

2023

REPORT & PLANS FOR 2024

ANNUAL REPORT

HALINA NIEĆ LEGAL AID CENTER

*A summary of activities, programs and
overview of results in 2023, plans and
goals for 2024.*

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We are an NGO of lawyers providing **free legal assistance** to persons seeking **protection in Poland**.

Introduction

The past year at the Halina Nieć Legal Aid Center was, in many ways, a breakthrough year. Never before have we worked so intensively, provided such a high volume of legal consultations, and assisted such a large number of individuals seeking protection in Poland.

Our operations have never been so wide-ranging, with a record number of legal aid points established in major Polish cities, and we've never conducted so many outreach visits and consultations in refugee centers and guarded facilities for foreigners.

Unfortunately, this exceptionally demanding level of activity reflected the ever-growing needs of the affected populations, associated with the influx of individuals fleeing war and persecution to Poland. Poland, like the rest of the EU, experienced record numbers of asylum seekers.

We hope that our support has helped these individuals regulate their legal status and, in the long term, contributed to improving the enforcement of their human rights and facilitating their integration in Poland.



2023 in numbers

19,119 Persons received legal assistance

18,082 Refugees from Ukraine

1,037 Persons seeking international protection

17 Lawyers

11 Legal Info points

6 Cities



HNLAC HISTORY 2002 – 2024

The Halina Nieć Legal Aid Center, (HNLAC) is a non-profit non-governmental organisation established in 2002 in Cracow. HNLAC's main objective is to protect human rights by providing free legal counsel to persons at risk of social exclusion and discrimination, including asylum seekers, refugees and the stateless. During the past 21 years of its existence the HNLAC provided free legal aid to over 38 000 persons!

Apart from providing free legal aid, the HNLAC also carries out regular monitoring of the adherence to standards of human rights undertakes legal interventions and advocacy activities, and pursues research and educational projects.

The HNLAC cooperates with many partners, first and foremost with the UNHCR Representation in Poland. The HNLAC is UNHCR's implementing partner in Poland since 2003.

The HNLAC is also a part of Multicultural Centre in Krakow cooperating with Internationaler Bund Polska and other NGOs in Krakow. Moreover, the HNLAC cooperates with the International Rescue Committee, La Strada Foundation against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery and the European Network on Statelessness (ENS).



Programs implemented in 2023

The legal support provided by the Halina Nieć Legal Aid Center is extended to foreigners seeking protection, regardless of their citizenship, nationality, political views, or religion. Our actions were carried out through two parallel legal aid programs:

1. LEGAL AID PROGRAM FOR FOREIGNERS SEEKING PROTECTION

Under this program, which has been implemented by the Center for 22 years, we provided free information and legal assistance to foreigners residing in open refugee centers as well as those detained in guarded center for foreigners. Assistance was provided through individual, in-person consultations, as well as via telephone, email, and video consultations. The program covered 7 open centers and 7 closed centers. A significant group of individuals who benefited from our support in this program were those who arrived in Poland through the Belarusian border and often were victims of violence.

2. LEGAL AID PROGRAM FOR REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE

Under this program, we provided free information and legal assistance tailored to the specific needs of individuals who arrived in Poland from Ukraine due to the war and were granted temporary protection. The program was implemented by a team of Ukrainian and Russian-speaking lawyers operating in 11 legal aid points in 6 cities. Additionally, legal assistance was provided through a special Ukrainian hotline. A special legal support program was implemented for Ukrainian children and individuals with specific needs. The scope of our activities is best illustrated by statistics:



Lawyers on the move

In addition to running legal info points in 6 cities in Poland, HNLAC also deploys mobile legal teams to reach beneficiaries in detention and refugee centers.

In 2023, we conducted 35 visits to guarded facilities, where we provided ongoing legal assistance to foreigners seeking advice. Facilities we regularly visited include the Guarded Centers in Krosno Odrzańskie, Lesznowola, Biała Podlaska, Przemyśl, and Kętrzyn.

We conducted 27 missions to open centers for asylum seekers. In the past year, we visited facilities such as the Open Center in Linin, Dębaki, Łuków, Bezwola, Biała Podlaska, Kolonia Horbów, and Grupa pod Grudziądzem.

In response to urgent situations and in order to offer additional communication channels, we were also providing legal assistance via video consultations. In 2023, we organized 10 such online sessions for various centers. In total, in 2023, we managed to conduct 62 missions! This is our absolute record!

35

**missions to 5
detention centers.**

27

**missions to 7
open centers.**

OUR BENEFICIARIES

An important indicator of our work is also the number of individuals who benefited from our legal assistance. Center lawyers provided support to 713 individuals residing in centers for foreigners in 2023.

The number of beneficiaries of our assistance in open centers was 324 individuals. Overall, in 2023, we supported 1,037 foreigners residing in centers who sought our advice.

Legal Aid Points for Refugees from Ukraine

In response to the need to expand our activities and improve our reach to individuals in need of legal consultation due to the war in Ukraine, the Center established legal aid points for refugees from Ukraine in various cities across the country.

Currently, our Center operates 11 points where individuals who arrived in Poland from Ukraine due to the war can seek legal assistance. In 2023, our legal aid points for Ukrainian citizens operated in 6 different cities: Krakow, Poznan, Rybnik, Wroclaw, Sopot, and Rzeszow.

Our team of lawyers providing advice at these points consists of 9 persons. All employed individuals are Ukrainian lawyers, some of whom arrived in Poland in recent months with the influx of refugees. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to work with them. Employing Ukrainian lawyers also allows us to better understand the needs of our Ukrainian beneficiaries and tailor our actions accordingly.

In 2023, we managed to provide 15,678 legal consultations to individuals from Ukraine!



PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

While providing legal assistance, Center lawyers pay attention to individuals with special needs, including minors (including unaccompanied minors), elderly persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, single mothers, large families, and victims of violence.

To better assist such individuals and provide them with comprehensive support, the HNLAC team has created its own Standard Operating Procedures and internal guidelines for identifying individuals with special needs and assessing their needs, followed by procedures for handling such cases to ensure the best possible support.

Additionally, Center lawyers have developed a special system for referring cases to appropriate organizations and support institutions that provide assistance beyond the scope of the Center, aiming to improve cooperation among various support entities.



Legal Helpline for Refugees from Ukraine

In response to the high demand for quick legal consultations regarding Ukrainian matters, the Center established a special, separate hotline dedicated to issues related to the stay of refugees from Ukraine in Poland.

The hotline operator (our number is 725 449 374). In 2023, the hotline provided a total of 2,042 consultations!

We also have a second hotline dedicated strictly to issues of assistance for unaccompanied minors from Ukraine residing in Krakow and its vicinity (phone number: 725 449 356).

In 2023, we were able to provide support in 362 cases in this way!

2,042 Legal Helpline consultations

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

In 2023, our activities were carried out as a partner organization of UNHCR, actively cooperating with UNHCR within the Protection Sector, coordinating assistance for refugees from Ukraine in Poland. The vast majority of our operational budget comes from UNHCR funds.

We also conducted a project focusing on individuals with special needs in partnership with IRC, as well as activities funded by the Norwegian Funds and Sigrid Rausing Trust.

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OUR NEEDS IN 2024



We already know that 2024 will be a pivotal year for us. Another year of war has begun in Ukraine, with nearly a million people from that country registered in Poland, benefiting from temporary protection. Numerous groups of foreigners continue to arrive through the Polish-Belarusian border, the number of asylum applications remains high, with a still very high proportion of individuals being detained and a low recognition rate.

We are intensively developing and training our legal team, expanding our modes of operation, striving for maximum effectiveness, and also expanding our advocacy and research activities. Our goal is to ensure that our assistance brings about real change in the lives of our beneficiaries.

At the same time, this year we are facing a significant decrease in financial support from the UN and large international organizations for assistance in our region. Therefore, in the face of the still-growing demand for our legal aid, we must intensively seek financial resources for its implementation.

For this reason, we greatly rely on the support of our Friends and Supporters. You can show your support in several ways:

Please allocate 1.5% of your tax to us during your annual PIT settlement. Simply enter the name of our organization: Halina Nieć Legal Aid Center and the KRS number: **0000113676**.



Please join our Patrons on Patronite: <https://patronite.pl/CPPHN>. Even a small but regular contribution will greatly improve our financial security.

We encourage you to donate any amount to our **fundraiser**:
<https://zrzutka.pl/6vh67e>

Thank you for your interest in our activities, and we count on your continued support!

OUR PLANS FOR 2024

In 2024, due to the high demand for further legal assistance, proven by consistently high numbers of beneficiaries recorded, the HNLAC intends to continue its current activities related to providing legal support to asylum seekers and stateless persons in Poland as well as refugees from Ukraine.

In the case of asylum seekers, the HNLAC plans to focus on **ensuring access to legal assistance for asylum seekers in various remote facilities** in Poland.

Another goal is to **limit the use of detention and its length, particularly in case of vulnerable persons**. Currently, as a result of insufficient identification, many highly vulnerable persons, including victims of violence are staying in guarded centers for foreigners.

Detention is lengthy and applied without proper assessment of individual circumstances whereas alternatives to detention are still used only scarcely.

As the situation along the fence on the Polish-Belarussian border is still precarious, the HNLAC will advance its **advocacy efforts** towards amending the applicable laws to ensure their consistency with international human rights standards, especially the non-refoulement principle.

Taking into account the **situation in Ukraine** and the current trends related to the influx of refugees, the HNLAC also anticipates the **further need to run the existing points with legal assistance**.

The HNLAC plans however to place **greater emphasis on supporting vulnerable persons from Ukraine**, including persons in a difficult mental state associated with prolonged war, unemployed and economically disadvantaged, as well as persons with disabilities, the elderly and victims of violence. The HNLAC will further work on strengthening referrals for persons at risk, forging cooperation with key stakeholders and working towards adopting a national referral system.

Following its efforts from previous years The HNLAC is also looking for **core-funding on an ongoing basis** in order to ensure financial stability of its increased team and resources. Securing the long-term retention of staff is a key element to sustainability of HNLAC services to its beneficiaries.

CONTACT:

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