

Reception and integration of Ukrainian and other refugees in Latvia: challenges and possibilities


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About Providus

- Leading public policy think tank in Latvia with a mission to promote evidence-based policy and open society values
 - **Asylum, migration, integration, and inclusive society** one of Providus main fields of research and intervention alongside good governance, anti-corruption, civic engagement, social entrepreneurship and NGO policy
 - Closely follows the development and implementation of Latvia's and EU asylum and migration policies and advocates for the necessary improvements in the Latvian integration system
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Long-term analysis of reception and integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Latvia

- Since 2016, part of the project *National Integration Evaluation Mechanism, NIEM* together with 13 other EU countries
- Key aim of the project: to **mainstream an integration evaluation mechanism into the national integration policies for refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection**
- **Key findings of NIEM 2022** Comparative and Latvian report very relevant for the long-term integration of Ukrainian refugees →


Recommendations based on NIEM Evaluation 2 of the Latvian integration system, 2019–2021

- **Improve mainstreaming and coordination** of integration activities
 - **Develop targeted housing support to BIPs:** e.g., recognize BIPs as a specific target group in the national housing strategy, create state/municipality guarantee fund for property owners, develop social housing and intermediate solutions
 - **Transfer the social mentorship service for BIPs to municipalities** → mainstream the integration support at the municipal level
 - **Cancel the requirement for a registered place of residence** as a precondition for social support
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Providus activities during the reception of Ukrainian refugees

- Closely **following the legislative initiatives**: the Law on Support to the Ukrainian Civilians, the Plan of Support Measures to the Ukrainian Civilians in Latvia etc.
- **3 online discussions in March 2022**:
 - Who does what in hosting Ukrainian refugees, 16.03.2022., *Twitter Spaces*;
 - Experiences of refugee reception and practical advice on securing social support and healthcare for Ukrainian refugees, 23.03.2022., *Facebook*;
 - Reception of Ukrainian refugees in municipalities: good practices & challenges, 31.03.2022., *Facebook*.

Providus activities during the reception of Ukrainian refugees

- **Advocating for long-term integration measures**, such as housing support, Latvian language courses to minors and adults, support for the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees into local communities, capacity building for municipality social workers, elimination of differences of support between different status holders etc.
 - **Stressing the need for a coherent and coordinated integration strategy** to be implemented beyond the initial 90-day reception period, including clear communication about the solutions developed
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A note on other refugees


- Since July 2021, Providus has closely **followed developments on the Latvian/EU-Belarussian border** and actively **advocated for the right to asylum of irregular migrants** and an **end to pushbacks**:
 - Regular participation in the meetings of Operation Management Centre under the Ministry of Interior and sessions of different Parliamentary committees;
 - Communication with people stranded at the border and their relatives;
 - Communication with the State Border Guard so as to extend support to the stranded persons;
 - Initiation and co-authorship of several joint letters by local NGOs to the government and the Parliament to solve the plight of irregular border-crossers;
 - Initiation and co-authorship of a joint letter by Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish NGOs to the European Commission in October 2021;
 - Regular communication with national and foreign media.
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Latvian–Belarussian “border crisis” not over

- Emergency situation in the areas bordering Belarus extended till 10 August 2022
- Findings of an independent report by Dr. A.Jolkina, *Trapped in a Lawless Zone: Humanitarian Crisis at the Latvia-Belarus Border*, which allege excessively violent, inhumane and degrading treatment of irregular border crossers currently investigated by state authorities
- A joint comparative report on the situation of Latvian-Lithuanian-Belarussian border from July 2021–January 2022 issued by Providus and Diversity Development Group, Lithuania



To conclude

- Alleged continuous pushbacks of **40–100 migrants, mostly from Iraq, in 2021-2022** vs. welcome of **~30 000 Ukrainian civilians in Latvia** since February 2022
 - All potential asylum seekers and refugees should be treated equally, without discriminating against particular groups based on their ethnicity/origin
 - No racial bias/positive discrimination should be accepted when designing and implementing integration support measures to different groups of beneficiaries of international protection
 - The swift and concerted effort to receive an unprecedented number of refugees in Latvia from Ukraine should be used as a springboard for further improvement of the Latvian integration system and thus and thus improvement of life of all refugees in Latvia
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Thank you for your attention!

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