinn, teaches in Estonian and Ukrainian, and in addition to compulsory subjects, pupils will also learn Ukrainian language and culture. Lessons at the Freedom School are based on the method of immersion in the language - 60% of the lessons are in Estonian and 40% in Ukrainian. The Estonian language is used to teach the official language, social sciences, humanities, technology, music, physical education and art. Physics, chemistry, natural sciences and Ukrainian language and culture are taught in Ukrainian. Mathematics, literature, history, geography and biology are taught in both Estonian and Ukrainian.

In June, the Ministry of Education and Research launched educational counselling service²⁸ for Ukrainian children, young people and parents in order to provide them help to find the most suitable learning opportunities at primary, general and vocational level and to help them choose a career.

Figure 2. Ukrainians registered in Estonian education system, January 2023 (Source: EHIS – Estonian Education Information System)



3.6 OTHER ACTIVITIES AND ACTIONS

In 2022, University of Tartu's Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS) together with the think tank Praxis conducted a study "Survey among Ukrainian refugees in Estonia"²⁹

²⁵ Available here: <https://www.valitsus.ee/en/news/government-will-cover-urgent-costs-receiving-war-refugees>

²⁶ Available here: <https://news.err.ee/1608556399/tallinn-to-open-a-school-for-refugees-on-raagu-tanav>

²⁷ Available here: <https://www.hm.ee/en/news/560-young-ukrainians-begin-their-studies-freedom-school-estonia-0>

²⁸ Available here: <https://hm.ee/en/node/194>

²⁹ Available here: <https://www.praxis.ee/tood/sojapogenike-kusitlusuuring/>

among 1598 applicants and beneficiaries of temporary protection in Estonia (period of October to December 2022). The Study found that:

- nearly 8% of the refugees come from Mariupol and 7% from Kharkiv region;
- war refugees have been concentrated in cities, and approximately half of them live in the capital Tallinn;
- 68% of the war refugees live in apartments. State aid in terms of accommodation is crucial when they arrive in Estonia, but if a job is found, almost all war refugees can pay for their own housing costs;
- the majority of war refugees can cope well in the Estonian labour market - 55% of adults have found a job;
- the majority of Ukrainian war refugees (63%) expect to be back in their home country in three years at the latest, while 25% of war refugees believe they are going to stay in Estonia after three years.

In response to the conflict, Estonian Refugee Council³⁰ evacuated approximately 8000 refugees from Ukrainian-Polish border, offered financial as well as material assistance (food, sleeping bags etc.), opened a call and counselling centre in Tallinn, coordinated volunteers from all over Estonia including for support person services, gathered and offered housing options and services, and carried out different awareness raising campaigns.

The Estonian Red Cross organised donation campaigns to support the Ukrainian Red Cross both financially as well as with humanitarian aid and food supplies. The Estonian Red Cross also supported health authorities with health advice and first aid on Tallink ships (for temporary accommodation), trained over a hundred specialists to offer psychological first aid for refugees and held camps for approximately 400 Ukrainian children.³¹

NGO Slava Ukraini set up logistics network to deliver aid to hotspots in Ukraine such as ambulance cars, medical and other necessary supplies. The NGO also helps to train soldiers on tactical combat casualty care.³² NGO Mondo collects donations to support victims of the war by sending humanitarian aid, by supporting the operation of the Crisis Information Line in Ukraine and by sending financial assistance to Ukraine.³³ UNHCR Estonia together with the Estonian Human Rights Centre involved experts from the Ukrainian community and carried out different events for more than 3000 Ukrainian refugees. Also, the work in field of legal aid increased and in total, 20 times more people were advised than during the previous year.³⁴

4. LEGAL MIGRATION

4.1 STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF YEAR 2021 IN LEGAL MIGRATION

In 2022, Russian aggression against Ukraine had the biggest effect on migration in general: sanctions and restrictions regarding the entry and employment of citizens of

³⁰ Available here: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/en/news/2022-summary-estonian-refugee-council>

³¹ Available here: <https://redcross.ee/teated/abiukrainas/>

³² Available here: <https://slava.ee/en/how-do-we-help/>

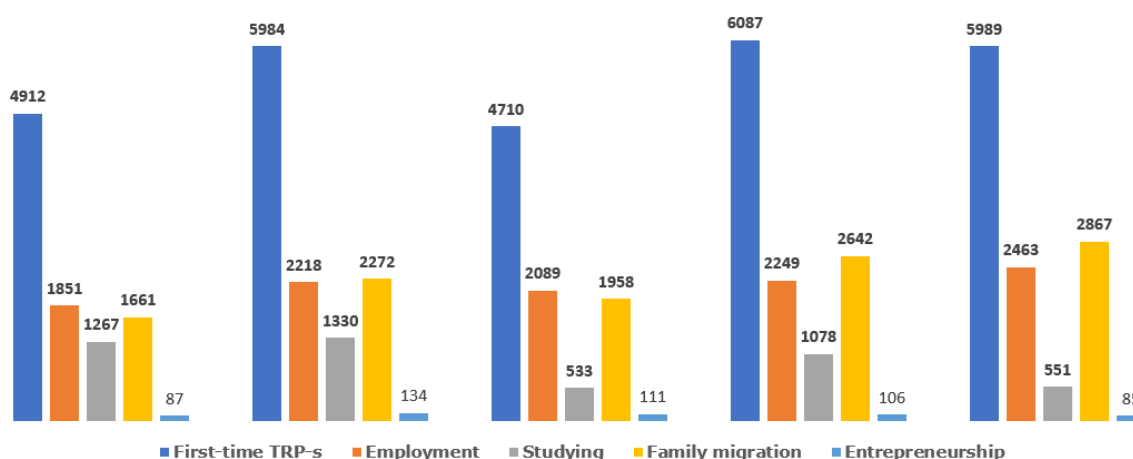
³³ Available here: <https://www.ukrainaheaks.ee/en/mondo>

³⁴ Available here: <https://humanrights.ee/en/2023/02/estonian-human-rights-centre-in-2022-annual-review/>

Russian Federation and Belarus, implementing Temporary Protection Directive and influx of those fleeing the war.

The total number of first-time issued temporary residence permits (TRP) by PBGB was 5989, marking a small decrease of 2% compared to the previous year. The number of TRP-s issued for family migration and employment increased by 8%. However, TRP-s issued for studying decreased the most by 49%, followed by TRP-s issued for entrepreneurship which decreased by 20%.

Figure 3: First-time TRP by type of migration, 2018-2022 (Source: PBGB)



The Top 5 nationalities to whom first-time TRP was issued, were Ukraine (1616), Russian Federation (1201), India (387), Belarus (320) and Turkey (263).

Figure 4: First-time TRP by type of migration and TOP 5 nationality, 2022 (Source: the PBGB)

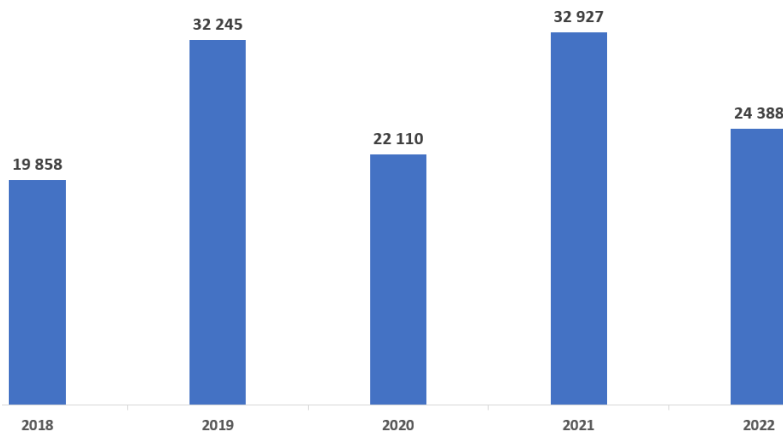
First-time TRP	Ukraine	Russian Federation	India	Belarus	Turkey
Family migration	Russian Federation	Ukraine	Belarus	India	Nigeria
Studying	Nigeria	Azerbaijan	India	Pakistan	Turkey
Employment	Ukraine	Russian Federation	India	Brazil	Belarus
Entrepreneurship	Turkey	Iran	India	Pakistan	Ukraine

There was a 26% decrease in registrations of short-term employment compared to the previous year, with 24 388 registrations in 2022 and 32 927 in 2021 (see Figure 5). Factors contributing to this decrease included changes in the cross-border labour flows due to the war in Ukraine and sanctions/regulations set to restrict the entry and employment possibilities for Russian and Belarussian citizens. Additionally, to make the entry into the labour market easier for Ukrainian nationals fleeing from the war, requirements for registering short-term employment were dropped with amendments made to the Aliens Act³⁵ on 24th of May. Third-country nationals whose short-term

35 Aliens Act available here: <https://www.riiqiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/505092022004/consolide/current>

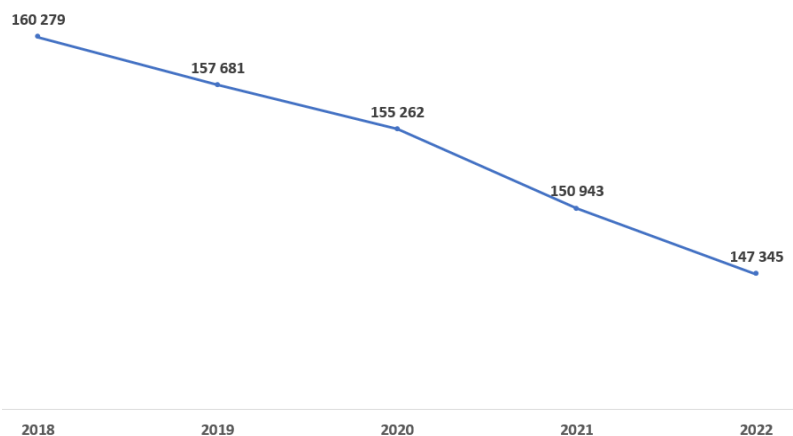
employment was registered in 2022 were most often citizens of Ukraine (47%), Uzbekistan (12%), Moldova (11%), Georgia (5%) and Russian Federation (4%). Top 5 areas of occupation for registration of short-term employment were construction, processing industry, agriculture and forestry, transport sector and service sector.

Figure 5. Number of short-term employment registrations 2018-2022 (Source: PBGB)



The number of people who hold long-term resident's residence permit decreased by 2% (see Figure 6). The largest three groups among the long-term residence permit holders are citizens of Russian Federation (51%) and persons with undetermined citizenship (44%), followed by 3% of citizens of Ukraine.

Figure 6. Number of persons holding long-term residence permits, 2018-2022 (source: PBGB)



4.2 OVERARCHING LEGAL AND POLICY CHANGES IN LEGAL MIGRATION

- On 28th of February, Estonian universities (University of Tartu, Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn University, Estonian University of Life Sciences, Estonian Academy of Arts, Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and Estonian Business School) decided to halt cooperation with higher education institutions and research organisations in Russian Federation and Belarus as well as restrict the admission of

Russian and Belarussian students for the next academic year of 2022/2023³⁶. This decision was taken to condemn the military attack on Ukraine and to restrict the ability of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus to carry on with ordinary international life at the levels of both the state and its citizens.

- On 10th of March, Estonian embassies in Russian Federation and Belarus stopped accepting visa applications. On 8th of April the Government of the Republic of Estonia approved a regulation "Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine"³⁷ on citizens of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus applying for all types of Estonian visas (both Schengen C-type and national D-type visa) for employment, teleworking or engagement in business, including start-ups; issuing residence permits for employment or engaging in business (including start-ups and large investors); not registering short-term employment unless the Russian/Belarussian citizen already has a legal basis for stay in Estonia.

The regulation was amended several times. Firstly, on 6th of June an exemption was made for Russian and Belarussian journalists accredited by the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and for citizens of Belarus who apply for a temporary residence permit for employment in information and communication technology. Secondly, on 29th of July an additional limitation was added for citizens of Russian Federation applying for a visa or temporary residence permit for study. Thirdly, on 17th of August a restriction was added for issuing visas to citizens of the Russian Federation and a list of exemptions for whom the sanction does not apply was provided (e.g. those visiting direct ascendants/descendants, a spouse, a person with whom one shares a minor child etc.). Finally, amendments were made on 10th of September after passing a separate order on temporary restriction on crossing the state border by citizens of Russian Federation.

- On 8th of September, the Government of the Republic of Estonia approved an order "Temporary Restriction on Crossing of State Border by Citizens of Russian Federation"³⁸. The order restricts from 19th of September temporary entry into Estonia for citizens of the Russian Federation who hold a valid short-term Schengen visa for tourism, sports, culture, visiting friends or family regardless of their country of destination or visa issuing country. Restrictions apply to crossing the external border and at all border crossing points open for international traffic in Estonia (Narva, Luhamaa, Koidula, Tallinn Airport and ports). Exceptions include visiting direct ascendants and descendants, a spouse etc.
- On 12th of December, the Riigikogu approved an Act that creates the bases and conditions for the transition to Estonian as the language of instruction in schools and childcare institutions³⁹. According to the Act, nurseries as well as the 1st and

³⁶ Available here: [Estonian universities halting cooperation with Russian and Belarussian higher education institutions and research organisations | University of Tartu](#)

³⁷ Regulation is available here: [Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine-Riigi Teataja](#)

³⁸ Order is available here: <https://kriis.ee/en/travelling-crossing-state-border/travelling-estonia/visas-russian-citizens>

³⁹ Available here: <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/sitting-reviews/the-riigikogu-received-an-overview-of-estonias-participation-in-the-european-stability-mechanism-2/>

4th grades will be the first to transfer to Estonian as the language of instruction in the academic year 2024/2025. In upper secondary school and in studies carried out under vocational secondary education curricula, in the academic years from 2024/2025 to 2029/2030, the proportion of another language may be up to 40 per cent of the volume of studies laid down in the curriculum of the school. Schools will be obligated to ensure transition to Estonian as the language of instruction in the 10th grade by no later than the academic year 2030/2031, in the 11th grade by the academic year 2031/2032 and in the 12th grade by the academic year 2032/2033. In vocational educational institutions, the amendment will concern the students studying under a curriculum of vocational secondary education.

4.3 WORK-RELATED MIGRATION

The number of permanent residents of Estonia has decreased compared with 2021, thus, the immigration quota for the year 2022 was 1311 and for the year 2023 1307.

In November 2022, the Government set the maximum annual immigration quota of 1307 for the year 2023 and the Minister of Interior established a division⁴⁰ within the quota. Before 2022, the annual immigration quota was distributed freely with the exception of culture, sports and foreign agreements meaning that the quota was fulfilled by those submitting applications the quickest and the actual distribution did not reflect the need for foreign labour in different sectors. 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:

- 600 residence permits for employment in manufacturing industry;
- 200 residence permits for employment in construction sector;
- 100 residence permits for employment in transport and storage sector;
- 5 residence permits for employment for entrepreneurship;
- 5 residence permits on the basis of a treaty;
- 19 residence permits for employment in a performing arts institution as person engaged in creative activities;
- 30 residence permits for employment in the professional activities in the capacity of a sportsman, coach, referee or sports official by summons of a respective sports federation;
- and 313 residence permits on general grounds to divide freely.

The immigration quota is subject to exemptions such as 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

⁴⁰ Distribution of the immigration quota in 2023 per reason for applying for a residence permit and basis for issuing a residence permit, available here <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/101122022005>

the European Union and their family members, citizens of the United States, United Kingdom and Japan, or people seeking international protection.

Highly qualified workers

In May, several important amendments were made to the Aliens Act, which regulates the entry, temporary stay, residence and employment in Estonia. Regarding highly qualified workers, top specialists' remuneration requirement was reduced from twice the Estonian average salary to 1,5 times the average salary⁴¹. Previous salary requirement was mainly fulfilled by the ICT sector, where the average salary was highest in Estonia. However, highly qualified top specialists, who are increasingly more difficult to find in the Estonian labour market, are also needed in other areas/sectors where average salary is not comparable with the ICT sector. Therefore, with the salary requirement lowered, other industries such as the machinery industry are now able to recruit top specialists who are exempt from the immigration quota and work permit from the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund.

In terms of Russian aggression in Ukraine, an amendment was made to the Government's regulation on "Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine"⁴² in June so that the regulation does not apply to citizens of the republic of Belarus who have a legal basis for staying in Estonia and who apply for a temporary residence permit for employment in a professional position in information and communication technology.

Enterprise Estonia and Work in Estonia developed an action plan for the period of 2022-2025 for attracting external talent under the Work in Estonia program⁴³. The program will focus not only on attracting IT specialists, but also on supporting the recruitment of engineers and specialists in natural and exact sciences in general. Increasing the involvement of foreign talent is one of the strategic objectives to alleviate the shortage of skilled labor in the fields of information and communication technology and natural sciences and science. The goal is that by 2025, with the direct impact of the activities of Work in Estonia, at least 3,000 high-paid foreign talents would have been added in the fields of information and communication technology and natural and exact sciences, and to increase Estonia's position as an attractive country of residence and employment in international benchmarking compared to 2020.

Work in Estonia also carried out a programme "Re-invent yourself"⁴⁴ for the spouses of foreign specialists residing and working in Estonia aimed at assisting with re-invention professionally. The programme includes training sessions to help find a professional path, networking meetings with local professionals and HR specialists and individual career consultations. Four-week programme is free of charge and is organised by Work in Estonia in cooperation with Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund and MoveMyTalent.

⁴¹ § 106 of the Aliens Act, available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/505092022004/consolide/current>

⁴² Available here: [Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine–Riigi Teataja](#)

⁴³ Available here: <https://eas.ee/work-in-estonia-toob-tippspetsialistid-eesisse/>

⁴⁴ Available here: <https://www.workinestonia.com/reinvent-yourself/>

In 2022, the Estonian Qualifications Authority (OSKA) carried out an analysis on forecast of the Estonian labour market "Overview of the Estonian labour market, labour demand and resulting need for training"⁴⁵ which provides a comprehensive overview of today's and future's labour demand and labour supply. Analysis also focused on COVID-19 pandemic, global supply difficulties, ongoing Russian-Ukraine conflict and the energy crisis as well as on the possible impact on labour supply and labour migration.

Short-term employment and seasonal work

In May, several important amendments were made to the Aliens Act regarding registration of short-term employment and seasonal work.

Firstly, a new type of type of temporary residence permit for short-term employment⁴⁶ was introduced (entered into force on 1st of January 2023). Residence permit for short-term employment will allow foreigners who have worked in Estonia on a short-term basis for at least nine months to apply for a residence permit that is valid for up to two years (also called a 1+2 scheme). The employer must meet certain requirements in order for the employee to be eligible for this type of residence permit, such as being trustworthy and having paid the employee a corresponding salary during the period of short-term employment. The residence permit is exempt from the annual immigration quota but cannot be extended.

In 2022, the Estonian government prepared proposals for more effective involvement of foreign labour as labour shortage was an acute problem addressed by certain sectors. Since the annual immigration quota fulfils quickly, registering short-term employment is used more and more. However, as recruitment from abroad and training on the post is time consuming and the employer must meet salary criterion, the timeframe of actual short-term work (365 days during 455 days period) was found unproportionally short. This new type of residence permit should allow these individuals easier access to reside and work in Estonia and ease labour shortages.

Secondly, with an amendment to the Aliens Act, short-term employment was restricted to full-time employment and the foreigner has to be paid at least the Estonian average salary regardless of the agreed working hours. If a foreigner works on the basis of a temporary residence permit intended for employment, the employer must pay the foreigner at least the Estonian average salary regardless of the workload agreed in the employment contract. Amendment was made in order to prevent cases where the employer uses part-time work to deviate from the salary criterion in order to pay less than required.

Thirdly, regarding the war in Ukraine, amendment to the Aliens Act was made to allow Ukrainian citizens who worked in Estonia before the 24th of February on the basis of short-term employment to continue their employment after its expiration without being subject to short-term employment requirements. Employer is obliged to pay the foreigner at least 0,8 times the average salary of the respective area of activity to avoid possible exploitation of those unable to return or those fleeing from the war. This was decided in order to support the self-sufficiency of Ukrainian citizens staying in Estonia

⁴⁵ Available here: <https://oska.kutsekoda.ee/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/OSKA-Uldprognoos-2022-2031.pdf>

⁴⁶ Aliens Act § 176² <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/505092022004/consolide/current>

and provide them with an opportunity to work temporarily without excessive bureaucracy and requirements for registering short-term employment.

Entrepreneurship and startup business

The average number of startups in Europe is 5 per 100,000 people. Estonia ranks 6 times higher than the European average, taking the third place in Europe. The State of European Tech 2022⁴⁷ report by Atomico highlights Estonia's continued leadership as one of the most entrepreneurial European country for tech startups. The report was published in December 2022 when the Estonian Startup Database⁴⁸ showed 1,452 startups founded in Estonia and the number has continued to grow.

In May, another amendment was made to the Aliens Act⁴⁹ in order to introduce a new initiative for hiring foreign labour to a *growth company* (entered into force on 1st of January 2023). Growth company is defined as a company registered in Estonia with the purpose to continue developing a business model with high global growth potential, innovative and replicable that shall significantly contribute to the development of the Estonian business environment. Growth companies will be allowed to offer salaries to foreign employees that are at least 80% of the average salary in Estonia and residence permits issued to foreign employees of a growth company will not be subject to the annual immigration quota.

Until relevant amendment was introduced, Aliens Act stipulated special incentives for hiring foreign labour to startup companies. At the same time, several innovative and fast-growing startups operate in Estonia that have grown out from the startup phase and who have been in the market for more than 10 years but to whom favourable conditions for recruiting foreign employees no longer apply. Thus, with this amendment technology-based growth companies will have similar benefits for hiring foreign labour as is available for startups.

Starting from 2023, technology companies that have been operating in Estonia for more than ten years will be able to use the growth company visa programme to recruit workers from abroad. The possibility to recruit foreign talent is important for Estonian tech companies, as the local labour market has a shortage of workers who are suitably qualified for both developing business and growing rapidly. The Estonian technology sector is becoming an increasingly important employer and taxpayer, and it is important for the state to encourage start-ups and technology companies to have their headquarters in Estonia, allowing them to create new jobs in Estonia and keep the associated taxes in the state budget. The growth company visa programme, modelled on the Startup Visa programme, will thus create the indispensable prerequisites for technology companies that have successfully established themselves in Estonia to grow and develop here, and for their development units and headquarters to remain in Estonia in the future, as well.

The Startup Visa programme, which was launched in 2017, has proven its effectiveness and success over the years. With the help of the programme, Estonian start-ups have recruited 4,000 foreign talents, 868 of whom were founders of technology companies.

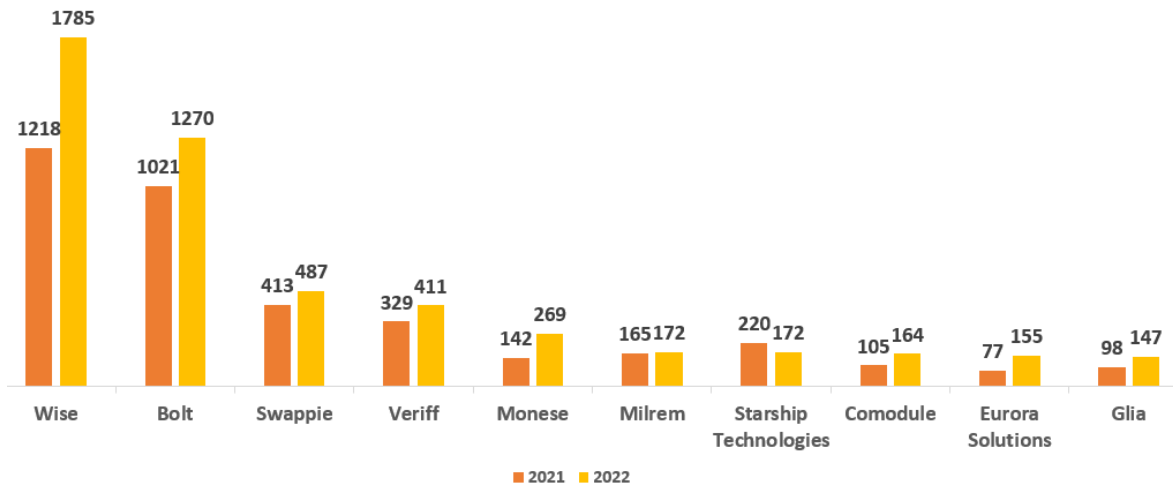
⁴⁷ Available here: <https://stateofeuropeantech.com/>

⁴⁸ Available here: <https://startupestonia.ee/startup-database>

⁴⁹ §106³ of the Aliens Act, available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/505092022004/consolide/current>

515 Estonian start-ups have used the Startup Visa to hire talent, and 248 start-ups have been founded in Estonia by foreign Startup Visa holders⁵⁰.

Figure 7. Top 10 biggest employers among Estonian start-ups by employee count, 2021-2022 (Source: Startup Estonia)



In 2022, Startup Estonia⁵¹, which is a governmental initiative aimed to supercharge the Estonian startup ecosystem, also carried out a satisfactory survey among the Estonian ecosystem participants⁵². The project team conducted applied research within the period of June - October 2022, during which the satisfaction of various parties in the Estonian startup ecosystem with SUE services was studied. Also, information and feedback was collected from various parties of the ecosystem about the broader functioning of the ecosystem, along with existing and future bottlenecks in the Estonian startup sector. In conclusion, awareness and satisfaction with the services offered by the Startup Estonia are high, but there are some concerns regarding the lasting impact of COVID-19 pandemic and Russian aggression in Ukraine.

E-residency

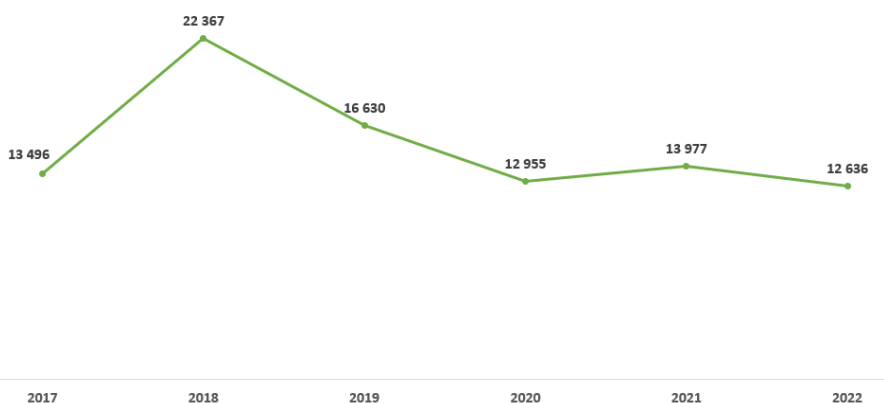
In 2022, the number of issued e-resident's digital IDs decreased by 4% compared to previous year. In 2022, the TOP 5 countries where e-residents were from, were Spain, Ukraine, Germany, Finland and Turkey. The total number of e-residents was 98 592 and TOP 5 citizenships Ukrainian, German, Russian, Finnish and Chinese.

Figure 8. The number of issued e-resident's digital ID-s, 2017-2022 (Source: PBGB)

⁵⁰ Available here: <https://kredex.ee/en/news/labour-shortages-are-forcing-action-estonia-creating-growth-company-visa-programme>

⁵¹ Available here: <https://startupestonia.ee/>

⁵² Final report available here: https://media.vooq.com/0000/0037/5345/files/Estonian%20Startup%20Ecosystem%20Participants%20Satisfaction%20Survey%202022_ENG.pdf



4.4 'SOCIAL DUMPING' AND LABOUR EXPLOITATION

One of the most important legal amendments regarding labour exploitation was made in May: PBGB was provided with the right to issue a precept to an employer if the employer fails to fulfil its obligation to pay to the foreigner the remuneration provided for in the Aliens Act. If the employer fails to pay the remuneration by the deadline specified in the precept, PBGB has the right to impose a penalty of up to 32,000 euros to the employer⁵³. Before the amendment, there were not enough effective measures provided by the act in order to sanction employers who did not fulfil conditions set for employment nor salary in order to avoid tax payments and gain competitive advantage.

PBGB continued to provide free legal migration counselling service (AMIF project 2021-6) and increased the number of migration advisors to 7. Advisors carried out a total of 28 information days (for employers, educational institutions, foreign employees, Ukrainian citizens, and beneficiaries of temporary protection) and provided information via Skype, phone and e-mail on more than 25,000 occasions. Migration advisors play an important role raising awareness of employers, entrepreneurs, educational institutions and to others who invite foreigners to Estonia as well as foreigners, whether employees, students or other. The need for migration related counselling has increased since introducing the service in 2017. Service plays an important role on providing legal migration related information including the introduction on legislative changes.

Authorities also continued with actions addressed to migrants and employers in terms of the Violence Prevention Agreement⁵⁴ which aims at preventing trafficking and was confirmed by the Government in 2021.

4.5 FAMILY REUNIFICATION AND FAMILY FORMATION

In 2022, changes related to family reunification and family formation were tied to sanctions and restrictions set as a response to Russian aggression against Ukraine. On 8th of April the Government of the Republic of Estonia approved a regulation "Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine"⁵⁵ on citizens of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus. The regulation was amended several times,

⁵³ §286¹ of Aliens Act, available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/505092022004/consolide>

⁵⁴ Available here: https://www.just.ee/sites/www.just.ee/files/vagivallaennetuse_kokkulepe_2021-2025_0.pdf

⁵⁵ Available here: [Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine–Riigi Teataja](https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/505092022004/consolide)

including on 17th of August to exempt those Russian citizens who visit a direct descendant or ascendant relative or spouse of an Estonian citizen living in Estonia or a person holding an Estonian long-term residence permit and visit an Estonian citizen living in Estonia or a person holding an Estonian long-term residence permit with whom they are raising a common minor child. Same exceptions were applied on order approved by the Government on 8th of September "Temporary Restriction on Crossing of State Border by Citizens of Russian Federation"⁵⁶.

4.6 STUDENTS AND RESEARCHERS

The number of international students from third countries decreased by 49% in Estonia in 2022 compared to 2021. The reason can be tied to the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the decision taken in February by several universities (University of Tartu, Tallinn University of Technology, Tallinn University, Estonian University of Life Sciences, Estonian Academy of Arts, Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and Estonian Business School) to halt cooperation with higher education institutions and research organisations in Russian Federation and Belarus as well as restrict the admission of Russian and Belarussian students for the next academic year of 2022/2023⁵⁷. This decision was taken to condemn the military attack on Ukraine.

In terms of the academic year 2022/2023, the number of enrolled students fell the most among sending countries of Russia (-68%) and Azerbaijan (-34%). At the same time, more students from Ukraine (+222%) and Turkey (+5%) were accepted to Estonian higher education institutions than before⁵⁸.

Several legal amendments were passed in the Aliens Act⁵⁹ regarding students and researchers:

- Requirement for institutional accreditation for educational institutions was added meaning that that a visa may be issued for study at the level of higher education studies if the educational institution is institutionally accredited. Previously there was no such requirement. The amendment aimed at avoiding situations where higher educational institutions that have not passed institutional accreditation operate with the purpose to gain profit on admitting high number of foreign students while not meeting the requirements set for providing higher education, teaching and research activities or where students who have already paid admission fees and/or started studying, are unable to finish or receive a diploma and the educational institution does not take responsibility.
- 2-year time period was set for settling with a spouse who holds a temporary residence permit for study. This means that if a temporary residence permit is applied to live with a spouse who has a temporary residence permit for studies, the spouse must have lived in Estonia on the basis of a residence permit for study for at least two years. This will not apply when the spouse in question has been granted a temporary residence permit for doctoral studies. Previously, there was no such requirement. This amendment aims to prevent possible misuse and ensure that

⁵⁶ Available here: <https://kriis.ee/en/travelling-crossing-state-border/travelling-estonia/visas-russian-citizens>

⁵⁷ Available here: [Estonian universities halting cooperation with Russian and Belarussian higher education institutions and research organisations | University of Tartu](https://www.kriis.ee/en/estonian-universities-halting-cooperation-with-russian-and-belarusian-higher-education-institutions-and-research-organisations-|university-of-tartu)

⁵⁸ Available here: <https://www.studyinestonia.ee/news/international-students-2022>

⁵⁹ Available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/505092022004/consolide/current>

residence permits for study are used purposefully. The amendment does not limit the possibility to visit a family member studying in Estonia based on a visa or applying for a residence permit/visa individually.

- The ground for annulment of a temporary residence permit for study was amended. According to the amendment a temporary residence permit for study is annulled if a foreigner has failed to perform to a significant extent an obligation set in the same Act. Residence permit for studying expires 30 days after failure to complete the study program to the required extent or after an interruption of studies. This amendment aims to reduce the risk of possible misuse while providing a foreigner who has not completed his/her studies or has interrupted his/her studies with a reasonable time (30 days) to apply for a new temporary residence permit on other grounds (e.g., for employment).

In 2022, Statistics Estonia carried out an analysis on the economic impact of international students working in Estonia⁶⁰ during the academic year of 2021/2022. The study found that international students paid 14 million and international alumni 8 million euros in income and social tax in Estonia. The study also found that:

- More than half (56%) of international students in Estonia work next to their studies, compared to more than 86% of local students.
- Within a year after graduation, 63% of the international alumni worked in Estonia. The proportion of alumni who have stayed in Estonia and commenced employment has increased significantly during the last year.
- Foreign students from African and Asian regions are more likely to work while studying.
- Most likely to work while studying are international students in ICT; engineering, manufacturing and construction; business, administration and law. Of International students studying ICT, around 3/4 worked while studying. .
- Most of international alumni continue their employment either in Tallinn, the capital, or in Tartu.

4.7 OTHER MEASURES REGARDING LEGAL MIGRATION

PBGB continued to develop information systems such as: RIS (migration information system), MIGIS (migration surveillance system), VIISA 2.0 (visa information system) and RAKS2 (international protection system). Developments carried out in 2022 included self-service portal for short-term employment registration and residence permit application process enabling clients to launch applications, monitor the process of applications and to communicate with the PBGB.

PBGB also implemented an online appointment system to apply for temporary protection via self-service portal and started to set up mobile service points in accommodation facilities where war refugees from Ukraine were staying. In December 2022, the PBGB opened a self-service portal⁶¹ for Ukrainian citizens to whom Estonia had granted temporary protection and who wish to apply for the extension of temporary protection. Upon submission of the application in the self-service portal, Ukrainian citizens will receive an e-mail confirmation that their application has been accepted.

⁶⁰ Available here: https://www.stat.ee/sites/default/files/2023-02/valistudengid_2022.pdf

⁶¹ Available here: <https://asylum.politsei.ee/>

Ukrainian citizens will also receive an e-mail once their extended residence permit card is ready, and they can collect it from the PBGB's service office of their choice. Self-service portal was opened to better manage the volume of applications for the extension of temporary protection.

5. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

5.1 APPLICATIONS FOR AND DECISIONS TO GRANT 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.

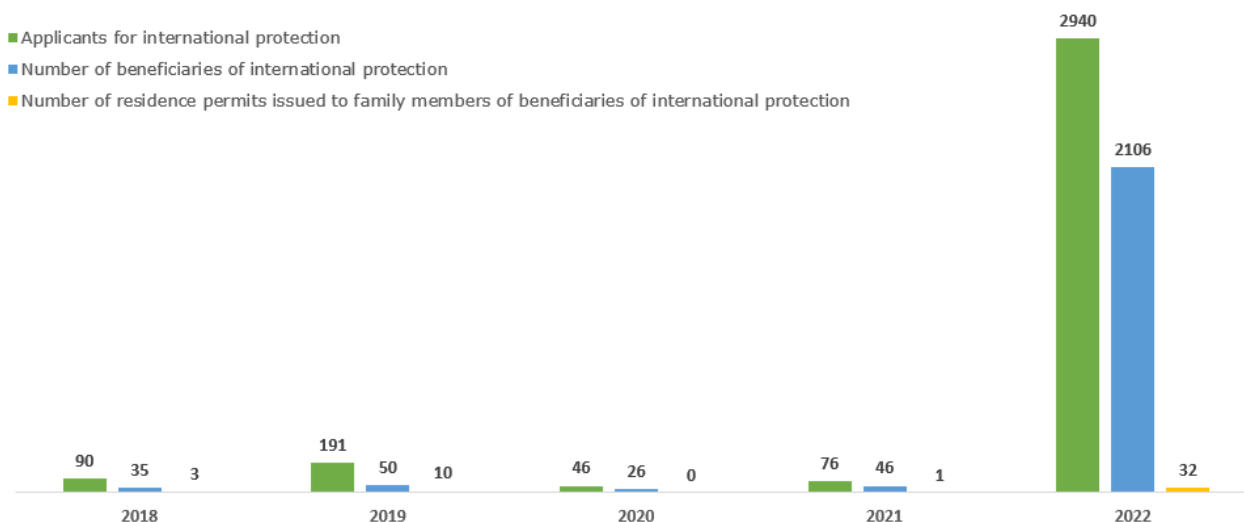
Since 1997, a total of 4264 foreigners have applied for international protection in Estonia. International protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection status) has been granted to 2709 foreigners, including 213 persons who received protection and came to Estonia as part of the EU migration agenda. In total, 407 persons have received refugee status and 2302 subsidiary protection. In 2019 Estonia decided not to continue with resettlement and relocation activities⁶². Therefore, there were no persons resettled or relocated to Estonia within the framework of European Agenda on Migration in 2022.

In 2022, Estonia received 2940 first-time applications for asylum, marking a significant increase of 3800% compared to the 76 first-time applications submitted in 2021. Out of these 2940 applications, 61 decisions were made to grant refugee status and 2045 subsidiary protection status. Top three countries by nationality for those who received refugee status were Russian Federation (36), Afghanistan (13) and Belarus (5). Subsidiary protection was granted mainly to Ukrainian nationals (2041).

The increase in the number of asylum applications 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 earlier than the 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.

Figure 9: Number of applicants and beneficiaries of international protection and their family members 2017-2022 (Source: PBGB)

⁶² 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).



5.2 RECEPTION OF APPLICANTS FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

While the procedure for international protection usually takes up to six months, it has been conducted in a simplified manner for Ukrainian citizens and takes up to a month. Ukrainian citizens seeking international protection are provided with accommodation and subsistence for four months in the same way as war refugees seeking temporary protection. Applicants may live independently elsewhere, for example with acquaintances or relatives. The right to work in Estonia during the one-month procedure depends on whether the person previously had the right to do so. If the person was in Estonia already before the war and was working on the basis of a registration of short-term employment, he or she may continue to work during the procedure for international protection. If the person did not previously have the right to work, he or she may not work in Estonia before being granted international protection or subsidiary protection. Amendments were made into the Aliens Act⁶³ stipulating that the right for entry and temporary stay in Estonia is valid until the decision of the Council of the EU on temporary protection is implemented.

Due to Russian aggression in Ukraine, the PBGB removed Ukraine from the safe third country list. As the number of applications for international protection submitted increased rapidly, workflow was optimized, and some caseworkers started to handle only Ukraine-related applications. In addition, the unit under PBGB proceeding applications for international protection and temporary protection was expanded from 3 caseworkers to 12 by the end of the year.

5.3 INITIATIVES BY NGO-S

The Estonian Refugee Council launched a project called "MyAdapter⁶⁴" to promote the skills of third-country nationals, in particular beneficiaries of international protection and family migration, and to develop an environment conducive to their adaptation. In cooperation with Pärnu International House, Tartu Folk High School and Tallinn Folk

⁶³ Aliens Act available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/505092022004/consolide>

⁶⁴ Available here: <https://www.paqulasabi.ee/en/projects/myadapter-adaptation-activities-third-country-nationals>

High School hobby classes that supported Estonian language learning were offered. Around 170 events were held in Tartu, Pärnu and Rakvere.

Regarding mental health initiatives, the Estonian Refugee Council together with NGO Peaasi⁶⁵ launched a NET therapy training for mental health professionals to improve Estonia's ability to offer people with refugee backgrounds a suitable form of therapy for complex traumas. In total, 20 specialists will be trained in order to help up to 5000 persons with refugee background⁶⁶.

Estonian Human Rights Centre⁶⁷ increased work with refugees in the field of legal aid. In 2022 the Centre advised 20 times more people than in previous years on average: more than 2000 people received legal aid as well as counselling and 18 strategic refugee cases were handled.

5.4 OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- In February, new updated version of RAKS2 (Register of granting international protection) was launched. New developments included adding data regarding court procedures, automated process for receiving country of origin information etc. in order to better manage the procedural files of applications for international protection and to ensure further process automation.
- In August, amendment to the Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens⁶⁸ (AGIPA) was passed regarding the submission of application for international protection. According to the amendment, if there is an emergency caused by mass immigration, the PBGB may, in the event of a risk to public order or national security, determine locations where application for international protection must be submitted and consider a third-country national to be an applicant for international protection only if the application was submitted at the specified location. Reason behind the amendment was to provide PBGB with an option to specify/limit the places where an application for international protection may be submitted to optimize its resources (in the light of Lithuanian-Belarus border crisis in 2021).

6. MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

6.1 UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

An unaccompanied minor must be appointed a legal representative or a guardian in Estonia who takes care of the child's well-being and represents them in the necessary actions. Until a guardian is appointed, the guardian's duties are performed by the local municipality where the child is registered (in the absence of registration, the local municipality in which the child lives). Since 2020, the reception system of

⁶⁵ Available here: <https://peaasi.ee/en/meist/>

⁶⁶ Available here: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/uudised/ukraina-pagulastele-avatakse-kohanemisprogramm-kust-saavad-tuge-ligi-5000-pogenikku>

⁶⁷ Available here: <https://humanrights.ee/en/>

⁶⁸ Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/530082022008/consolide/current>

unaccompanied minors has a case-by-case approach. The minor is placed in a safe home or accommodation centre for applicants of international protection. During the temporary placement, the SIB works toward finding a long-term solution.

Increased amount of political attention was given to the topic of unaccompanied minors regarding Russian aggression against Ukraine. Cooperation between the PBGB, the SIB and local governments became closer, also informative materials and two trainings were held for local governments on the specifics of appointing a legal representative or guardian and proceedings regarding the role of municipalities.

Estonia received a small number of unaccompanied minors from Ukraine who were placed with the National Child Protection system for proper needs assessment aimed at identifying an individual case plan. In order to maintain and develop children's cultural and linguistic needs, some of the staff working with these children were recruited from within the Ukrainian population.

6.2 OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS (EXCLUDING VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING)

Regarding other vulnerable groups, there were no legal or policy developments. After the Russian aggression in Ukraine and due to increased number of applicants for international protection, accommodation centre for asylum seekers in Vägeva unit was re-opened and adjusted for families.

7. INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION

In 2022, the developments in the field of integration and inclusion were related to changes to policy and practice. There were also numerous developments regarding the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees, which are described in detail in Chapter 3.

7.1 NATIONAL INTEGRATION STRATEGY

In October, the government approved the Coherence Plan 2022-2023 (*Sidususe plaan 2022-2023*), which is an action plan within the Cohesive Estonia Strategy 2021-2030. The plan provides a holistic approach to support strong ties between communities and to prevent possible tensions in Estonia society between different nations. The driver of this development was the escalated situation in Ukraine and rapid increase in the number of Ukrainian refugees in Estonia. This development is considered as major, because it has a holistic approach, with different ministries responsible for different actions.

The Coherence plan foresees for the years 2022-2023 four general aims and specific activities which will be implemented to fulfil these aims. The four aims are:

- 1) Common information and value space;
- 2) Caring and cohesive state;
- 3) Estonian language and -minded education;
- 4) Community and sense of belonging.

7.2 INVOLVEMENT OF MULTI-STAKEHOLDERS INCLUDING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

In addition to developments in the context of setting strategic goals for the next year, there were also several developments in the field of practice. For example, starting from March 2022, 26 information days on migration, adaptation, and integration were organised by Johannes Mihkelson Centre all over Estonia.⁶⁹ The purpose was to support the employees of local municipalities and their sub-divisions in their daily work, introducing the activities and opportunities provided by the state to newly-arrived immigrants, returnees, and permanent residents who are not yet extensively integrated. For example, the counsellors of Integration Foundation were speaking about the opportunities for learning Estonian, the adjustment programme, residence permits, and benefits and counselling services for specific target groups, as well as introducing the online integration-related advisory tool LINDA, where all those services come together.

The information days were organised in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Culture and were co-funded by the European Union via the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Ministry of the Interior.

In April 2022, Integration Foundation hired 7 additional advisors who in May and June carried out information sessions for refugees from Ukraine. In addition, a working group was formed from representatives of partner institutions (PBGB, Unemployment Insurance Fund, Health Board, Labour Inspectorate, Tax and Customs Agency, SIB, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Culture, Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities). The working group supported the further training of the advisors, addressed current issues and shared information in their respective networks.

In April, the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities mapped the contacts in local municipalities with the aim to carry out information days in 9 counties (Raplamaa, Jõgevamaa, Harjumaa, Järvamaa, Läänemaa, Saaremaa, Võrumaa, Lääne-Virumaa, Ida-Virumaa) and online. In total, 33 information sessions were organised with 810 people participating. Among others three online sessions in the Facebook group "Ukrainian friends in Estonia" were carried out. The sessions were recorded, and together with the viewings of the recordings, the sessions have been viewed 4700 times. In April, the information sessions were also carried out in the accommodation centres for Ukrainian refugees.⁷⁰

In March, due to the large number of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Estonia, the Tallinn City Council established a new department aimed at adaptation of newly-arrived immigrants.⁷¹ The department was created to offer adaptation and integration services on the city level in a more systematic and client-centred way. The main activities were carried out in an ad-hoc refugee centre on Niine street in Tallinn. The services provided included assistance with labour market, education or social issues. Additionally, external partners, such as Estonian Refugee Council, Estonian Human Rights Centre, Unemployment Insurance Fund, were included to offer specific assistance or activities. The activities are more and more gathered under an umbrella term of a "migration

⁶⁹ Available here: <https://www.jmk.ee/rande-kohanemis-ja-loimumisteemalised-teabepaevad/> ; <https://integratsioon.ee/en/newsletter-april-2022> ; <https://linda.integratsioon.ee/login>.

⁷⁰ Available here: <https://integratsioon.ee/en/node/3504>

⁷¹ Available here: <https://teele.tallinn.ee/documents/118539/view#preview>

centre" (*rändekeskus*), with the target groups and activities extending the scope of help and services provided for Ukrainian refugees.

Also driven by the high number of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Estonia in 2022 and the rapid need for counselling, the Ministry of Culture signed cooperation agreements with two biggest Ukrainian diaspora organisations in Estonia (NGO Eesti Ukrainlaste Kongress and NGO Ukraina Organisatsioonide Assotsiatsioon). The aim of the cooperation agreements is to empower diaspora organisations to handle supporting of newcomers with state information.

Lastly, in early 2023, the PBGB launched a new counselling service for Ukrainian temporary protection holders for the time they need to prolong their residence permit (coordinated by Integration Foundation). The objective of the counselling was to inform the Ukrainian temporary protection holders about their rights and obligations, especially those who have not fulfilled the criteria for prolongment, such as participating in the Welcoming programme or registering an address.

7.3 EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF ADULTS: BASIC SKILLS AND LANGUAGE TRAINING

In 2022, there were several developments related to the Welcoming Programme in Estonia, which were all related to the Russian war in Ukraine and the need to provide adaptation programme for Ukrainians who have fled to Estonia.

In June, registration began for the temporary adaptation programme for Ukrainian war refugees who have received temporary protection in Estonia.⁷² The programme provides information on issues related to the functioning of the Estonian state and society, daily life, work, study and family, and additionally A1 language learning is provided.

Additionally, the language courses for temporary protection holders were coordinated by Integration Foundation instead of Ministry of Interior/Culture as it is in case of other refugees. According to Welcoming programme the A1 level was defined as mandatory language level for adult temporary protection holders.⁷³ The development was necessary due to the high number of target groups and rapid need for service. The aim of this change was to offer and coordinate language courses using a standardized model.

7.4 ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

In December, the Minister of Culture signed Regulation No. 21 on the "Conditions and procedure for providing grants to young Ukrainian war refugees up to 19 years of age to preserve the Ukrainian language and culture".⁷⁴ An application round opened in January 2023. The purpose of the grant is to ensure that young Ukrainian war refugees up to the age of 19 in Estonia have opportunities to keep in touch with the Ukrainian language and culture.

⁷² Available here: www.kul.ee/en/news/registration-settle-estonia-programme-ukrainian-war-refugees-began

⁷³ Available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/528102019001/consolide>

⁷⁴ Available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/117122022022>
<https://integratsioon.ee/en/application-round-was-opened-ensure-ukrainian-refugees-opportunity-keep-touch-their-culture>

7.5 FIGHTING RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

In April, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reiterated its concern over Estonia's Penal Code, which is not fully compliant with the Convention to prohibit racist organizations and ban disseminating ideas based on racial hatred.⁷⁵ The Committee recommended that Estonia amend its legislation to fully comply with the Convention and ensure that punishment for hate speech corresponds to the gravity of the offences.

8. CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

8.1 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.

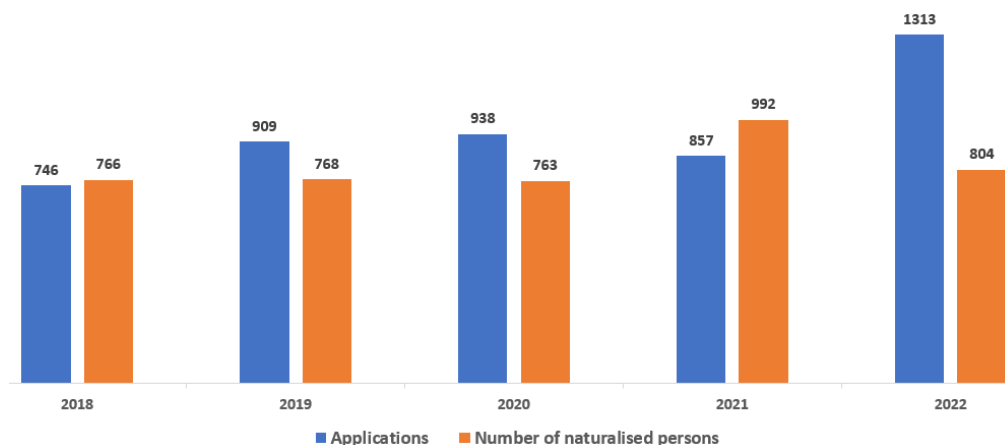
Estonian citizenship can be:

- 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.

In 2022, a total of 1313 persons applied for Estonian citizenship with 56% of the applicants being women and 44% being men. In 2022, Estonian citizenship was granted to 804 persons. In 2018-2022, a total of 4093 people have received Estonian citizenship through naturalisation with 55% being women and 45% being men. Most often, the naturalised people were previously citizens of the Russian Federation, persons with undetermined citizenship, and citizens of Belarus.

Figure 10. Citizenship applications and number of naturalised persons (Source: Ministry of Interior)

⁷⁵ Available here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/04/un-committee-elimination-racial-discrimination-issues-findings-cameroon>



* Number of naturalised persons in 2022 also includes 66 children who were born in Estonia and obtained Estonian citizenship automatically since birth and whose parents are persons with undetermined citizenship.

The number of persons with undetermined citizenship has been decreasing year by year. After the restoration of Estonian independence in 1991, 32% (494 000) of the population of Estonia had undetermined citizenship. By the end of 2022, this number had dropped to 64 584 persons (4,8% of the population). The main factors for the decrease have been the acquisition of Estonian citizenship, acquisition of some other citizenship or, since the group includes many elderly people, death of the person.

In 2022, the Citizenship Act was amended in the context of Russian war in Ukraine. Namely, in August 2022, amendments to the Citizenship Act came into force⁷⁶, specifying the revocation of citizenship for persons who have obtained Estonian citizenship by naturalization. Revocation is possible in case of a person's admission to the state or military service of a foreign state or military organization, if such a service is associated with a threat to public order or national security. Estonian citizenship obtained by naturalization can also be revoked in the case of a conviction for a crime against humanity or a crime of aggression.

Integration Foundation printed an updated version of the guideline brochure '6 Steps to Becoming an Estonian Citizen'.⁷⁷ With the update, additional options were added to the Estonian to English/Russian translated 24-pages brochure, contacts and web addresses were specified. The printout has also been distributed to the PBGB, and the Education and Youth Board of Estonia.

In addition, the Integration Foundation continued to offer a program "Language training to apply for Estonian citizenship" for those who wish to acquire Estonian citizenship and speak Estonian at the required level (B1).⁷⁸ For this purpose, a language learning contract can be concluded. In 2022 the general interest to obtain Estonian citizenship has increased. In October, the Integration Foundation carried out a campaign to raise awareness of and introduce the programme. After this, the foundation received over 800 new applications in one month. In 2022 there were in total 447 available learning

⁷⁶ Available here: www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/104082022003

⁷⁷ Available here: <https://integratsioon.ee/sites/default/files/2022-10/6%20Steps%20to%20Becoming%20an%20Estonian%20Citizen.pdf>

⁷⁸ Available here: <https://integratsioon.ee/en/language-training-apply-estonian-citizenship> ; <https://integratsioon.ee/en/newsletter-november-2022-0>

spots in this program. 84 persons reached the required B1 level and 75 persons acquired Estonian citizenship. Since launching the programme in 2019, in total approx. 1000 persons have joined the programme and approx. 300 have obtained Estonian citizenship.

8.2 STATELESSNESS DETERMINATION, STATUS AND RIGHTS GRANTED

In 2022, there were no changes in legislation or policy within the field of statelessness. There was one development in the field of practice. Namely, since January, Estonian Human Rights Centre offers counselling to people who do not have a citizenship of any country, i.e. are stateless.⁷⁹ The centre's lawyers will provide legal aid to people in need and represent them in court if needed. A person can contact the Centre if the Estonian state has mistreated them due to not having a citizenship. This can for example be a situation where they have not received state aid or have been denied a residence permit, they have been prevented from applying for citizenship by naturalisation or deported. The project is funded by UNHCR.

In 2022, the Estonian Human Rights Centre advised ten Ukrainian residents who can be divided into two groups based on their situation or status. The first group consisted of recognized stateless persons who had a so-called white passport and who the Centre assisted in applying for temporary protection. However, the second group consisted of young people from Luhansk and Donetsk, whose citizenship has not been identified. This situation occurs when the child was born before 2014 and has received a Ukrainian birth certificate, but a passport has not been applied for. Following the occupation of the territories by the Russian Federation, the child has been given a passport of either the Donetsk People's Republic or Luhansk People's Republic (but not a passport of the Russian Federation). In this situation, a person has the right to Ukrainian citizenship, but citizenship has never been recognised, and thus these young people are stateless. Because of this, these young people also had a problem with obtaining temporary protection in Estonia, because there is no procedure for establishing statelessness in Estonia.

Textbox: EMN Luxembourg and EMN Estonia co-organized a technical meeting on "Ensuring the right to nationality for every child"

EMN Luxembourg and EMN Estonia organized a technical meeting on 7th December 2022 on "Ensuring the right to nationality for every child". The hybrid event was held within the scope of the EMN Platform of Statelessness, which was established in 2016 on the basis of the Justice and Home Affairs Council conclusions of 3 and 4 December 2015. The technical meeting explored the complex concept of statelessness and more specifically ways how EU Member States and EMN Observer Countries have tackled issues related to children without nationality, the risk of children becoming stateless and different procedures for acquiring citizenship. Event hosted speakers from the Council of Europe as well as from the Netherlands, Georgia, Finland, Estonia, Ireland and Belgium.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Available here: <https://humanrights.ee/en/2022/02/kodakondsuseta/>

⁸⁰ Conclusions of the event can be found here: <https://www.emn.ee/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/summary-of-the-event.pdf>

9. BORDERS, VISA AND SCHENGEN

In 2022, main focus in border management, visa and Schengen was on restrictive measures in connection to the aggression of Russian Federation and Belarus in Ukraine. Thus, it included a regulation "Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine"⁸¹ which sanctions issuing new visas for citizens of Russian Federation and Belarus and an order "Temporary Restriction on Crossing of State Border by Citizens of Russian Federation"⁸², which forbids entry to short-term Schengen visa holding Russian citizens whose aim is tourism, sports, culture, visiting friends or family regardless of their country of destination or visa issuing country. Restrictive measures were implemented to condemn the military attack on Ukraine.

9.1 EXTERNAL BORDER CONTROL MANAGEMENT

In 2022 significant legislative change took place in area of external border management:

- On 16 August 2022, the amendment to the State Border Act⁸³ and other related legislation came into force, to ensure the protection of public order and national security in an emergency situation caused by a mass influx, taking into account the norms and jurisprudence of EU and international law.

The driver to for amending the Act was the Belarussian hybrid attack at the borders of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland in 2021. Previously, the national legislation in force did not enable to respond effectively to such hybrid attacks. The amendment stipulates that in the event of a threat to public order or national security, the PBGB may refuse to accept the application for international protection of any third-country national who has illegally crossed the external border in an emergency situation caused by a mass influx and send them back without issuing a return decision or an entry ban. Immediate return of a person who has crossed the border illegally is permitted only in case of danger to public order or national security and on the condition that the person had not tried to enter Estonia legally, i.e. through an open border point. The aspect of non-refoulement must be taken into account.

The amendment was based on the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, which stipulates that in the situations a state has provided the person a genuine and effective access to means of legal entry into the country but the person has crossed the border in an unauthorised manner in large numbers and by using force, creating a situation that is difficult to control and endangers public safety, the state cannot be responsible for providing such persons with guarantees of legal protection (Judgment of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights of 13 February 2020 in the case of N.D and N.T v Spain (Application Nos. 8675/15 and 8697/15), paragraphs 201, 231 and 242).

⁸¹ Available here: [Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine–Riigi Teataja](#)

⁸² Available here: [Visas for Russian citizens | Kriis](#)

⁸³ Available here: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/526082022001/consolide>

The Act stipulates that expulsion of persons is allowed only in the case it conforms to Article 3 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and Articles 32 and 33 of the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Amending Article 9¹⁰(5) of the State Borders Act, gives the PBGB the right to allow a third-country national into Estonia for humanitarian reasons.

During the preparatory debate of the amendment, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe sent a letter⁸⁴ to the Estonian parliament in relation to the planned amendment to the State Borders Act. In the letter they called to change the planned amendments which would allow pushbacks in situations of a mass influx of migrants and would prevent individuals from applying for asylum and could lead to them being returned in violation of the principle of non-refoulement. Other concerns about the act included the lack of suspensive effect of appeals against a decision to immediately return.

On 15 June, the Chair of the Constitutional Committee of the Parliament sent a reply⁸⁵ stating that in an emergency situations caused by mass influx it will be possible to send irregular migrants back from locations between border crossing points without issuing a return decision or making a decision on refusal of entry. Immediate expulsion of a migrant who has crossed the border illegally is permitted only in the event of a threat to public order or national security and on the condition that the third-country national had the option of entering Estonia legally by crossing the external border through an open border crossing point.

- On 17th June, the Government of the Republic cancelled the Government order No. 169 on "[Imposition of temporary restrictions on crossing the state border in order to prevent a new outbreak of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 causing the COVID-19 disease](#)"⁸⁶ restricting the entry at the external borders due to Covid-19, and thus the normal border control was restored.

In 2022 several practises and activities were carried out regarding the external border:

- Due to start of the military war in Ukraine, Estonia strengthened its border surveillance at the external border with Russian Federation. Military activity in Ukraine lead to large-scale migration flows from the external and internal borders of the EU. As a result, under the leadership of the PBGB, a national joint staff was established, which was responsible for solving both the migration and social crisis.
- As related activity, the PBGB sent a contact officer to Poland to coordinate the exchange of information between Estonian and Polish border agencies, to get an overview of situation on the Polish-Ukraine border, to assist and coordinate Ukrainian refugee flows/bringing them to Estonia, in cooperation with the NGO Estonian Refugee Council to collect and send assistance to Ukraine and assist

⁸⁴ Available here: <https://rm.coe.int/letter-to-mr-juri-ratas-president-of-the-parliament-of-estonia-by-dunj/1680a6891b>; <https://rm.coe.int/commhdh-govrep-2022-6-reply-by-the-chair-of-the-constitutional-committee/1680a69f26>

⁸⁵ Available here: [1680a69f26 \(coe.int\)](https://rm.coe.int/1680a69f26)

⁸⁶ Available here: [Imposition of temporary restrictions on crossing the state border in order to prevent a new outbreak of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 causing the COVID-19 disease-Riiqi Teataja](#)

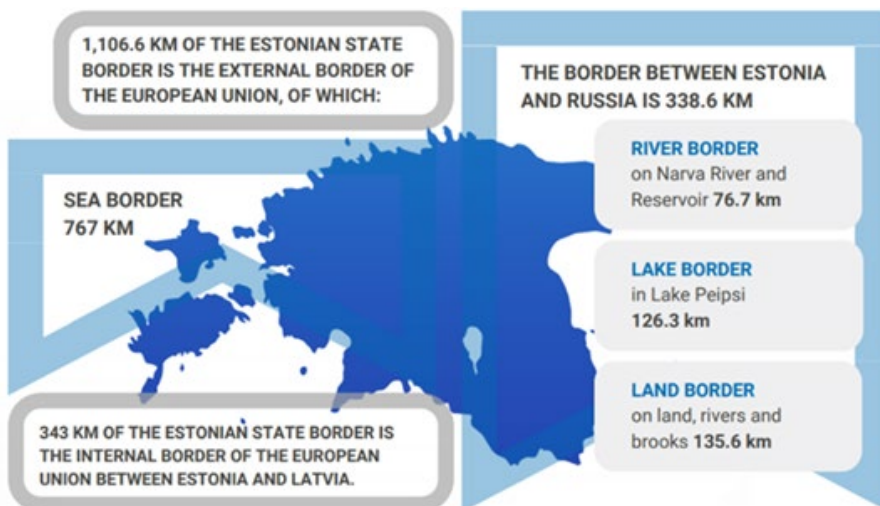
Ukrainian employees residing in Estonia, who had relatives in Ukraine and who wanted to bring them to Estonia.

- In November, the PBGB in cooperation with the Defense Forces, installed approx. 30 km of a temporary border barriers to Estonian external border.

As of 28th November, the Narva-2 border crossing point was temporarily closed for reconstruction by the decision of the Minister of the Interior. Closure of the border crossing point should not have any security risks as it was only used by European Union citizens, third-country nationals who hold a valid residence permit or persons with undetermined citizenship from Estonia. In near future the point will be fully automatized with automatic border control gates. The objective for this change was to modernize border crossing point with the automatic border control system (ABC gates).

Estonia has currently six opened border crossing points on the Estonian-Russian border: two in Narva: (Narva land border crossing point and Narva railway border crossing point), one in Saatsse and 3 in Southeast: (Koidula border crossing point, Koidula railway border crossing point and Luhamaa border crossing point).

Figure 11. Estonian borders (Source: Ministry of Interior)



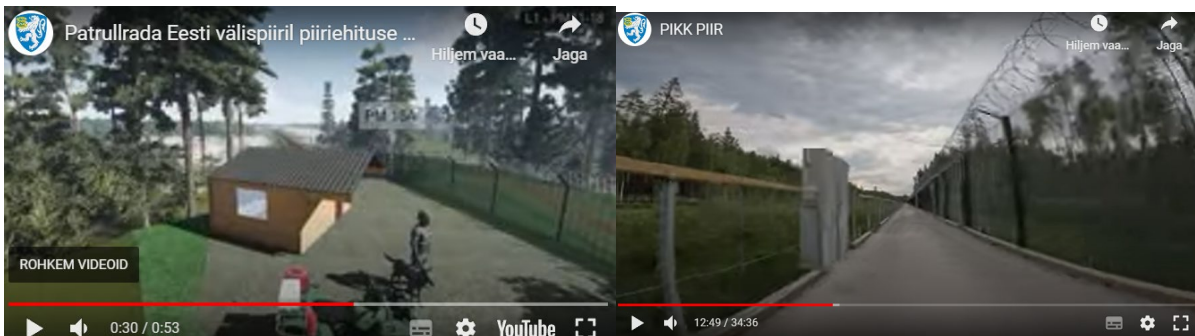
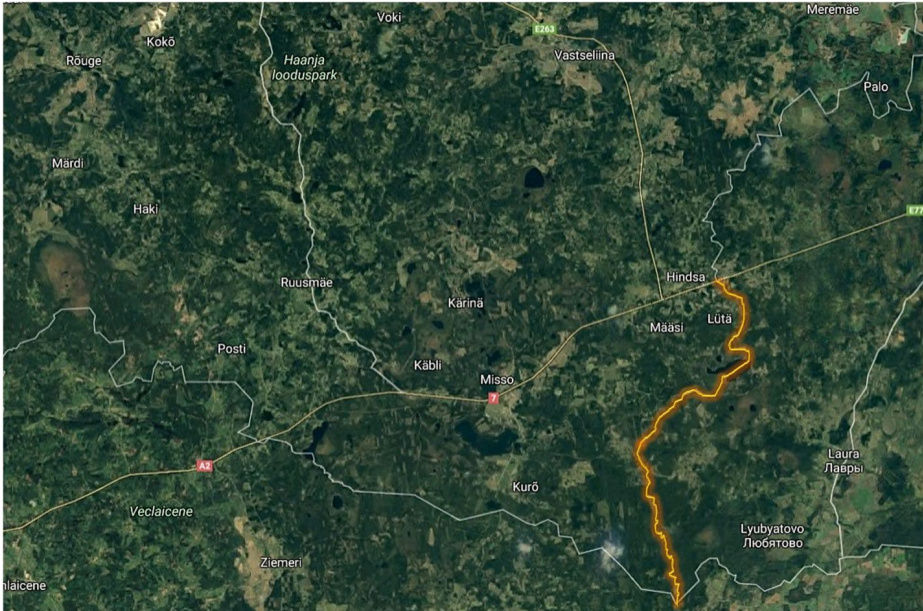
Construction on the South-Eastern border

On 31 January 2019, the PBGB announced the procurement for the first phase of construction work on the south-eastern border. The border construction includes establishment of a patrol road and access roads, an obstacle fence and animal fence, sand strip, power supply, data link, and sewerage (not including the monitoring and surveillance equipment).

The first phase of construction of the south-eastern border encompasses a 23.5-km-long stretch of border that runs along the border areas in Võru County, from the three-country border point to Luhamaa border crossing point. According to risk assessments, this is the most problematic border segment, with a greater than average number of border incidents.

Figure 12. First phase of construction on the south-eastern border includes the border segment from the three-country point to Luhamaa border crossing point

The border construction started in early 2020 and finished on 16th June 2022.



A video is available about the patrolled border road⁸⁷ and constructed border via YouTube⁸⁸.

9.2 COOPERATION AMONG EU MEMBER STATES AND WITH THIRD COUNTRIES AT THE EXTERNAL BORDER

In November and December 2022, under the cooperation agreement with Ukraine, five Ukrainian border guards were deployed by the Frontex. They were deployed to facilitate the entry of those persons who need protection and prevent the entry of those persons who do not have right to enter Estonia. They worked at Estonian eastern border, at Narva and Luhamaa border crossing points. Ukrainian officials observed the controls at the border and if needed assisted the Estonian border guard. Costs related to the deployment of Ukrainian border guards are covered by Frontex.

⁸⁷ Available here: <https://youtu.be/kOIby0BOYg>

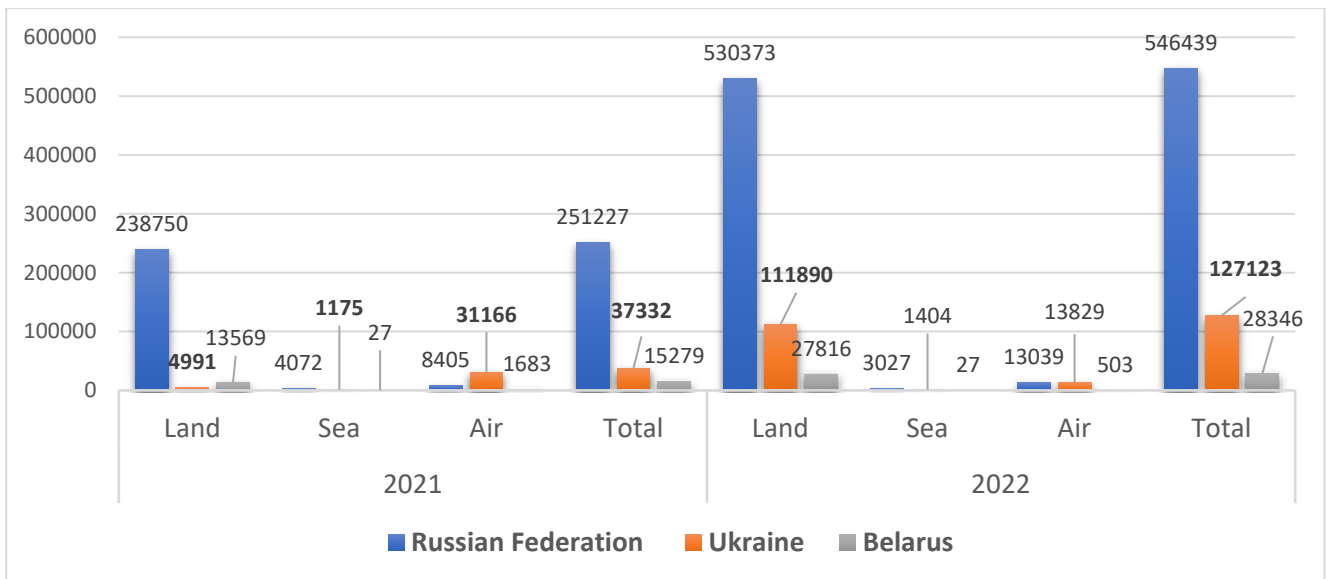
⁸⁸ Available here: <https://youtu.be/LqOKWrb09Mw>

9.3 BORDER-CROSSING STATISTICS

The number of external border crossings (those who are entering Estonia) was significantly affected by the situation in Ukraine. The total number of border crossings increased due to two main factors: 1) the arrival of Ukrainian war refugees and 2) the lifting of travel restrictions, as the Russian Federation lifted Covid-19 restrictions on travel on 15.07.2022. Border crossings of citizens of the Russian Federation increased though out the year until mid-August 2022. However, as of 18.08, Russian citizens who had a visa issued by Estonia and whose purpose of visiting Estonia was tourism, business, sport or culture were not allowed to enter Estonia. Together with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, Estonia prohibited Russian citizens from entering the country from the external border with a short-term Schengen visa.

In more detail, the trend of increasing border crossings of persons at the land and air borders continued throughout 2022. There was a significant increase in the number of border crossings of persons since May 2022 - at the air border, mainly due to the increase of persons who wish to travel, while at the eastern land border due to Ukrainian war refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. However, there were also Russian citizens who wanted to either travel or leave the country.

Figure 13. Top 3 Third-country nationals border crossings (entering Estonia), 2021-2022 (Source: PBGB)



9.4 NATIONAL VISA STATISTICS

According to the statistics provided by the PBGB, Estonia issued a total of 34 869 visas in 2022, which was a 47% decrease compared to the previous year. As during 2020-2021 the cross-border movement of people around the world, including Estonia, was impeded by the COVID-19 pandemic, then the year 2022 was mostly affected by the restrictions and sanctions imposed on citizens of the Russian Federation in relation to the war in Ukraine. Also, as several Estonian embassies abroad suspended accepting visa applications, a record low number of C visas were issued in 2022 – 19 049 (a decrease of 52% compared to last year) while the number of issued D visas was 15 820 (a decrease of 39% compared to last year). TOP 5 nationalities for long-term (D) visas

were citizens of Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Russian Federation and Georgia. TOP 5 nationalities for short-term (C) visas were citizens of Russian Federation, Belarus, India, Kazakhstan and Turkey.

Figure 14. Long-term (D) visas issued in 2018-2022 (Source: PBGB)

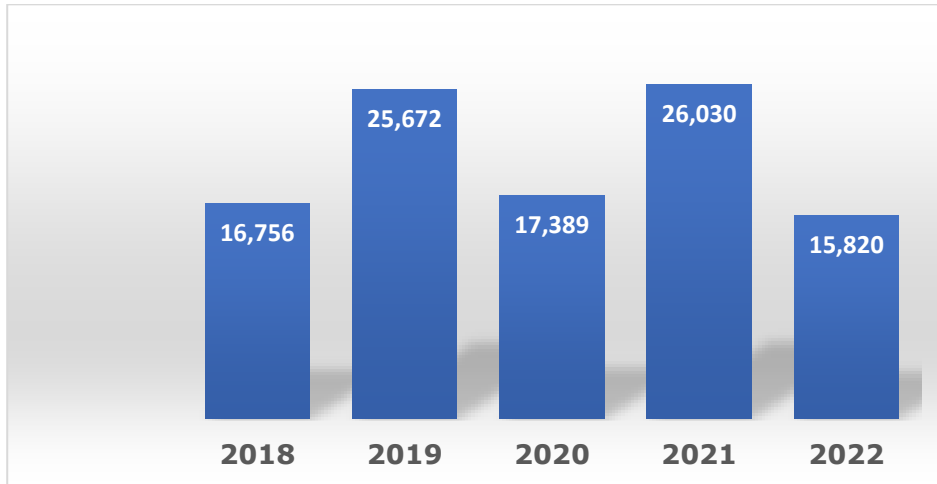
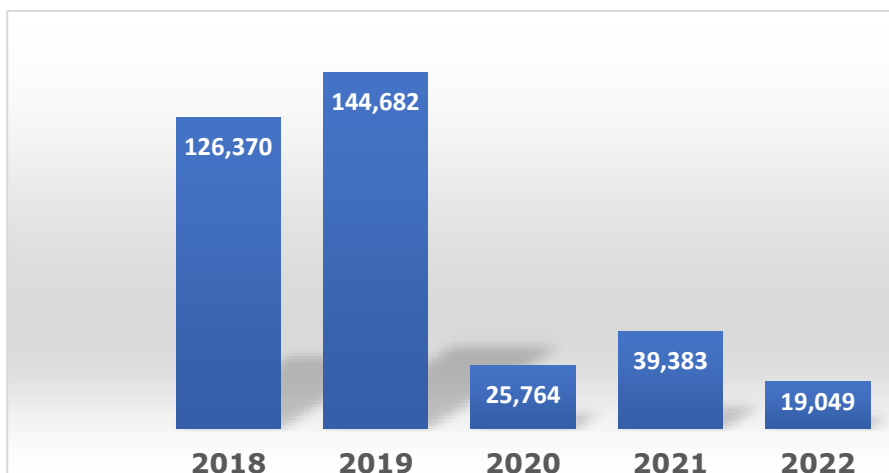


Figure 15. Short-term (C) visas issued in 2018-2022 (Source: PBGB)



TOP 3 reason to issue D visas were short-term employment, visiting relatives and study reason. TOP 3 reason to issue C visas were tourism, visiting relatives and business.

Since 2020, Estonia is issuing visas for teleworking or so-called digital nomad visas, which may be issued to a person whose purpose of temporary stay in Estonia is to perform work duties in Estonia as a location-independent employee. In 2022, in total of 191 long-term digital nomad visas were issued, which is 25% more than a year before. Main citizens who became holders of nomad visas were from the United States, India, United Kingdom, Russian Federation and Canada.

9.5 VISA RECIPROCITY MECHANISM

The visa representation agreement with Finland was amended in November 2022. As of 29 November 2022, Finland no longer represents Estonia in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates and as of 30 November 2022, Estonia no longer represents Finland in Astana,

Kazakhstan. Estonia processes C-visa applications in Abu Dhabi itself, while Finland does the same in Astana. Driver for changes was that the Embassy of Estonia in Abu Dhabi has been reinforced with an additional diplomat dealing with consular affairs posted in August 2022.

9.6 OTHER VISA RELATED ACTIVITIES

Main activities took place in order to reduce the number of Russian citizens having the possibility to enter Estonia and the Schengen area. Driver for this is the military actions of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

- On 21 April 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation ordered the closure of the Consulate General of Estonia in St Petersburg and its Chancery in Pskov with all staff posted from Estonia was forced to leave Russia. The Estonian Consulate General in St Petersburg and its Chancery in Pskov were closed on 6 May 2022. Driver for action was the military conflict of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.
- As from 3 October 2022, the Embassy of Estonia in Minsk is accepting visa applications only from Belarusian residents visiting close family members or whose entry is necessary for humanitarian reasons (e.g. funerals). These restrictions are also applied while representing Finland and Sweden in issuing Schengen visas in Minsk. Objective for this activity was to reduce the capacity to process visa applications and provide consular services. The Belarusian Embassy in Tallinn presented a formal note in the end of September 2022 to inform the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia about the decision to mutually reduce the staff of embassies to the minimum (one diplomat only).
- As from 10 March 2022, the Estonian representations in Moscow, St Petersburg and Pskov suspended accepting visa applications from the citizens of Russian Federation. Exceptions applied to the applicants whose direct descendant relative or ascendant relative or spouse is an Estonian citizen, holder of an Estonian residence permit, or the right of residence (EU citizens living in Estonia) and to those visiting Estonia for humanitarian reasons (e.g. funerals). This order was repealed with the imposition of a sanction by the Government of Estonia in August 2022.
- On 17th of August, the Government of the Republic of Estonia approved an amendment to the regulation on "Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine"⁸⁹ by adding a restriction for issuing visas to citizens of the Russian Federation and a list of exemptions to whom the visa sanction does not apply. According to the amendments, exceptions include:
 - visiting a spouse, who is an Estonian citizen residing in Estonia or a person residing in Estonia on the basis of Estonian long-term residence permit;
 - visiting a relative in the direct descending or ascending line who is an Estonian citizen residing in Estonia or a person residing in Estonia on the basis of Estonian long-term residence permit;

⁸⁹ Available here: [Imposition of sanctions of Government of Republic in connection with aggression of Russian Federation and Republic of Belarus in Ukraine–Riigi Teataja](#)

- visiting an Estonian citizen residing in Estonia or a person residing in Estonia on the basis of Estonian long-term residence permit and with whom they raise a minor child;
 - employees of a diplomatic mission or consular post in Estonia and their family members;
 - directly involved in the international carriage of goods and passengers;
 - persons enjoying the right of free movement under European Union law (EU citizens family members) and
 - whose entry into Estonia is necessary for humanitarian reasons (e.g. funerals).
- On 8th of September, the Government of the Republic of Estonia approved a restriction on entry for citizens of the Russian Federation starting from 19th of September. The order on "Temporary Restriction on Crossing of State Border by Citizens of Russian Federation"⁹⁰ restricts temporary entry into Estonia for citizens of the Russian Federation, who hold a valid short-term Schengen visa with aim of tourism, sports, culture, visiting friends or family regardless of their country of destination or visa issuing country. Restrictions apply to crossing the external border and at all border crossing points open for international traffic in Estonia (Narva, Luhamaa, Koidula, Tallinn Airport and ports).

The visa restriction does not apply to Russian citizens who are:

- visiting direct ascendants and descendants (children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents); a spouse, a person with whom one shares minor children. It is not possible to visit a relative, spouse or person with whom you share minor children if that person is living in Estonia based on a temporary residence permit;
 - diplomats;
 - Russian nationals with a short-stay visa and registered employment in Estonia or with a student visitor visa;
 - people directly employed in the international transport of goods and passengers.
 - Exceptional entry is also allowed on humanitarian grounds and for dissidents. The entry restriction does not apply to border crossers with a long-term (type D) visa.
- As from 28 February, the Article 11(1) of the Agreement on Facilitation of Visa Issuance to Citizens of the European Union and the Russian Federation, was suspended, which meant that holders of diplomatic passports of the Russian Federation who did not have a visa, were not allowed to enter Estonia.

On 1 February 2022, the PBGB started making changes to the practice of issuing seafarer visas at the borders. From 01.02.2022, a visa can only be applied at the border in case of unforeseen circumstances, which must be provable (e.g. unexpected team changes, illness of a team member etc). As a result of the amendment, application for seafarer's visa must be submitted at the embassy or at the centers of the embassy's external service provider (so-called visa centers assisting embassies, from where the

⁹⁰ Available here: [Visas for Russian citizens | Kriis](#)

person's application is forwarded to the embassy for final decision. The advantage of visa centers is, that they are more widely located around the world. The application for visa must be submitted a maximum of nine months before the start of the planned work (expected use of visa) and, in general, no later than 15 calendar days before the start of the planned work. In justified urgent individual cases, consular missions may allow the application to be submitted even later than 15 calendar days. This change has led to a significant decrease in the number of visas issued to seafarers at the borders. Objective for change was compliance of regulation (EU) 2019/1155 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 amending Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code).

To allow both Schengen and Estonian long-stay visa applicants to submit their visa applications more conveniently, eliminating the need to travel long distances to the embassies and consulates and to standardise common practice for Schengen Member States, on 2 September 2022, the service contracts concluded between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia and VF Worldwide Holdings Ltd ("VFS Global") entered into force, as a result of the concession agreement procedure "Processing of Schengen visa and Estonian long-stay visa applications" carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The public procurement for conclusion the service contracts was carried out in the first half of 2022. The public procurement was divided into four lots and the service contracts were concluded for each lot:

I lot – processing of Schengen visa applications and Estonian long-stay visa applications (D-visas) in the Commonwealth of Australia, Canada, State of Israel, Japan and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland;

II lot – processing of Schengen visa applications in the Republic of Belarus, in the Republic of Kazakhstan and in the Russian Federation;

III lot – processing of Schengen visa applications in the People's Republic of China, the Arab Republic of Egypt, in the Republic of India and in Turkey;

IV lot – processing of Schengen visa applications and Estonian long-stay visa applications (D-visas) in Ukraine.

On 7 December 2022, the United Arab Emirates were added to the service contract for II lot, VFS Global started to provide the service in the United Arab Emirates on 19 December 2022.

Thus, Estonia uses external service providers services currently in 14 countries.

All contracts are valid until 31 August 2027.

9.7 SCHENGEN GOVERNANCE (INCL. SCHENGEN EVALUATION MISSIONS, TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF SCHENGEN BORDERS, SCHENGEN INFORMATION SYSTEM SIS)

On 2 March 2022, Estonia temporarily restored its Schengen border control⁹¹ on the Estonian-Latvian border and re-established the temporary checkpoints between Estonia and Latvia at four locations, three in Valga and one in Ikla. As of 24 May, Estonia ended temporary border controls on Latvian border, as the number of refugees arriving from Ukraine via Latvia significantly decreased. Thus, as migration route changed, there was no need to continue with the Schengen border controls. Since June 2022 most refugees from Ukraine were arriving to Estonia via Russia.

An amendment to the Police and Border Guard Act⁹² was adopted in 2022. The aim of the amendment was to specify the authorities that can access the EES data for inspections, corrections, additions, deletions, etc. In addition, the tasks of the EES central access point and which authorities can request for EES data through CAP were specified. The legislative amendment will enter into force on the date the European Commission determines, based on article 66 (1) of Regulation (EU) 2017/2226 of the European Parliament and of the Council, as the date from which the EES will start operations. The changes to national legislation are driven from the directly applicable Regulation (EU) 2017/2226.

In 2022, a draft amendment to the Police and Border Guard Act has been submitted to the Riigikogu which designates the competent state authority for ETIAS entity, specifies the issues related to using the system and deleting data from ETIAS, etc. The legislative amendment will enter into force on the date the European Commission determines the ETIAS is to start operations. The changes to national legislation are driven from the directly applicable Regulation (EU) 2018/1240.

The legislative amendments related to the implementation of EIF regulations are being analysed and BMVI funding prepared by the PBGB and the Ministry of the Interior. Implementation of the EIF regulations at the national level is planned for 2023. Currently the amendments are in the proceeding at Riigikogu. Majority of legislative amendments concern the inquiries based on biometrics, i.e. the implementation of Article 20 of the EIF Regulation.

10. IRREGULAR MIGRATION INCLUDING MIGRANT SMUGGLING

10.1 PREVENTING AND TACKLING IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN LEGAL MIGRATION CHANNELS

False travel documents

In 2022, as in previous years, false documents were mainly detected at Estonian border checkpoints. Compared to the previous year, there were fewer detected forged documents in 2022, mainly due to the reason that the presence of health certificates is no longer checked at the border. The number of detected forged travel documents has also decreased, while falsified visas and residence permits increased by 67%. The residence permits were mostly forged by Russian citizens (10 cases), Dominican

⁹¹ Available here: [Government decides to open Estonian-Latvian border checkpoints to help Ukrainian refugees | Siseministeerium](#)

⁹² Available here: [Police and Border Guard Act–Riigi Teataja](#)

Republic (in 4 cases), Egypt (1) and by Sri Lankan citizen (1). There were also cases, where third-country nationals falsified short-term visas.

Detected forged vehicle's registration numbers were mostly forged by Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus citizens. Driving licenses were forged mainly by citizens of Ukraine, Serbia and Moldova.

As a new trend, which is related to war in Ukraine, there was an increase in identity hidings among holders of dual citizenship. These persons present during the border-procedures the citizenship that better suits them (mostly non-Russian citizenship, as several sanctions have been imposed to Russian citizens), which may also be considered as a threat to the state security.

10.2 FIGHT AGAINST FACILITATION OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION (SMUGGLING) AND PREVENTING IRREGULAR STAY

Combatting facilitation of irregular migration (smuggling) policy and legislation changes

- To improve Estonian readiness in case of mass influx of migrants the PBGB and the Estonian Defence held a joint **training exercise 'Müür' (Wall)** on 14 to 18 September, to practice the implementation of an emergency plan in case of a mass influx of migrants, as well as applying for assistance from the European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA) and organizing logistical support in providing support to the host country. During the exercise various scenarios of mass influx of migrants were practiced, also how institutions cooperate, how procedures are implemented (e.g. establishment of proceeding points, work in processing points and relocation of persons within different points). In total, more than 400 persons participated in this exercise from the PBGB, the Defense League and the Defense Forces, as well as from the Rescue Board, the Emergency Center, the Academy of Security Sciences, Viru Prison and other related partner organizations. The exercise was carried out in the framework of the AMIF project "Increasing the capacity of reception and return of persons entering the country during a mass influx".
- To ensure public order and stability in the region, in the end of August, as a response to Latvian Police request, the PBGB deployed the ESTPOL6 unit to Riga for one-week period, when Soviet monuments were removed in Latvia.
- In the end of 2022, the document-fraud experts of the PBGB trained Gambian immigration officers. The aim was to train the officers how to identify and verify authentic and forged travel documents, but also to increase the knowledge of the Gambian authorities, that they could be able to prevent illegal migration, incl. to Europe.
- Due to migratory pressure from the EU external border in 2022, in order to support the PBGB patrol and monitoring activities, the PBGB sent for the first time a request to Frontex, for additional resources. On March 2022, 20 officials from Finland, Germany, Netherlands, France and Switzerland and 14 patrol vehicles started operations as part of the Frontex joint operation. Operation is still in progress.

Legislative change in preventing, combatting facilitation and tackling irregular migration were:

- On 18 June, when amendments to Article 15 of the Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act⁹³ (hereinafter *OLPEA*) came into force. Amendment stipulates the possibility of detaining a third-country national for identification procedures and for establishing whether a person is subject of obligation to leave the country. As previously, the short-term detention (according to directive 2008/115/EC) didn't allow the PBGB to clarify with sufficient depth all the relevant circumstances and justify the return decision (as initial procedures may be time-consuming). In practice, in order to verify the legal basis for the arrival and stay of a person in Estonia, the PBGB or the Estonian Internal Security Service may detain a person for up to 48 hours without the permission of an administrative court to determine the necessity of detention of a person. Detention must comply with the principle of proportionality and all relevant circumstances related to each individual case are taken into account. When the basis for detention has ceased to exist, the third-country national will be released immediately. An administrative judge may extend the term for detention for up to three days and grant permission to detain the person, if due to objective impediment it is not possible to carry out all the necessary procedures (e.g. security checks, requests to EU information systems, questioning of person, health checks etc.).
- Amendment specified in more detail, that person may be detained for identification procedures and for establishing, whether a person is subject of obligation to leave the country. Previously national legislation foresaw issuance a return decision prior detaining a person. Now a person can be detained without issuing a return decision and within 48 hours decision, whether to issue a person decision on voluntary return or decision on forced return will be made. In case of forced return, if needed, a permission from administrative court to detain a person for longer period, will be applied.

Prevention of irregular stay

As there was an increase in the misuse of working conditions for both short-term employment as well as working on a basis of a temporary residence permit on 24 May an amendment to Article 106 of the Aliens Act⁹⁴ came into force. According to the amendment the short-term employment is restricted to full-time employment and the third-country national must be paid at least the Estonian average salary regardless of the agreed working hours. If a third-country national works on the basis of a temporary residence permit intended for employment, the employer must pay the third-country national at least the Estonian average salary regardless of the workload agreed in the employment contract.

To ensure that temporary residence permit for study is used purposefully, the ground for annulment of a temporary residence permit for study was amended. According to the amendment a temporary residence permit for study is annulled if a foreigner has failed to perform to a significant extent an obligation set in the Aliens Act. Residence permit for studying expires 30 days after failure to complete the study program to the required extend or after an interruption of studies. This amendment aims to reduce the risk of possible misuse while providing a foreigner who has not completed his/her

⁹³ Available here: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/compare_original/530082022005

⁹⁴ Available here: [Aliens Act–Riigi Teataja](#)

studies or has interrupted his/her studies with a reasonable time (30 days) to apply for a new temporary residence permit on other grounds (e.g., for employment).

In 2022, the PBGB finalised its migration surveillance system (MIGIS), which enables automatic and manual data-based checks against different databases, creates risk profiles, plans and reports inspections, draws statistics and exchanges information with other state authorities. The MIGIS, as an automated migration surveillance IT-solution, assist officials to track persons' compliance with the legal requirements to reside in Estonia and to prevent misuse or irregular stay. Automated checks ensure up-to-date awareness of third-country nationals staying in Estonia and thus provides faster ability to react to misuse or irregular stay. Legislative amendment to implement MIGIS was submitted to the Riigikogu in the end of 2022 and adopted on 23rd February 2023. The implementation of the system is planned for summer 2023. Development of the system is funded by the ESF.

The PBGB continued its long-term and active cooperation with the Estonian Tax and Customs Board and the Labour Inspectorate to prevent and tackle illegal employment in Estonia and to ensure that foreign labour-force, who are employed in Estonia, will pay their taxes in Estonia. Information on the employer's responsibilities when hiring foreign labour-force was also shared among employers. The driver to continue with preventive activities is the continually high number of violations of working conditions in Estonia.

In 2022, the Estonian Labour Inspectorate paid more attention to inspecting the working conditions, including labour relations, of employees from the Ukraine, as they might be a vulnerable group in the Estonian labour market. The Labour Inspectorate received additional budget funds for supervision and control of the working conditions of Ukrainian war refugees, but also to support and counsel employees personally to prevent their misuse and exploitation.

As of the end of 2022, the Labour Inspectorate carried out 819 company inspections which included a total of 3,261 employees' workplaces. Inspection of the working conditions of war refugees from Ukraine covered 20% of their monitoring. In 2022, inspectorate received a total of 1,869 labour dispute committees, of which 70 labour dispute committees were from Ukrainians. Only few of them were Ukrainian war refugees, majority were from Ukrainians who resided in Estonia before 24 February 2022.

Monitoring and identifying irregular migration routes

During the years 2020-2021 Estonia refused entry at the external border mainly regarding with COVID-19 restrictions⁹⁵ and this reflects also in the statistics. In 2022, there was an increase in refusals of Russian and Ukrainian citizens, who were not refugees and had resided in Russia a long period prior the war. Most of them were also dual citizens of the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

Figure 15. Third country nationals refused entry at the Estonian external borders, 2018-2022 (Source: Eurostat (MIGR_EIRFS))

⁹⁵ These refusals were not included in the EUROSTAT statistics, as majority of them were made at internal borders and the bases were not the same as in the Schengen border regulation.

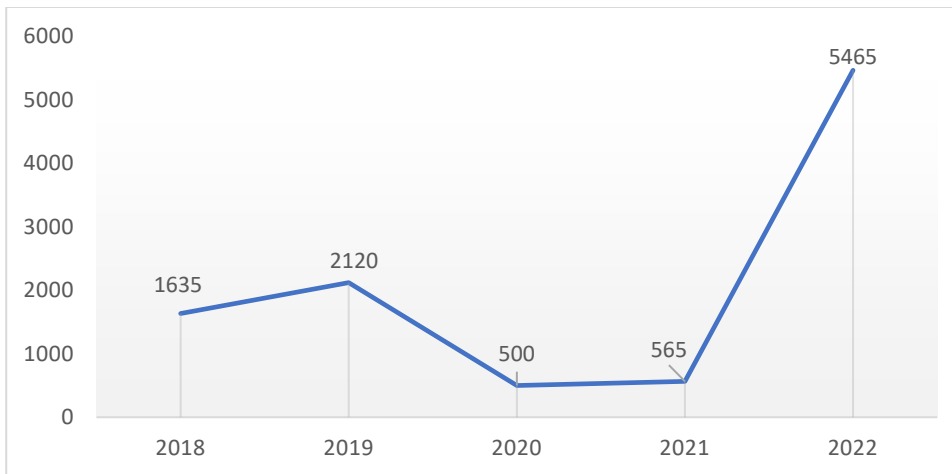
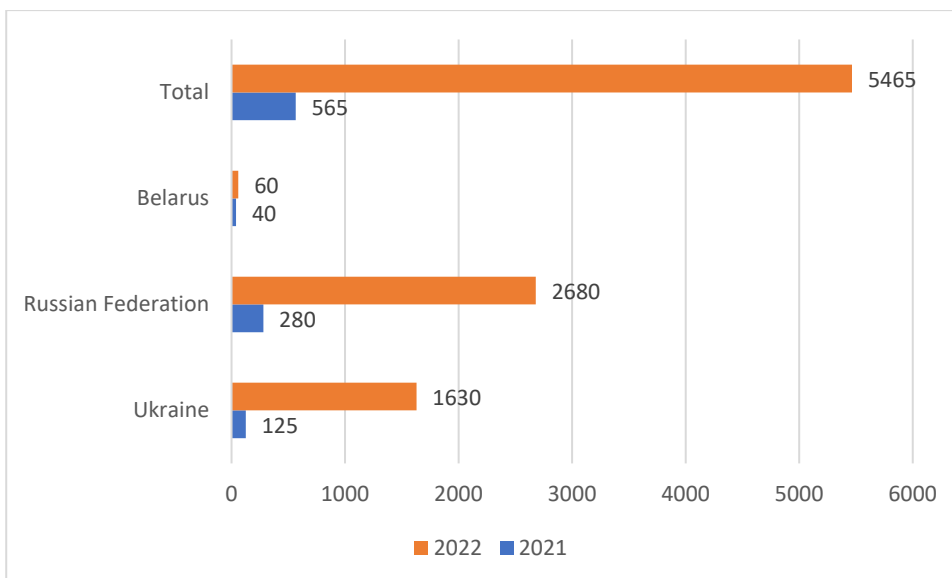


Figure 16. Top 3 third country nationals refused entry at the Estonian external borders, 2021-2022 (Source: Eurostat (MIGR_EIRFS))



11. TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

11.1 NATIONAL STRATEGIC POLICY DEVELOPMENTS ON DETECTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

In 2022, there were no third-country nationals who were identified as victim of trafficking in human beings as was also the case in 2021. However, in 2022, there were 86 presumed victims of THB, which is more than a two-fold increase compared to the year before. In 2022, from presumed victims 51 were woman, 5 transgender and 30 males. They were all over the age of 18. 54% of the presumed victims were involved in sexual exploitation, and 46% of them were involved in labour exploitation. The presumed victims were most often citizens of the Ukraine, Russian Federation and Moldova. All victims from third countries were presumed victims related to crimes of pimping (Penal Code § 133-2.). In 2022, 4 persons were arrested (i.e. prosecuted 2

and sent to court 2), and 4 traffickers were convicted (out of which 2 persons related to forced criminality and 2 persons of sexual exploitation).

During 2022, active preparations for the amendments to the Victim Support Act was taking place and the act was finalised and adopted by the Parliament on 14.12.2022 (came into force on 1st April 2023). In the new Victim Support Act the status of the presumed victims will be changed, but the services for the target group who are not identified as THB victims, but are related to other related crimes, will remain. In practice, if SIB or Labour Inspectorate suspect the case to be THB case, then services will be provided without the investigation period for 14 days. If the victim is a third-country national, then reflection period by the Aliens Act will be given to a person, and also services until the deadline set within the reflection period will be provided. For the first time, the provision of psychosocial assistance is provided as a service in the Act.

Offering services to third-country nationals will not give them a legal status to stay in Estonia. If the person is not allowed to stay in Estonia or has left the country, then provision of services is terminated. Temporary residence permit may be given in the future to the third-country national, who is a victim in the trafficking related crimes (Penal Code §133–133/3, 138–140, § 145/1, 175, § 260/1). If the person is a witness in these crimes, then residence permit can be given when the prosecutor considers its relevance (previously victims and witnesses were equally justified to receive temporary residence permit for participation in criminal proceedings).

Objective for these legal amendments were to enhance, in an incident of violence, crime or crisis, the availability and quality of victim assistance services provided to victims and to change crime victims' compensation application system more victim friendly.

11.2 PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONAL VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Estonia has been actively raising awareness on trafficking in human beings among the population, especially among youth. Campaigns and trainings that have targeted students in schools and universities have changed the perceptions of youth on human trafficking and problematized their role as possible demanders of services. With lessons learned from the campaigns, the SIB is getting ready for a new awareness-raising project targeting all the youth in Estonia. As majority of the children exploited are between 15-18 years old, Estonia has introduced measures to raise the awareness of the young population about human trafficking. The goal is to prevent young people from falling victims to this serious crime. To get the information to the most vulnerable (incl. children who can't be reached through schools), the SIB together with Estonian Back to School initiative produced Youtube videos on human trafficking. The focus of the videos was to convey information to children and young people on what human trafficking is and how the Estonian SIB can assist possible victims.

In recent years also special lectures about sexual exploitation and trafficking have been implemented by the specialists for school children in Estonia and e-learning courses are made available also in web platform of schools⁹⁶ and lectures itself are as follows:

⁹⁶ Available here: [E-Koolikott](#)

- Sexual violence in Estonia: Kelle nägu on seksuaalvägivald Eestis?⁹⁷ Kai Part
- What are my possibilities to avoid sexual violence: Millised on minu võimalused vältida seksuaalset väärkohtlemist?⁹⁸ Anna Frank-Viron
- Sexual violence crisis centre video:⁹⁹ introductory video about crisis-centers
- Why trafficking concerns me: Miks puudutab inimkaubandus mind? Sirle Blumberg, in Russian, Miks puudutab inimkaubandus mind?¹⁰⁰ Sirle Blumberg, in Estonian.

In 2021-2022 the Estonia SIB started project-based cooperation with Estonian universities. Law students at the University of Tartu were offered a study module on human trafficking, where various Estonian anti-trafficking experts shared their impressions on different aspects of the phenomenon. As part of the Council of the Baltic Sea States THALIA project, university level media students were actively included to increase the awareness of future journalists on the topic of human trafficking. In 2022, students from Tallinn University were also involved in the project.

The SIB and Labour Inspectorate, Tax and Customs Board, Ministry of Justice, PBGB and Tartu University initiated several Youtube live - sessions to foreigners arriving to Estonia to share information about the available free services.

In 2021 and 2022, Estonian authorities organised live training sessions on Youtube¹⁰¹ for entrepreneurs, aimed at raising their awareness of the existing state services when recruiting foreign workers. The need for the videos was raised, due to a need for help in relation to the labour market situations involving foreigners. The videos were produced in three languages, Estonian, Russian and English. The videos include presentations from migration advisers, employment lawyers, tax officials, and victim support professionals. Moreover, they address how businesses can prevent labour exploitation.¹⁰²

The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine has engaged all levels of the Estonian society, e. g. Estonian authorities have jointly activated local coordination to assist arriving refugees by opening shelters, coordinating and transporting refugees to the appropriate housing and activate institutional assistance mechanisms. Leaflets with information on the risks of human trafficking, as well as information on available assistance, have been disseminated to refugees in Ukrainian. The PBGB and the SIB have been the key focal points of this work. Volunteers have received information and training on human trafficking, to be aware of possible exploiters and perpetrators intending to recruit Ukrainian women into human trafficking. Short films have been produced to volunteers on what to look for and where to turn to report suspected cases of human trafficking. In 2022, special videos were made for educating helpers of refugees in order for them to notice and help the refugee to notice possible threats of trafficking. Videos were produced by the Ministry of Justice and SIB in Estonian and also in Russian. Also, special leaflets were made to refugees in three languages: Russian, English and Ukrainian: <https://www.just.ee/kuritegevus-ja-selle-ennetus/inimkaubandus#vabatahtlikele>; Short video clip about provision of services for victims of human trafficking https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuM7necup_Y and video about helpdesks 116 006

⁹⁷ Available here: [#187 Kai Part - Kelle nägu on seksuaalvägivald Eestis? - YouTube](#)

⁹⁸ Available here: [#194 Anna Frank-Viron - Millised on minu võimalused vältida seksuaalset väärkohtlemist? - YouTube](#)

⁹⁹ Available here: [Vaata, millist abi pakutakse seksuaalvägivald kriisiabikeskustes \(pikk versioon\) - YouTube](#)

¹⁰⁰ Available here: [#201 Sirle Blumberg - Miks puudutab inimkaubandus mind? - YouTube](#)

¹⁰¹ Available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRiE_xdIDEI

¹⁰² Human Trafficking Baltic Sea Round-up Report 2022 available here: https://cbss.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/human-trafficking_bsr_roundup_report_2022.pdf

and 6607 320: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiKy-dAR5ZM&list=PL4Xow53QzhUpjPhSLbCGIkaPrxKQwIALQ&t=159s>. Additionally, the MOJ developed a new training program for government and private sector officials on recognizing indicators of trafficking. The program targeted government contractors providing temporary housing and job placement services to refugees and volunteers working with vulnerable communities.

In order to reduce the risk of THB incl. prevention of labour exploitation, which has increased with Ukrainian refugees arriving in Estonia, the state has granted approval to increase the resources of the Labour Inspectorate. Due to the increased workload of the Labour Inspectorate caused by the need to further protect vulnerable people (including Ukrainian war refugees) and to ensure the protection of their labour rights on the labour market, there is a need to employ an additional 10 labour inspectors and 5 counselling lawyers. The Labour Inspectorate's need to increase resources also arises from the need to continue to ensure effective and systematic state supervision and support counselling as a preventive measure for people who have entered the Estonian labour market and their employers.

The Labour Inspectorate opened for Ukrainian war refugees work-life related portal, which is in Ukrainian language (Інформаційні матеріали для громадян, які прибувають з України) and provide with additional work-related info materials¹⁰³. Inspectorate hired several Ukrainians who assist their nationals by e-mail and by phone. Active is also a blog-post runned by one Ukrainian in Tööelu portal, with aim that all the necessary and trustful information would reaches those in need of it.

Inspectorate updated in its homepage on Tööelu- portal information, how to prevent work-related exploitation?¹⁰⁴, with aim that both employer and employee get the necessary information and knowledge.

In April 2022 PBGB created public e-mail thb.info@politsei.ee, that the state level, partners organisations and NGOs could turn to them, if they have information (suspicions or evidence) on THB crimes. All of these changes are made in order to offer more possibilities to possible victims also to contact state authorities themselves.

To improve cooperation within national stakeholders in 2022 one united training on THB (legal questions, cooperation in the labour exploitation cases) was organised for the stakeholders working with identifying, investigating and assisting in THB cases (police, prosecutors, labour inspectors, victim support officials) and examples of the suspicious labour cases with migrants (also from third countries) were also discussed.

On 21-25 September, the training on "Anti-Trafficking in Human Beings" was organised by Frontex in Tallinn, in the Academy of Security Sciences. The training covered topics related to human trafficking, victims of human trafficking, slavery and minors and people in vulnerable situations. Representatives of 16 countries participated in this training.

¹⁰³ Available here: <https://www.tooelu.ee/et/503/ukrainci-yaki-tikayut-vid-viyni-ta-trudovi-vidnosini>

¹⁰⁴ Available here: <https://www.tooelu.ee/et/292/tooalane-arakasutamine#kuidas-ennetada-tooalast-arakasutamist>

12. RETURN AND READMISSION

12.1 GENERAL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AND ACTIONS IN THE AREA OF RETURN

On 18 June 2022, several minor amendments to the OLPEA¹⁰⁵ entered into force to exchange the information entered into SIS and mutual recognition of return decisions. With the amendments the EU Regulation 2018/1860 (on the use of the Schengen information system for the return of illegally staying third-country nationals) and EU Regulation 2018/1861 (on the establishment, operation and use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) in the field of border checks) was formulated in more detail into national legislation including entering and deleting alerts into SIS and forwarding information to the competent authorities of other member states.

With the same amendment to Act on Article 17, it was specified to which country the third-country national can return or will be returned. A person who is staying in Estonia without a basis for stay is required to leave or is expelled: 1) to the country he/she the citizenship; 2) to a country of transit in accordance with the European Union or a bilateral re-admission agreement or other arrangement or 3) to a third country provided that the person wishes to leave to that country and is admitted there. These amendments were made to take into account the comments made to Estonia in 2018 during the Schengen evaluations in the field of return.

On 16 August an amendment to the OLPEA¹⁰⁶ on Article 6⁶ (3) was made providing that in an emergency caused by mass immigration, the court may suspend the expulsion or compliance with the return decision of an alien who has illegally crossed the external border until the administrative court has rejected by a decision the complaint filed by the alien.

With the same amendment to the OLPEA Article 15⁴ (3¹) came into force, stipulating that upon detention of a third-country national in an emergency situation at least the name or names of each alien, legal and factual basis and justification for the detention, the date, time and place, as well as the name of the administrative body and official who made the report are recorded in the detention report. The difference from detention under normal circumstances is that less initial personal data will be collected and instead of an individual protocol, a group protocol will be made. Driver to these changes were to ensure initial procedures in case of mass influx.

12.2 RETURN-RELATED STATISTICS

In 2022, the number of issued return decisions remained almost the same as in 2021. According to the Eurostat data, the PBGB issued 1170 return decisions, which is 1% more than in 2021. 87% of these were voluntary return decisions. Top 3 nationalities to whom return decision were issued was Russian Federation, Moldova and Uzbekistan. All decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and forced return is applied mainly when there is risk of absconding. Number of persons who actually left the country remained high with the return rate being almost 88%. The number of persons returned with

¹⁰⁵ Available here: [Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act–Riigi Teataja](#)

¹⁰⁶ Available here: [Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act–Riigi Teataja](#)

support provided by IOM Estonia VARRE project (assisted voluntary return programme) remained the same compared to previous year from 40 in 2021 to 41 in 2022. Top 3 nationalities to whom assistance was provided were Uzbeks, Georgians and Nigerians.

Figure 17. Number of TCNs in return procedures (including TCNs returned as part of an assisted return programme), 2018-2022 (Source: PBGB)

	Enforced return	Returned voluntarily	Among TCNs returned voluntarily, the number of TCNs returned as part of an assisted return programme
2018	155	666	45
2019	208	1000	132
2020	108	989	128
2021	104	1089	40
2022	111	971	41

12.3 VOLUNTARY RETURN, ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION MEASURES

In the late 2022 the Ministry of the Interior ordered in-depth study to find out how the counselling could better support the return procedure and what are the expectations of returnees as well as partner organisations to this service. Study results will be disseminated only within ministry and its partner organisations. Document itself will be for internal use only. First results are expected by the end of April 2023.

The PBGB has revised their needs and applied/planned for the new AMIF period two full time workplaces for return counsellors. Officials are expected to start 1st April 2023. Their main tasks would be provision of Frontex reintegration services and use of the RIAT-support system.

In Estonia, voluntary return is encouraged through the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRE). Recently they have started to put more emphasis on commitment to BID (Best Interest Determination), especially with the cases that involve dealing with unaccompanied minors. IOM has edited its handbooks and has reviewed its Counselling Kit to give everyone working in the organization better expertise in these matters. They save information on different basic criteria involving beneficiary's needs and situation and if difficult questions arise, perform systemically networking both internally (with their regional coordinators) and externally (with PBGB and Ministry of the Interior) to ensure best solutions for those who turn to IOM in need. Estonia started with the VARRE project already in 2010 and within these years more than 600 persons voluntary return to home country were supported. The VARRE programme is carried out by IOM and it is co-funded by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and by the Estonian Ministry of the Interior.

12.4 FORCED RETURN AND DETENTION

To increase a capacity to react in case of mass influx, the PBGB conducted several activities within AMIF project 2021-23 "Increasing the capacity of reception and return of persons entering the country on mass influx":

- Organized one training "The preparation of the PBGB officials for work in high-risk areas (miniHEAT, MH221)", which supports officials working in Hotspots (tasks related to deportation and return procedures);
- Organized three trainings to the PBGB DEPA officials (deportation officials), of which one was carried out by Frontex (National Course for Escort Officers, NEO) and two by the PBGB itself. DEPA officials are the PBGB (or the KAPO) officials, who go through a training course, where they are prepared for procedures of deportation of irregularly staying third-country nationals to the country of origin or to another host country. In 2022, 34 officials were trained;
- The PBGB and the Estonian Defense League held a joint training exercise 'Müür' (Wall) on 14 to 18 September 2022, to practice the implementation of an emergency plan in case of a mass influx of migrants. During the exercise, various scenarios of mass immigration were practiced, also how cooperate institutions, how procedures are processed (e.g. establishment of proceeding points, work in processing points and relocation of persons within different points, detention related aspects).

12.5 ENHANCING RETURN MIGRATION MANAGEMENT INCLUDING COOPERATION AMONG EU MEMBER STATES AND WITH THIRD COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AND TRANSIT ON RETURN READMISSION AGREEMENTS

On 7th to 8th April, Pakistan's RCMS (Readmission Case Management System) training took place in Tallinn to improve cooperation with third countries of origin and transit on return management and reintegration. After this training, Estonia was granted access to Pakistan's RCMS. On 16th May, an update for Georgian RCMS took place in Tallinn. RCMS is an electronic platform which facilitates for processing of readmission applications.

In May 2022, to facilitate a return process of persons who has no legal basis to stay in a country, a meeting of the delegations of Estonia and Uzbekistan took place in Tallinn, where the draft of bilateral agreement on the return and readmission was discussed. The signing of the agreement is planned for 2023.

On 15th December 2022, Estonia and Kazakhstan signed in Kazakhstan a bilateral agreement on readmission of irregularly staying persons.

13. MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

2022 marked the year of policy concentrated towards Ukraine. In addition to Estonian military help, there was a major shift of development cooperation and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Russia's aggression has significantly affected the humanitarian situation and Estonian support has addressed Ukraine's immediate and long-term needs. Ukraine has the utmost importance to Estonia, due to historical, political and cultural reasons.

Estonia is participating in initiatives that help transform economies and societies, create employment and strengthen education systems; contributing to the long run in reduction of refugee flows. Starting of the implementation of the EU Global Gateway strategy through Team Europe initiatives was one of these initiatives. Global Gateway is a connectivity strategy that aims to create sustainable, high-quality and trusted connections globally in areas of digitalisation, energy and transport, enabling EU's partners to develop their societies and economies and tackling pressing global challenges - from climate change and sustainable development to health security, gender equality and education systems. Estonia is active in development and implementation of several Team Europe initiatives related to digital transformation, digital skills, e-governance and cybersecurity in Africa.