

The World Health Organization (WHO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the European Union (EU) work together to improve access to health-care services for refugees and people displaced from Ukraine

WHO, IOM and the EU work together to support countries in improving the access to health-care services for refugees and displaced people from Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive activated by the EU on 4 March 2022 following the onset of the war in Ukraine.¹



The project **“Improving access to health care for refugees and people displaced from Ukraine benefiting of temporary protection in Member States”** is funded by the EU under the 2023 EU4Health Work Programme.

Project period:
2 years from
October 2023

16 000 individuals
expected to be reached
through health
mediation, and over
50 000 through public
health information

**Project is implemented
in 10 European
countries:** Bulgaria,
Czechia, Estonia,
Hungary, Latvia,
Lithuania, Poland,
Republic of Moldova,
Romania and Slovakia.

1. European Union, Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof. Off J Eur Union. 2001;179:1–10 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/BG/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32001L0055>, accessed 18 June 2025).

About the project

Hanna, a refugee from Ukraine living in Estonia.
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Building strong partnerships and creating spaces for dialogue and information sharing

The EU, IOM and WHO have partnered to strengthen health systems in refugee-receiving countries and achieve the best health outcome for host populations refugees and displaced people from Ukraine. At the national level, focus is placed on effective service delivery and efficient use of resources. Examples of this work are as follows.:

- The first Knowledge Forum on Refugee and Migrant Health² (April 2024) convened Member States and partners to exchange knowledge and good practices.
- In February 2025 key representatives from ministries of health from the project countries, the EU, IOM and WHO met at an intercountry workshop³ to exchange technical inputs, share challenges and interventions, and promote lessons learned to meet the health needs of refugees and displaced people from Ukraine.

Identifying and tackling the barriers that hinder access to health services for refugees and displaced people

- A health system review⁴ in Estonia assessed the national health system's capacity to provide services to refugees, identify challenges in accessing services and highlight opportunities for service integration and system resilience.
- Two rapid assessments were conducted in Lithuania and Romania to understand the enablers and barriers for refugees in accessing vaccination services.
- Throughout 2025 WHO and IOM are continuing to develop and disseminate health promotion materials aimed at reaching over 50 000 individuals. These materials seek to inform about the availability of services, administrative procedures, entitlements and rights.
- In Latvia, the Ministry of Health, IOM and WHO are addressing training needs among medical workers and specialists providing care to families with children with autistic spectrum disorders. The intervention aims to support 600 Ukrainian children and their families through enhanced access to early intervention services.

“*The most difficult thing was to understand how to make an appointment with a doctor, how to find a family doctor or a specialist, and finally waiting for the appointment.... But once you understand the system, you realize that it is great*

Hanna, a refugee from Ukraine living in Estonia

² Knowledge Forum on Refugee and Migrant Health [website]. World Health Organization; 2024 (<https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/events/item/2024/04/16/default-calendar/knowledge-forum-on-refugee-and-migrant-health>, accessed 18 June 2025).

³ Intercountry workshop on strengthening capacity to support the health needs of refugees and displaced people from Ukraine [news release]. World Health Organization; 19 February 2025 (<https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/events/item/2025/02/18/default-calendar/intercountry-workshop-on-strengthening-capacity-to-support-the-health-needs-of-refugees-and-displaced-people-from-ukraine>, accessed 18 June 2025).

⁴ Refugee and migrant health system review: challenges and opportunities for long-term health system strengthening in Estonia. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2024 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/379328>, accessed 18 June 2025). Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.



WHO's training on Global Competency Standards for cultural and health mediators has taken place in 7 project countries. Training in Latvia shown here.
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Increasing the capacity of health systems to meet the needs of displaced communities:

Building and strengthening the capacity of cultural and health mediators

- Mediators are deployed to resolve linguistic and cultural barriers, providing a wide range of support to beneficiaries, including health system navigation, health and medical support, document assistance, information provision and counselling. Thus far, 27 IOM and WHO mediators have been trained on the WHO Global Competency Standards⁵ and deployed across many countries. So far, over 6000 people have accessed health mediation and referral services.
- IOM and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, a WHO-hosted partnership, are working with national health authorities to deliver five health system resilience test reports. The reports aim to highlight cross-cutting lessons, good practices and evidence to inform efforts and action on migration and the resilience of health systems at national and European level.

Empowering displaced health workers from Ukraine to continue professional development

- The report Empowerment of displaced health-care personnel from Ukraine in the host country⁶ provides a consolidated snapshot of key practices that are supporting health personnel from Ukraine to continue their practice while displaced in four Member States of the WHO European Region.
- Currently, 51 health workers from Ukraine are engaged in the national health system in Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova. Parallel efforts in other project countries aim to empower health workers from Ukraine.
- In Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania, vocational educational training is being implemented on specialized language and medical terminology. This raises awareness of development capacities and supports Ukrainian health workers in continuing their professional development.

“ How important it is for every person to have a sense of support and confidence! Especially now, during the war, when a huge number of Ukrainians are being displaced. Here, in Bulgaria, in Pomorie, thanks to IOM, we feel that we are not alone with our difficulties. The world depends on people who are caring and responsive, always ready to help and support.

Zhanna, a refugee from Ukraine living in Bulgaria

⁵ Refugee and migrant health: WHO trains health mediators on Global Competency Standards [news release]. World Health Organization; 16 December 2024 (<https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/16-12-2024-refugee-and-migrant-health-who-trains-health-mediators-on-global-competency-standards>, accessed 18 June 2025).

⁶ Empowerment of displaced health-care personnel from Ukraine in the host country. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2024 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/378446>, accessed 18 June 2025). Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.



An IOM health mediator in Burgas helps a refugee from Ukraine to navigate the hospital landscape.
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Establishing and strengthening networks of health workers and supporting their education needs

- In Bulgaria, the Regional Technical Health Working Group was established to facilitate a collaborative platform with a wide range of health stakeholders delivering services to refugees.
- In Romania, a network of general practitioners was established to collaboratively address challenges to delivering services, and share good practices.
- In the Republic of Moldova, more than 650 health providers have been trained on the refugees' benefit package and entitlements.

All skills in the WHO's Global Competency Standards support a people-centred approach. The training reminds me why I am here, who I am helping, and that refugees are in a new environment unknown to them, and it can be very frustrating at the beginning.

Anastasiia, a project associate case worker and health mediator from Ukraine working in Lithuania

Way forward

To continue supporting refugees and displaced people from Ukraine, as well as health systems in refugee-receiving countries, a coordinated, collective and long-term approach is essential to ensuring universal health coverage for all. Guided by this vision and underpinned by humanitarian values, the EU, IOM and WHO will continue their collaboration, in a continuously changing landscape, to provide sustainable solutions that safeguard the health and well-being of refugees and displaced people from Ukraine.



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