



WE ARE ONE

The block contains three logos: the European Union flag (a blue rectangle with twelve yellow stars in a circle), the European Solidarity Corps logo (the text "EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS" in blue and red), and the logo of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia (a blue circle with the text "Министарство образовања, науке и технолошког развоја Републике Србије" in white and blue).



This project was formed in European Solidarity Corps Programme by Gizem Karaköse with other volunteers from Armenia, Gerogia and students from Lithuania. Main aim of the project is researching minority problems in Lithuania and bringing awarness to the topic among young generation. Project group had 5 meetings in total to discuss about 3 main minorities that choosen. In the mean time, project team did interviews and held online meetings with special guests. In this regard I would like to thank all participants and supporters of this project.

Creater of the project: Gizem Karaköse

**...We are looking for sympathy
and understanding for better...**

...future.

In this workbook we report on the minority problems, young generation's and international volunteer's ideas in 2022.

What is minority and others?

Our work and resarch focussed on people who considered as others in society and minortiy groups.

Who is minority in Lithuania?

Sialai Didzvario Gymnasium students and international ESC volunteers discussed about minority and diasdvantaged groups in Lithuania.

Our works with minority groups in Lithuania

We worked on 3 main minority groups and their problems with online meetings, discussion, interviews and nonformal eduacation games.

3 minortiy groups we worked on;

- **LGBTQIA+**
- **Refugees — immigrants**
- **People with disabilities**

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MINORITIES

in Lithuania

INTRODUCTION

By Shota Gelashvili

Students with project organization and moderators covered the topic of Minorities in Lithuania, what minority means in general and which minorities are presented in this Balkan country where approximately 3 million people live. The discussion started with a definition and explanation of the minority itself, as you already may know it means the group of people in a major society who feel different regarding traditions, customs or are physically outstanding, somehow different, or maybe have different abilities. Students covered all the possible ways of defining minority, in this discussion communication and presentation, critical thinking skills were seriously engaged, and not just during this specific meeting but throughout the whole project. So as we had a clear definition of minority we decided to write down and analyze all the possible minority groups that would pop out in our minds that we can face anytime in Lithuania. There were many ideas and finally we narrowed it down to three main groups who are most noticeable in society and people may have different feelings towards them.

The first minority group the students selected is the LGBTQIA+ community, people with different sexual orientations, gay, bisexual, transgender, lesbian, queer, etc. People who are a minority not just in Lithuania but in all countries and talks about discrimination are also pretty serious all over the world, Lithuania is not an exception.

The second minority group was chosen by students in the community of refugees, as Lithuania has some different kinds of refugees, political, war, economic and so on. Also, local feelings for these people were discussed and thoughts were separated as some students saw the problem and some were just minority representation, we will talk about it later.

And the third one of the largest minority groups were identified which are people with disabilities, like autism spectrum, blind and deaf people, people in wheelchairs and more. All the group members agreed that in this case there are more challenges to cope with than problems and the majority of society is so loyal to people with disabilities in Lithuania.

WHAT IS A MINORITY?

By Ruzanna Baghdasaryan

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

The principle above is set out in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is an essential precondition for respect for human rights. Article 2 of the same document states that **“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional, or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing, or under any other limitation of sovereignty.”**¹

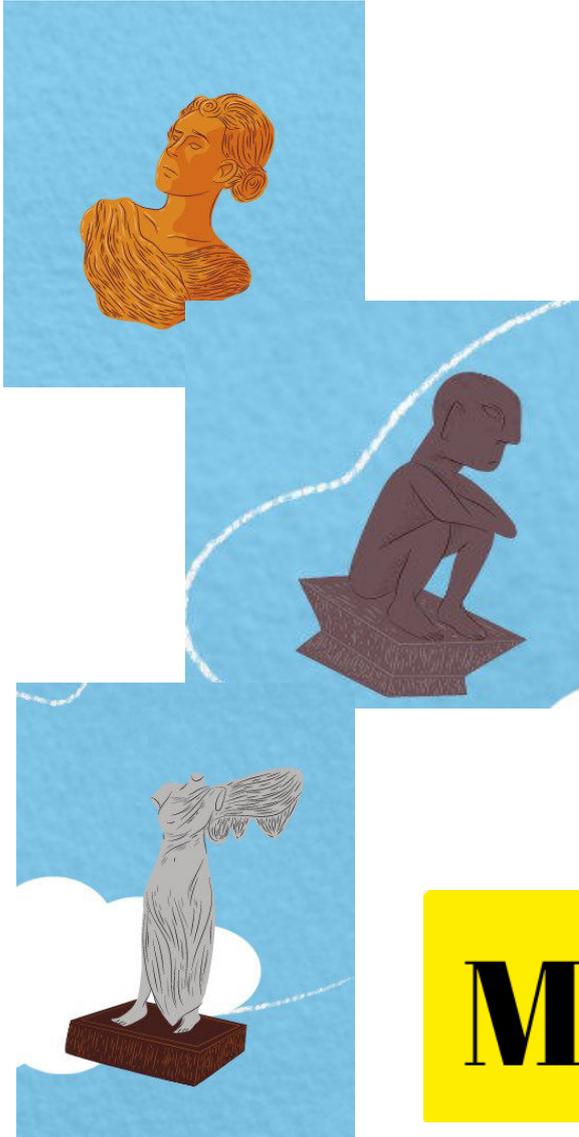


This provision contains two important components. First of all, the principle of equality for all the beneficiaries of the declaration, for each person, contains an obligation for the law enforcer to create all the preconditions for non-discrimination. This approach is also reflected in the preamble to the UN Charter, which states that **“the provisions of this Convention shall apply to all persons, regardless of race, sex, language or religion”**.



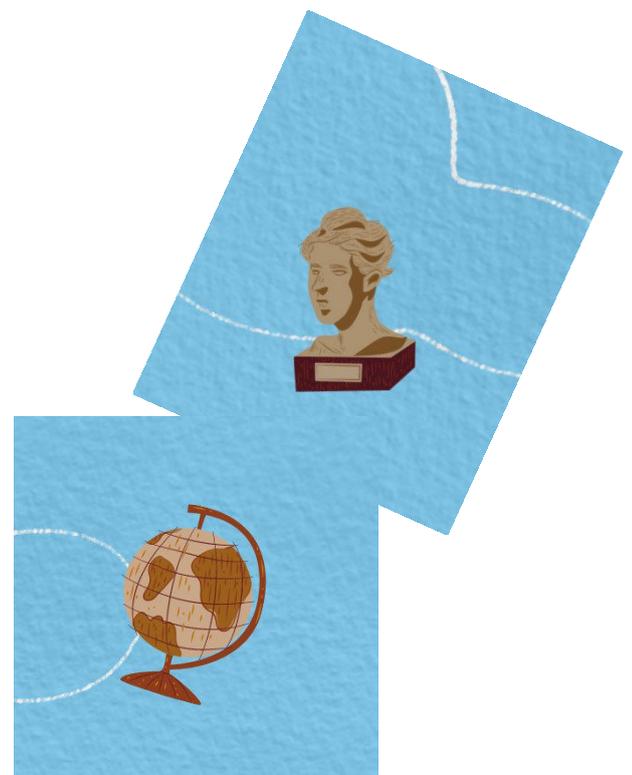
¹ Article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are closely interrelated categories and violation and disrespect of one logically lead to violation of the other. The principles of non-discrimination and equality are reflected in almost all human rights sources as one of the most fundamental human rights. Every modern civilized, democratic state must adopt a policy of adhering to these principles. The principle of non-discrimination is both directly enshrined in the basic human rights instruments and indirectly derived from the content of “certain individual human rights”, which is usually enshrined in the more common wording “everyone” or “no one can”. Thus, when we say that everyone has the right to education, choice, or other, they are based on the principle of equality of persons, the requirement to exclude discrimination.



MINORITIES

The fundamental document for the entire international community on the issue of minority rights is the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1992. It lists the rights to which persons belonging to minorities are entitled, including the right to enjoy their cultural heritage, to profess and practice their religion, and to use their own language.



The declaration also sets out the measures that states should take to create an enabling environment for the enjoyment of these rights, such as encouraging all members of society to learn about the history, traditions, language, and culture of the minorities living in their territory and providing persons belonging to the minorities with the opportunity to fully participate in the economic progress and development of their country. Governments must pursue national policies and programs with due regard for the interests of minorities. The founding principles of the Declaration are non-discrimination, effective participation and protection, and the promotion of the development of the identity of persons belonging to minorities.



In general, it can be said that a minority is a group that has the following characteristics;

- quantitatively smaller than the main mass of the population,
- doesn't hold a dominant position,
- culture, language, religion, race, abilities, gender, and other qualities are different from that of the rest of the population,
- have a desire to preserve their identity,
- members are citizens of the state/community where they are a minority.

MINORITY PROBLEMS



Any measures for the protection of minorities should be aimed primarily at protecting the physical existence of persons belonging to minorities, including protection from genocide and crimes against humanity.

The disrespect, insecurity, and lack of respect for the rights of minorities may at least be one of the significant factors, if not the main cause, of their forced displacement and may, in the worst case, even lead to the disappearance of such communities. It follows that the forced displacement of minorities can also serve as an indication of how the rights of minorities are respected and protected in the country they are forced to leave. While it may be difficult to identify all groups that may be considered minorities in a situation of displacement, protection mechanisms, including the provision of humanitarian assistance, need to be designed in such a way as to allow these groups to preserve their identity to the greatest extent possible.

Based on the world experience of minority communities and the content of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Minorities and other international standards relevant to the rights of minorities, the following main issues can be identified: survival and existence, development, and protection of the identity of minorities, equality and non-discrimination and effective and efficient participation in the life of society.



DISCRIMINATION



Minorities most of the time are directly related to discrimination, problems and controversy, of course, our project covered these aspects and students got in-depth of minority conditions overall in Lithuania.

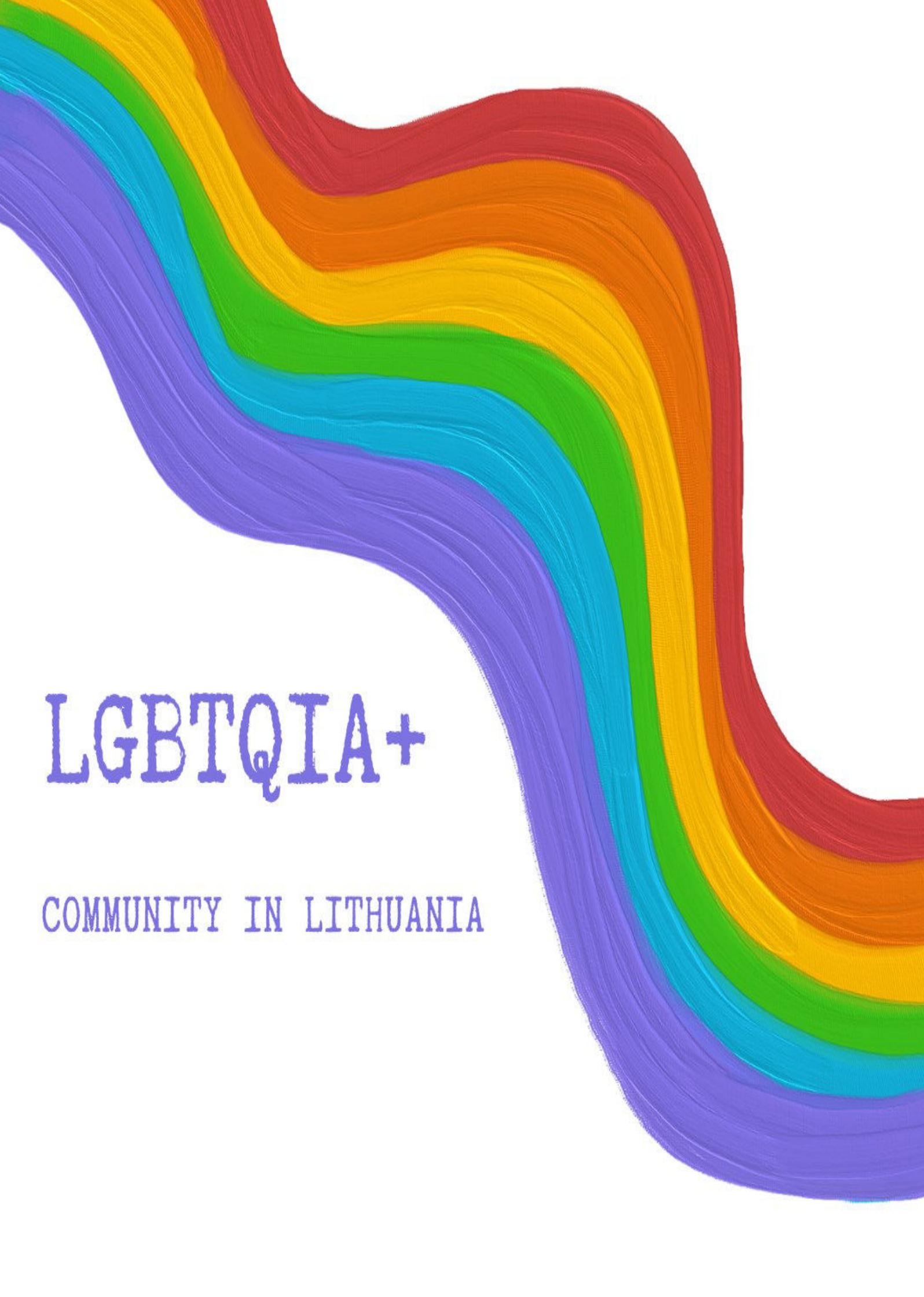
Okay let's start with one of the largest groups and this is the LGBTQIA+ community which takes lots of time and energy to study at the same time there are so many people interested in this topic and work constantly, which made students work much easier. We interviewed a member of parliament, a politician in Lithuanian political life, who is openly gay and works on problems his community has, nowadays as we explored there are not so many violence cases even though it's still noticeable, but most of the disappointment and sort of discrimination can be witnessed in law and constitution. Lithuania has an anti-discrimination law which in practice doesn't actually work and community members face not physical violence but job discrimination sometimes. Also, same-sex couples are not eligible for marriage in Lithuania which makes their households so unsafe and unreserved.

Talking about refugees nowadays everyone will recall Ukrainian war refugees and truly most of the refugees today in Lithuania are war refugees fleeing Russian Aggression. We cannot say they are being discriminated against or face some kind of discomfort here except for language barrier and education again because of language barrier, but the government pretty much works on that to make them appreciated and welcomed, as people most of the time help them and give some things that can be useful for them. Regarding discrimination towards refugees, our club students agreed altogether that it's not a considerable point anymore but to continue helping them in any possible way.

And lastly, as I already mention regarding the people with disabilities we will talk about challenges, not discrimination, as Lithuanian society is a progressive European society and realizes they need to be included and contented into society fully and help them, so they are trying their best. The economic situation may not be the best in Lithuania considering the latest inflation and a couple of problems with investigations but outdoor infrastructure, as well as indoor spaces, are pretty much for people with disabilities as well. Special schools, workplaces, light sounds and paths for wheelchairs.



Overall, we can conclude that Lithuanian society is not discriminative and qualifies all the crucial standards for European commission documents, discrimination is not so often but so rare, and all the facts are investigated accordingly. Thankfully we all together will overcome all the challenges society faces today.



LGBTQIA+

COMMUNITY IN LITHUANIA

LGBTQIA+ History In Lithuania

By Jonas Žemaitis

LGBTQIA+ communities have existed all over the world from time immemorial. Lithuania is not an exception and has LGBTQIA+ history as well, which includes numerous laws and policies for the community members.

Until 1918, Lithuania had been part of the Russian Empire. According to The Criminal Statute of the Russian Empire, homosexual relationships were condemned by the law or the society and were punishable by up to five years in prison. After Lithuania declared independence, the criminal law was based on Russian criminal law, and relation between homosexual couples was sentenced to imprisonment for up to three months.



This didn't change until 1940. After 1940, when Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union, Soviet law came into force. Under Soviet Union law homosexuality was illegal, and in 1960 the Criminal Statute of the Soviet Union provided that sexual relations between homosexuals could be sentenced to up to three years in prison. It lasted until 1993 when voluntary sexual relationships between all people were legalized.

As we can see, in the 20th century being homosexual was illegal, therefore we can assume that people were not open about their sexuality, because they could have gone to jail for who they are. Because of these laws, LGBTQIA+ topics were and still are, by some citizens, considered to be taboo and/or inappropriate.



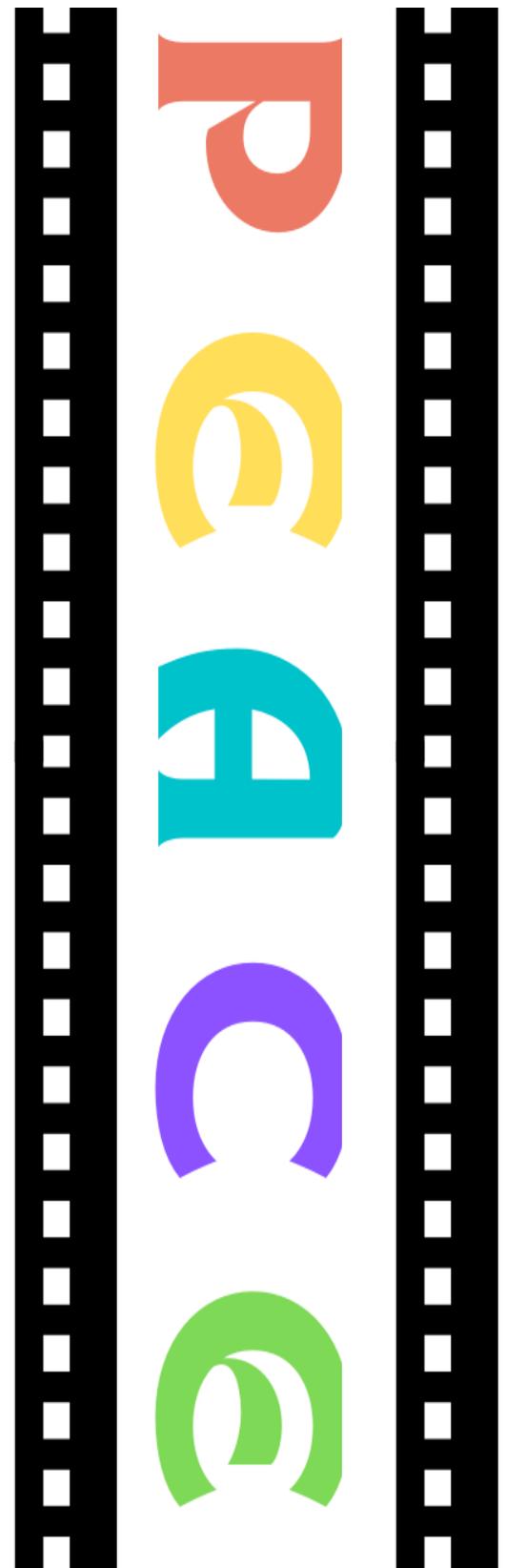
The situation has begun to change since 1993. Of course, the change was a small step, but after years of oppressing the LGBTQIA + community, it has made at least some progress. The Lithuanian Gay League was founded in 1993. In 2001, the law stipulated the rights of people to undergo sex reassignment surgery (SRS). In 2003, the Lithuanian Labor Code was amended to declare that "everyone is equal, regardless of gender or sexual orientation." With the introduction of the Equality Act in 2005, LGBTQIA + community members can rely on the Equal Opportunity Commission to protect their rights in out-of-court settlements.

With all these changes, Lithuanian citizens are still very anti-homosexual. A 2009 poll conducted by Sprinter showed that 81% of the respondents considered being gay a perversion or a disease. In 2017, according to ILGA Europe, Lithuania earned 17 out of 100 points by granting LGBTQIA + members full equal rights in society. In this rating, Lithuania is ranked 39th out of 49 European countries.

The Lithuanian parliament has two politicians who have spoken openly in support of LGBTQIA + rights. There is also a so-called "for equality" parliamentary group formed to oppose groups that support "traditional families". There is also very strong resistance from the far right party. During the Pride March, two politicians, Petras Gražulis and Kazimieras Uoka, who are considered the most hostile politicians to the LGBTQIA + community, were arrested for inciting riots.

The first Pride March was held in Vilnius in 2010 and was attended by 350 people. The 2019 Pride March had approximately 10,000 participants, and in 2022 up to 20,000 marched on the Baltic Pride. The slogan for this march was "We are a family."

What are the specific challenges LGBTQIA + minority groups are facing in Lithuania today? Lithuanian LGBTQIA + people face many legal and social challenges not faced by non-LGBTQ ++ citizens. Same-sex sexual activity is legal in Lithuania, but there is no same-sex civil partnership or same-sex marriage. That is, same-sex couples are not legally permitted. In general, couples must be married to adopt in Lithuania, and as a result, same-sex couples are not allowed to adopt.



The Problems LGBTQIA+ Face In Lithuania

By Marija Zubareva

In September 2021, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said he is against the demands to let homosexuals adopt children, which have been put forward by organizers of the Kaunas Pride march. "I am against such demands and I don't think they will be met in Lithuania. As President, I will do my best not to meet such demands at this time." Negative attitude towards to LGBTQIA + continue to take root all over the country. Various polls have found that LGBTQIA + support for people is extremely limited.



Lithuania has one of the lowest percentages of people supporting LGBTQIA+ among other EU countries. Another survey was done where LGBTQIA+ were asked various questions. It showed that 73% of minority members avoid holding hands in public with their significant others. Also, 55% felt discriminated against in public places. 44% admitted that they experienced some kind of harassment/violence because of their sexual orientation. 41% say that they hide being a part of this community in school, however, 50% say that their peers or teachers often or always supported LGBTQIA+ people. In conclusion, LGBTQIA+ members experience a lot of legal and social discrimination from the government and the non-LGBTQIA+ people. In addition, sadly, there're a lot of cases of domestic violence and harassment.

HOMOFOBIA

By Ieva Kontrimaitė

Homophobia is a serious problem in today's society, especially in Lithuania. However, if you encounter a problem, one way to solve it is to start with yourself. Here are the ways to make at least a bit of a change on homophobia. The most important way to reduce today's homophobia is to recognize your own homophobic/heterosexist prejudices: face your stereotyped assumptions and views about LGBTQIA+ people and make sure they are changed, eventually. Also, deal with homophobic behavior in your immediate environment: make it clear that homophobic jokes and taunting are hurtful and unacceptable to the members of the LGBTQIA+ members.

Also, make time to educate yourself by reading books and movies dealing with LGBTQIA + issues. Queer cinemas have evolved dramatically over the last 50 years to promote mainstream cinemas and raise awareness of the LGBTQIA + community experience. Being part of the audience doesn't waste it.

Another way is to make and attend workshops on homophobia, heterosexism, and transgender issues to raise awareness of the current issues and how they affect sexual minorities in Lithuania. Not only will you educate yourself during those workshops, but you will also educate others. Make sure it's significant to mention that one shouldn't assume that all their friends, classmates, or co-workers are heterosexual.



Furthermore, anytime an LGBTQIA+ person comes out to you, make sure they feel comfortable in your friendship/relationship by reassuring them that they are always welcome and that their sexuality is not a cause to feel inadequate. If someone from an LGBTQIA+ community has been comfortable enough to come out to you, make sure you talk to lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender friends, relatives, coworkers, or other students about their experiences, being careful not to go beyond their comfort zone.

Finally, let's learn more about the LGBTQIA + people who have made significant contributions to society. Leonardo da Vinci, Barbara Gittings, Alexander the Great, Sally Ride, Oscar Wilde, Alan Turing and many more-were all part of the LGBTQIA + community and have made a big difference in our society. Admitting that such individuals are open about their sexuality not only indicates the existence of LGBTQIA + individuals, but can also be encouraging for many of us.

POLICIES ABOUT LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY

By Viltė Aleksandravičiūtė

LGBTQIA+ rights in Eastern Europe, aligning with those in Lithuania, have faced some progress during the past decade. There have been punishments implemented for acts of discrimination against queer communities, push for laws providing gender reassignment surgery, same-sex partnership recognition, and numerous more. Despite many years and elections passing and ambitious politicians earning positions of power, Lithuania remains one of the last European states with no actual protection for LGBTQIA+ communities.



Probably the most important thing to start with—there is no legal approval for same-sex couples in Lithuania. The simple lack of this law leads to the migration of some queer people to countries where they can form partnerships and marry their significant others. For many, it is the disappointment of their country not acknowledging even their base identity and existence. Until 2019, people with such spouses had problems returning to Lithuania, even if they got married in another country. On January 11, 2019, the Constitutional Court reportedly condemned the routine denial of residency permits for the spouses of homosexual citizens who married abroad, ruling that the state must grant residence permits to foreign spouses of homosexual citizens even though same-sex unions are not recognized by law. Nowadays, partnership law has sparked many heated discussions and even parades in the Lithuanian community, leaving same-sex couples uncertain about their future in their own country. Seimas session, this project will once again be reviewed, leaving hundreds of thousands in hope of awaited legal protection and benefits that the formation of legal partnerships will bring to couples.

Regarding discrimination, in July 2011, it is reported that a bill was submitted by parliament to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation saying, “advertising and audio-visual commercial communications must not publish information that humiliates human dignity, discriminating or encouraging discrimination based on ...sexual orientation”. However, because there is no clear mechanism for reporting such crimes, many will argue that real offenders are ignored under this law. It leaves many queer people feeling unsafe in their daily lives, since for perpetrators, getting away with verbal abuse and sometimes even physical abuse based on gender identity and sexual orientation discrimination, is made relatively easy under the law. When it comes to workplaces, in 2004, a law banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment was passed as an obligation for acceptance into the European Union. There are no statistics to prove whether such discrimination is still present in employment, but if it is, in many cases, it will not be reported due to a lack of such protection mechanisms.



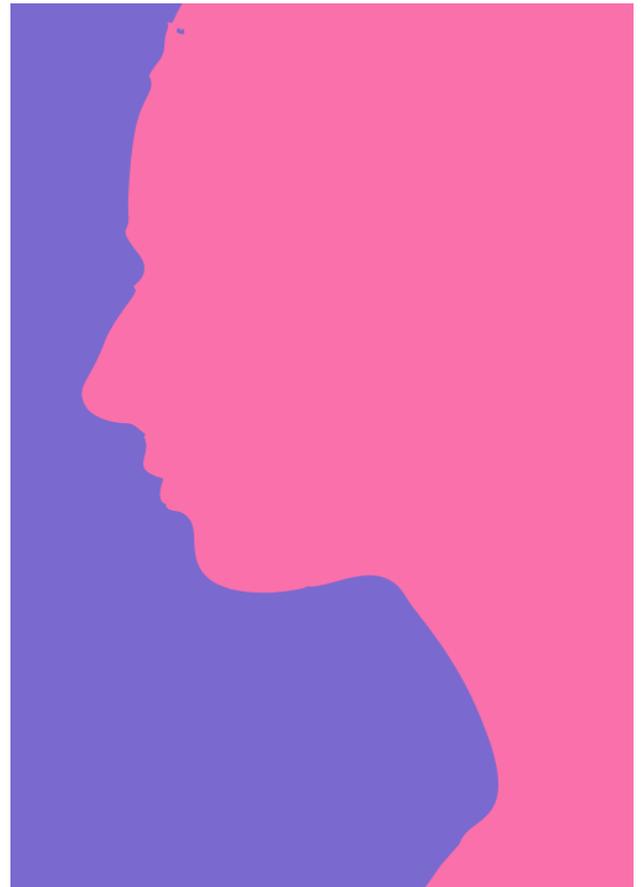
In conclusion, the general attitude of queer people in Lithuania towards the legal system is hopeful. Hope that same-sex couples will soon be recognized and free to live in the created family. Hope that your gender identity will not be the thing that causes you to fear being discriminated against or even abused. There is still a long way to go in this country, especially when looking at the attitude of middle-aged and elderly, but with many prosperous politicians and young people in politics, there is a light at the end of the tunnel for the LGBTQIA+ community to finally get legal recognition in Lithuania.

DISCRIMINATION TOWARDS LGBTQIA+

By Gerda Rumšaitė

79% of Lithuanians confess to the Catholic Church. Christian Lithuanians are very traditional people. LGBTQIA + people are facing discrimination in the church. Queer believers are not allowed to enter the church. Some posters show the rainbow as a bad sign. Most priests who appear as homosexuals are separated from the community. There is also a dispute between Adam and Eve. God created two genders. That is, there are only two genders and they cannot be swapped. The most disgusting stereotype about gay people is that they are pedophiles. It all came from the cases when priests sexually assaulted minor boys. Straight people put them in the same “gay” category. Lithuanians even use the incorrect phrase “pederastija” - “pederasty” to say that someone is gay, even though the definition is—a sexual relationship between an adult man and a pubescent or adolescent boy.

Older generations of Lithuanians are conservative because of their past. Probably, the Soviet Union has had a strong influence on their mindset. Peaceful artistic performances would get reported and performers would be sent to the insane asylums. Older generations have never freely seen the LGBTQIA + community on the streets. People in their 50s and above are coming out now. So it’s understandable why while sitting at the dinner table you could hear: “turn the tv off, those faggots will make a bad influence on the kids”; “They are confused, It’s just a phase.”; “It’s a sickness and they should be treated, not let free.”; “Those artsy people should stop making a show out of everything”.



Most Lithuanians have a mindset - if they don't get into my life, I don't care about them. The Lithuanian language has discriminative slang (which is still used by younger generations) about gay people like “žydras” - “blue man”; “pydaras” (from the Russian language) - “gay man that is poor, or a dumb person”. Not that long ago while I was on a public bus I hear fifth graders yell: “If you stop jumping you are gay”. Means - gay people are unfit. The last argument is that there is a lack of correct information about the LGBTQIA+ community in the Lithuanian language, which leads to a lack of society’s awareness. Throughout twelve years of learning, not once was LGBTQIA+ mentioned in the curriculum or sex-ed in my schools. Most informative websites are not translated into Lithuanian, so many of the older generation, that don't read in English are left in the unknown.



REFUGEES/IMMIGRANTS

In LITHUANIA



REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS

The major immigrant crisis that Lithuania has faced is when Minsk regime took action against Lithuania. People were crossing the boarder from Belarus. Second major movement is from Ukrianian war.

On 22 January 2014, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, when adopting the Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines, instructed the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter – the Ministry of Social Security and Labour) to formulate the policy of integration of foreigners.

Lithuania has extended its participation in the EU's refugee resettlement programme for another six months until December 31, 2021.

Foreigners integration centres are established in Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipeda. Lithuanian Red Cross, Caritas and UNHCR Refugee Day Centre (Kaunas) since August 2020. In Kaunas day centre there is Lithuanian language training in classes of about 10 people; up to 200 hours of courses available for each third-country national.

In order to implement foreigners integration, Action plan for 2018–2020 on the Integration of Foreigners Into Society (hereinafter – the "Action Plan") was developed with the aim to improve the implementation of the integration of foreigners and ensure their successful integration into society. The Action Plan includes 34 measures which are set to improve legislation and processes in the area of foreigners and asylum seekers.

By Gerda Rumšaitė

WHY REFUGEES CHOOSE LITHUANIA?

By Jonas Žemaitis



The main factors for choosing a country where refugees want to seek asylum are geographical location, economical situation and the efficiency of the application process.

Because of the war in Ukraine, we can see that a lot of Ukrainian refugees are coming to Lithuania for asylum. It is because Lithuania shares a border with Ukraine, therefore it is an optimal choice for Ukrainian refugees to come here.

There are two types of asylum application processes in Lithuania - urgent and regular. The urgent applications are examined within 10 business days and after that, asylum seekers can start the adaptation and integration process.

Asylum benefits include money which is provided monthly, free traveling with trains and city buses and other benefits.



Lithuania has a fully developed economy. Even before the war Ukrainian people and people of other nationalities were coming to Lithuania to work.

In Lithuania, refugees are provided with temporary protection which lasts for a year and can be extended for another year. During the time refugees have this protection, they get asylum benefits and can participate in integration programs, so it is easier for refugees to adapt to their new surroundings, find jobs etc.

Main Problems for Refugees in Lithuania

By Ieva Kontrimaitė



Due to the preservation of limited shared resources within their jurisdiction, such as land, water, housing facilities, natural and mineral resources, when a host community receives refugees, they are unprepared to accept new entries. Migrants frequently have difficulty in being accepted by host communities, resulting in issues such as communal integration, peaceful living, trade, cultural customs, religious views, language obstacles, and so on. Lithuania, unfortunately, faces very similar difficulties when welcoming refugees.

The Lithuanian government does not take seriously independent monitoring institutions' suggestions to dedicate funds to human rights implementation or enhance existing human rights institutions, when it comes to refugees. Although there is insufficient evidence to draw judgments about how many individuals in Lithuania are subjected to racial violence, patterns demonstrate that there is a lack of political will to enact strategic changes.

Undocumented immigrants have a particularly difficult time receiving services here in Lithuania. As a result, they would postpone going to the doctor or seeking out services like legal advice when they are desperately required. Moreover, it's extremely strenuous to get help for mental health difficulties.

Refugees are frequently subjected to assault or rape, but they may not know where to turn for aid. Furthermore, many cultures, Lithuanian included, consider mental health concerns to be taboo and a forbidden or a shameful topic, adding an extra barrier for refugees in need. And, eventually, those that are able to acquire the services they require frequently have a poor experience due to discrimination.



REFUGEE POLICIES IN LITHUANIA

By Maria Zubareva

In 2016, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania approved the Description of the Procedure of Provision of State Support for the Integration of Persons Who Have Been Granted Asylum (hereinafter – the “Description”) which regulates the grounds for, organisation and implementation of the provision of state support for the integration of people who have been granted asylum, the terms of support for integration at the Refugees Reception Center (hereinafter – the "Center") and in the territory of a municipality, payment of cash benefits and allowances, education and employment, the grounds for the termination and renewal of support for integration, and raising public awareness of the integration of persons who have been granted asylum.

During integration at the Center (for up to 3 months, with a possibility to extend it to vulnerable groups for up to 6 months), a person who has been granted asylum is provided with free accommodation, social and psychological services, on-site health care services and, where necessary, the conditions are created to receive services at health care institutions; evaluation of personal qualities and qualifications required for the job is organised; a monthly benefit for food and sundries is paid; a benefit for school-aged children for the acquisition of essential school supplies is paid; a monthly compensation in the amount of EUR 62.4 for the expenses of children’s education according to the pre-school and/or pre-primary education curricula is paid; free-of-charge Lithuanian language and culture courses are organised; persons are provided with basic necessities, clothing, footwear, and bedclothes.

After the integration period in the Center is over, support for integration is provided in a municipality (for 12 months, with a possibility to extend it to vulnerable groups for up to 36 months), in which a person chooses to reside. At this stage, non-governmental and other organisations provide mentoring services to persons who have been granted asylum who are participating in the integration process. Currently, mentoring services were provided by Caritas of Vilnius Archdiocese and Lithuanian Red Cross Organisation. Mentors help foreigners to acquire basic necessities, rent an apartment, pay cash benefits, organise Lithuanian language teaching to foreigners, organise kindergarten attendance and children’s education at school, consult foreigners on all issues, ensure foreigners’ attendance at the Employment Service, help to fill in and prepare necessary documents, etc

Anna* — Ukraine, Donetsk region.

1. Did you choose this specific country and if yes why did you choose Lithuania?

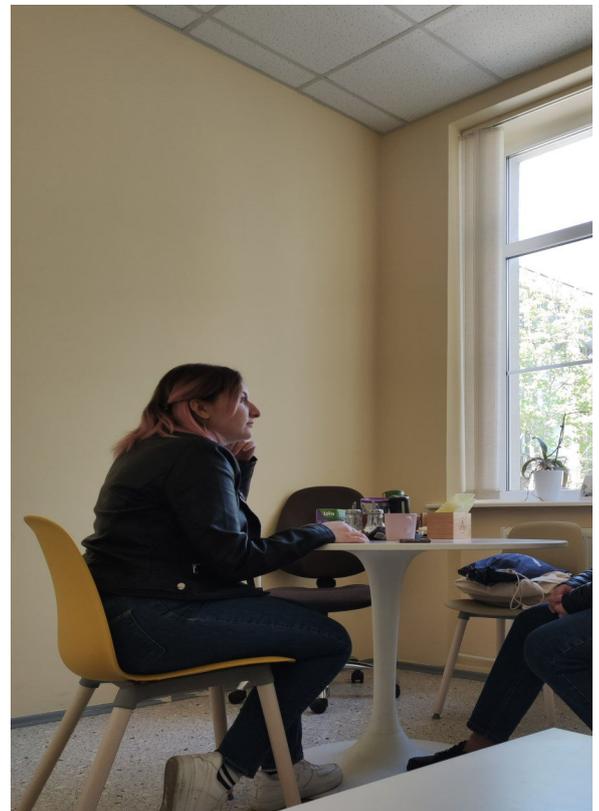
Yes, we were given the opportunity to choose, we chose several. We were in Slovakia and from there through Poland we came to Lithuania since my husband works here. Most of the women who moved here are like Decembrists.

3. What was it like when you first arrived and What surprised you most?

I was probably pleasantly impressed when we crossed the border of Slovakia. I will probably never forget this feeling. Because when I went through passport control, there we were met by DSNS cars and red buses, I thought they would carry us in their arms. That is, we were quite conscious, without panic, but they did everything in such an organized manner. I will never forget it. Buses drove up, they were grabbing our bags, escorting us to these cars, and bringing us to the nearest city for refugees - Košice. Food, mobile communications, strollers, buses - everything was so organized, I was very impressed, I did not expect such an attitude, such greeting. Then we had to spend the night in Košice, everything was very well organized, very good-natured, no fuss, no nerves, nothing, and we spent the night safely there, in a large gym. At first, I thought "Well, how is it to spend the night in the gym?", I tell you, it's great. The most necessary things for life, everything was delivered, there was no need for more - water, food, warm water, pillow, blanket, you wash, change, and go to bed. Therefore, I was very impressed with Slovakia.

2. What were your (or your parents) hopes or expectations for your new life here?

There were no hopes or expectations. There was a goal to calmly cross the borders, without crushing, spending the night on the street, and there was a goal to get to the city, which was discussed in the family, and to have shelter. This was the first thing that we needed.



5. What have been your biggest challenges/in which areas?

When moving to Lithuania, the first problem was finding housing. Either there is one, but in a very bad condition, or there isn't any at all. Because the place we arrived for the first time, not to offend them, of course, but it was a flophouse, I won't call it in other words. We arrived at the hostel where the drivers live, because the company where my husband works met us, but it was just a flophouse with bedbugs. We immediately packed up and moved to another place. We spent the night there, but I cannot say that we were welcomed there, because no one will keep you there for free, and for accommodation they asked for such a big amount of money, as for a luxurious three-room apartment in the city centre. Then we were taken out of there into normal conditions. Local bikers gave away their house, which had not been heated all winter, as they did not live there. There was everything we needed. They filled the kitchen with food and gave us a bed. There was only one snag, that the house had to be heated. Every hour we had to go to the boiler room to put in firewood. It was not difficult, of course, but sometimes because of the smell of smoke, we didn't feel well. This was the only problem, but then it became uncomfortable for us to live for free.

I looked for housing, but there was simply none. And now the prices have risen and it is clear that the locals are playing with prices. Housing has risen in price by 200 euros for the past month and a half. There are problems with finding a job. I personally am a civil servant. We worked remotely. I took all the work, but they adopted a new resolution in Ukraine, which prohibits civil servants from working abroad. Either a business trip is arranged, or remote work, only on the territory of Ukraine. No one will arrange a business trip for you, of course. There is also little choice in the employment centre, as employers ask how long you are going to stay here and whether you are going to return home or not. And I don't know, especially the Donetsk region.

I'm not going to return as long as military operations are going on, and I'm not going back if there is an occupation. I'm not even planning to go back if the borders are returned before February 24. I don't want to either. I just don't want to be next to Russia. Therefore, when asked how long I'm going to work here, I just answer "I don't know."

There is a problem with the language, because I speak English very slowly and it's better to ask, "can you speak Russian?", than to say something in English. We learn Lithuanian, but do we need to learn it? What if tomorrow they say it's all over, and most of us will pack their things and go home. I'm more inclined to think that it's better for me to improve my English, because Lithuanian is very difficult.

As for job, I will not be able to work as a civil servant here, but other jobs, like cleaning, can be found, you just must be mentally prepared, everything is fine for me, any work is paid, simply, somewhere more, somewhere less. I do not care. Personally, I'm looking for a job that will be related to plants, gardens, orchards, because this is my hobby, I'm interested in it.

6. Can you think of times when you have felt unwelcome as an immigrant? What about when you have felt welcomed?

Maybe, at some point, you initially feel like a welcomed guest, but when they really can't help you, you immediately become an unwanted guest. Because there are a lot of us, and it is simply impossible to help everyone at once. I have this problem with housing, when you call by an ad and ask: "Do you rent out an apartment?" "Yes. No animals, no children." This is probably the biggest problem here so far.

7. Have you thought about staying in Lithuania or maybe you want to go back to Ukraine?

For a while, I really, really wanted to go home, but I understand that as long as the personalities of the Russian Federation are there, we will not go. My husband wants to go, he wants to take risks, he says that after all, we have a house there, property, but personally I don't want to.

1. Did you choose this specific country and if yes why did you choose Lithuania?

There was a choice, you could go anywhere. My daughter lives in Amsterdam, I could go to her, but her family had covid, so I was invited to Lithuania. If I had not been invited to Lithuania, maybe I would have stayed in Kyiv. If they have relatives or friends in some country, they can go there, if don't they go to the countries that can get more profit from. But it's not my case, I can't do it. I left at the beginning of March, I just didn't have the opportunity to work in Kyiv anymore and didn't feel well. In Kyiv, I worked at the Minor Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, this is an organization that deals with preschool education of children and prepares them for scientific activities. Lithuanian friends asked me to come to Lithuania and, I have absolutely no regrets after coming here. At first, I worked as a volunteer in many places. Then I began to work with Ukrainian children, I teach them at school and work at the Technical Centre and various events.

2. What were your hopes or expectations for your new life here?

When you go you don't know anything, especially in the first days, when you ride on this train full of people, where people sleep on the floor or when you stand for 5 hours in the station at a temperature under zero, waiting for the train. There you don't think anything, just to go somewhere. It was only after crossing the border that I was able to sleep, that is, at the beginning of the war I slept for 2 hours a day, I just forced myself to fall asleep. I couldn't eat or sleep properly. As for me, I was alone, but I can imagine how hard it was for mothers who were traveling with 2-3 children and did not know where to go. The only thing I was calm about was that I had friends here, they would meet me, I would have housing and I would not die here. I was everywhere and helped as much as I could because I understood what it was like for people who come here.

Oleksiy* - Ukraine, Kyiv



4. What was it like when you first arrived and What most surprised you?

An Estonian was driving me to Lithuania on his bus. He was going to Estonia, carrying a group of people, and he dropped me off in Lithuania. When we stopped at a gas station, he decided to buy a hot dog for me, I refused, but he bought it anyway. He says I don't know how to help you all, and that giving money is somehow not very good, so you need to help with something "alive". I was eating this hot dog and then the Lithuanians behind the counter started looking at us. I said thank you when I was going out. And It turned out that they know Russian. They asked where you are from, I said from Ukraine, and now her smile just faded away from her face and was replaced by compassion. Her eyes completely changed, and tears appeared in her eyes. Then my friends came, met me, and I already felt absolutely calm. I was only thinking about what will happen tomorrow, how I will work, how I will live here. But I still can't forget the change on that girl's face.

5. What have been your biggest challenges/in which areas (education, language, accommodation, food, etc.)?

The language still needs to be learned, because I want to continue working here, to show the theater of science not only to Ukrainian children but also to Lithuanian ones. So I still work with a translator. It will be even better to work without a translator. There have been no problems with accommodation and food so far since I live with a friend.

6. Can you think of times when you have felt unwelcome as an immigrant? What about when you have felt welcomed?

No. I am surrounded by friends here and the environment in which I find myself is always calm. There was no hostility. Never lie either in the store or in the pharmacy anywhere. Yesterday I was buying medicine, and they gave me without a prescription because they did not find my prescription in the database. They talked to the doctor and after a few minutes, they gave me the medicine. Everyone is very friendly and I wrote in my blog that Lithuania is a small country with a big heart. I like it here and I think Lithuanians like me too. After working in India, I realized one thing. When you come to some country, become a part of it immediately. Accept it as it is and what seems unusual to you, this is usually here, so try to pour these customs into yourself. I believe that you need to love every country just as your own, then it will reciprocate.

7. Have you thought about staying in Lithuania or maybe you want to go back to Ukraine?

It depends. The fact is that I am already retired in Ukraine, they probably pitied me at work, and that's the reason I still had a chance to continue my job. But all my projects were not promoted much, although I know that they are innovative and that they can be promoted here with appropriate funding. Let's see how everything will be, it all depends on how things are going to be after the war. Now the main thing for me is to teach children until the end of the war, to make them feel comfortable here. Recently I have been invited to Finland, by Ukrainians, so I'm thinking of going there too.



Meetings

The project team had 5 meetings about refugees with different coordinators, volunteers and academic persons from different countries.

As for the first meeting; Barış Can Sever, a Ph.D. Candidate in the department of Sociology at Middle East Technical University from Ankara/Turkey explained the refugee problems in Turkey?

- First of all, we should always bear in mind that the refugees in Turkey, even the refugees coming from the same country are not homogenous groups. They are differentiated by their class, race, gender, age, state of disability, and other social factors as you can imagine. So, their problems are differentiated as well. In this regard, we can look at each different groups and analyse their problems in their own settings. There are also some all-encompassing and intersectional problems the refugees face in Turkey. Nowadays, one of the challenges for the refugees is that they cannot anticipate what kind of future is waiting for them. With the rising anti-immigrant sentiments and the pragmatic approaches of the political parties in Turkey, now there is a huge debate about the repatriation of refugees to their countries.

In the second meeting, dr hab. Michał Głuszkowski, prof. Nicolaus Copernicus University in the Department of Slavic Languages, Institute of Linguistics explained the Ukrainian refugee situation in Poland .

sphere	Help from NGO's	the government and local government	common people
first days, reception points	food and drink, clothes, translations,	facilitating organization of the reception points, simplification of procedures of crossing the border	volunteers organizing food, drinks and clothes
accomodation	organization of hosting, short-time housing in schools, empty hotels	40zł (approx. 8 EUR a day for 1 refugee hosted at home), short-time housing in schools, empty hotels etc.	people hosting refugees in their homes („Pospolite ruszenie” mass mobilization)
subsides		300zł (approx. 65 EUR) for start for each refugee (once) 500zł for each child every month possibility to exchange money at bank rates (much better than in private exchange money points)	
health care system	free medicines	free health care insurance	free consultations from doctors
political and social rights	legal support, free lessons of Polish language	simplification of procedures, granting a PESEL identification number, opened labour market	free lessons of Polish language
transport	free private transport for the refugees	free city buses, free trains for refugees	free private transport for the refugees

Flavia, a Italian volunteer and a coordiantor from Caritas joined us to explain the practical aspects.





Poeples with disabilities

Ieva* - Lithuania, Siauliai

1. Can you introduce yourself and your work?

My name is Ingrida, I'm a special education teacher I'm also a speech therapist and floor-time therapist as well. I am a mother to 14-year-old boy who has documented severe autism. I'm the board chairwoman of the NGO of Siauliai association for autistic families and parttime do volunteer work.

2. How do you think Lithuanian society sees people with disabilities? and what are the approaches in media and public spaces?

First of all, I think people don't know enough, they have little knowledge in their tiny bubble. Because they don't know much they are scared of unfamiliarity and have hard time accepting it. For 14 years of my son`s life changed a lot in our family. But people keep their distances, probably because they don't understand and see getting away as a solution. Four years ago, we travelled to Paris, to Disneyland and the first thing I noticed as soon as the plane landed was helpfulness. In France they saw he's difference, as I needed to work while I was enjoying the time. The moment we got on the plane with all Lithuanian passengers, we felt the "who are you" "I don't care" and "I don't want to do anything with you". What frustrates me is that people with mental disabilities are seen as little kids, even if their mind doesn't work the same way as ours. I constantly need to remind the teachers and people around that my son is a teenager. You cannot teach him baby songs. It doesn't matter if he can't pronounce something correctly, he's teenager so perceive them as one. Mainly, I believe knowledge makes us more tolerant.

3. Do you think there is any communication barrier between the public and those who have disabilities or relatives?

Of course, there is. People with mental disabilities need to be represented, especially autistic people because we don't know what their world is about, what it's like. Now autistic adults start to speak up, it's really happening, but it's slow and barrier stays there.



4. Is there any inappropriate word used to discriminate people with disabilities in Lithuanian society? What is it? Is it humiliating?

It's the word "invalidas". It's out of any official documents, it's out of the medical system but people still use it. People also call other people by their disability, for example, they can say "autistic", instead of "kid with autism". The word "invalidas" is not usable anymore it should be a person with a disability as the person comes first than illness.

5. Does Lithuania have special policies and programs for people with disabilities or people with special needs? If yes, what it is, and if not what's the reason in your opinion.

The main thing they have is that if you hire a disabled person, someone who has any sort of disability, then the country donates some money for the employer, so it partly funds his job right and the company that wants to hire must register and then they hire 1, 2 or 3, it depends on the company. Of course, companies only want people with illnesses, like diabetics, but not people who need assistance. But on paper they have a program for work, also starting from 2024 there's new law with their total inclusion, which means that the part of the law from the law of education will be raised. Basically, everyone can go or will have to go to Mainstream school and Mainstream will have to rearrange so that they can accept everyone. I'm guessing they will leave some special schools for students with severe disabilities of course, but other than that we have schools for speech and language problems, schools for kids that have problems with their spine. So these schools will be gone, or they will change the name or I don't know how they will make this happen. But starting from 2024 we are very we're getting ready with schools to welcome everyone into the system. Also, a lot of things are done by NGOs- projects for inclusion, social rehabilitation, etc. As a family that has a disabled kid, we have a lot of benefits. We can get lots of help, for example, to buy a car some help to buy a house or apartment, we can get sensory stuff, we can get car seats, helmets, or headphones. Also, money, of course. In Lithuania, the schools are funded by, what we call, students' basket. Every student comes with a basket into the school's budget, a kid with special needs gets a little bit bigger basket, like if your basket is 200, I have special needs mine would be 300 so they can hire special education teachers, speech therapists, psychologists, etc. As I said, a lot of things that disabled people now get are through NGOs and all the fundraisings and concerts also.

6. Does Lithuania have special education laws or systems for people with disabilities? Does it involve integrated schools? How is their integration into Lithuanian society?

It depends on the abilities of the school. For example, I work in a school which is made up of three small schools. It's difficult for kids with physical disabilities to navigate because we have no elevators, nothing. We had one kid in the wheelchair, he had an assistant who would carry him up and down the stairs but then he got older and bigger, so we transferred his classroom downstairs, had only eight years with us, and then he went to the only school in Siauliai that has an elevator. Basically, there will be schools that can accept every child, but the reality is that everyone wants to have a "convenient child", one that doesn't require much. It's difficult because the average age of the teachers in Lithuania is around 50 years, so they've finished their education when it still was the Soviet Union with a totally different perspective of everything. In those times people with disabilities were "non-existent", they were all closed up, hidden from society and if you gave birth to a disabled child, they will immediately offer you to take him away. So the teachers learned as if there are no special needs kids and now it's difficult for them because they don't know much, they don't know how to teach you because when they come to work they expect well-motivated, hard-working kids and it's really difficult for them to navigate in the classroom where they're like one child with intellectual disability another one physical disability others with special needs, a big mix of everything, it is really difficult. In my opinion, schools are not ready yet.

7. Does being disabled / with special needs incapacitate them from being employed in Lithuania?

Yes, because most of them need assistance, an additional cost. Now, in Lithuania they are starting to provide assistance for grown-ups, which is not social work, it's an assistant who helps. Right now, I'm my son's assistant, but we had an assistant who would go with him to the pool, go to the café, go to the movies, to the bank, to the post office wherever he needs social interaction. So, it's starting. For example, in Siauliai, we have a social worker, so that I can have my free time because I cannot leave him alone even if he's 14 he can't stay alone for an hour, but I have to be away now when something is wrong. When I have to go somewhere further, I need assistance for him to be safe. We have this in Siauliai, but most of the cities in Lithuania don't have that. There's a law but the city government will say that nobody wanted. If you call and say that you need help, they say "we don't have it", but when you ask them why they don't have this help, they say that nobody asks. But by asking they mean that I have to file an application. We fought to get the system that we have now as an NGO.



8. What is the main prejudice towards people with disabilities or people with special needs in Lithuania from your point of view?

That they cannot do anything. Basically, they're someone you have to take care of. I gave every interview that I was asked, and I went on every video that I was asked I spoke to every media person that ever called me, but there are lots of families that say they wouldn't do that, there were other people who said, why are you putting your son into public like this. Should I be ashamed or what? They are perceived as someone that you have to pity and take care of, that they cannot do anything on their own, etc.

9. What can you advise people or policymakers to focus on about this topic? How should they approach it?

First of all, I think we should look at all people the same way, with the same respect. It really surprises me when I go to the doctor with my son and for example, doctors always ask me everything. He's 14 years old he can speak, you know his language is a mess, but he can do it, but they've never talked to him they always talk to me, like he's not there and it's disrespectful. But in their mind, they just do the easier thing for them, but he's a person, he's here, and he can at least say something, but he's completely ignored. So, it should be prioritized to speak and treat people in a respectful way. One of my friends works in a cultural house, they were doing a big renovation and by law, you have to have some construction for people in wheelchairs to get on the stage and normally it's on the chairs and you have to have some sort of going up and he called me and asked whether he should do a lifting thing or he should do the going around thing. I said do whatever you can, but so that the person could go up and come down with no assistance. So, it would be respectful of him if he can go on the stage on his own, he doesn't need any assistance. So, this kind of call makes me happy because now people think about it, in a respectful way, because he could do whatever is the cheapest, as people do now. It's respect, when people think about all the people, that would be the best approach when you think about everyone. And focus on inclusion in every way possible, in every area when you write a law of any kind, you should think of all the people- the blind people, the deaf people, or the people that have severe disabilities and others.