



Migration Profile

LITHUANIA

A. Executive Summary

The Republic of Lithuania is located in North-eastern Europe¹ and is characterised by flat plains and some rolling hills². Almost one-fourth of its territory is covered by woodlands³, and there are numerous lakes⁴.

Since its independence (1918), Lithuania has been a country with a low birth rate and emigration to Western Europe⁵. However, since 2019 the migration balance has been positive, thanks to an increase in the demand of high value-added sectors in Lithuania⁶. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the local labour market situation has been stable⁷, even though it is still impacting small production and supply chains and inflation seems to be on the rise⁸.

After becoming a member of the Schengen zone in 2007, major changes have also taken place regarding migration flows in Lithuania⁹. It reduced the number of migrants coming in from non-European countries by tightening borders' control and establishing agreements with third-party states like Turkey¹⁰. At the same time, due to the free movement within member states, migration to other European countries has increased¹¹.

In 2019, immigrants mainly came from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Latvia, and the United Kingdom¹². Lithuania faces problems related to irregular migration¹³ and the integration of migrants¹⁴ ¹⁵. Regarding refugees' countries of origin, they mainly arrive from Russia, Belarus, and Tajikistan, although since 2021 there has been an increase of refugees and asylum seekers crossing through Belarus holding a Russian, Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghan

¹ World Atlas

² Ibid.

³ Country Reports

⁴ World Atlas

⁵ Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ OECD, 2021

⁸ Lietuvos Bankas, 2022

⁹ European Union

¹⁰ International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2022

¹¹ Gruzevskis, 2006

¹² United Nations Population Division, 2019

¹³ International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2022

¹⁴ Labanauskas, 2019

¹⁵ Official Statistic Portal, n.d.

citizenship¹⁶ ¹⁷. Since then, the Lithuanian reception and asylum processing system have been overwhelmed¹⁸.

In 2021 Lithuania's GDP amounted to US\$ 65,503,849,700¹⁹, experiencing a 5% annual growth rate compared to the one from the previous year, due to a decrease of -0.1 in 2020²⁰. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) net inflows in 2020 represented 7.9% of the country's GDP²¹. The inflation rate in 2021 was 4.7% of its GDP in comparison with the 1.2% of the previous year²².

Country Profile

I. Basic Information

The Republic of Lithuania is located in the centre of the European continent, bordered to the north by Latvia, to the east by Belarus, to the southwest by Poland and by the Russian enclave of Kyrgyzstan²³, while to the west its coastline is along the Baltic Sea²⁴. It has an area of 65,301 sq. km²⁵.

Its capital is Vilnius and its official languages are Lithuanian, Russian (also spoken by the adult population), and Polish (used by Polish minorities in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the country)²⁶. Its population was 2,805,998 inhabitants according to the latest data from 2021²⁷. Regarding ethnic distribution, 85.9% are Lithuanians, and 14.1% belong to ethnic minorities, like Poles (5.7%), Russians (4.5%), Belarusians (1.7%), and Ukrainians (1.2%)²⁸.

The main religion is Catholic (74%), although there are also present an Orthodox minority (3.75%) and small communities of Lutherans, Calvinists, Muslims, and Jews²⁹.

II. International and Internal Migrants

According to the United Nations, in 2019 Lithuania registered 117,218 immigrants³⁰. Among them, there are more females (57.94%) than males (42.05%), and the reason for this disparity is that the first group mostly migrate for family reunification purposes, education or work,

¹⁶ UNHCR, 2022

¹⁷ UNHCR, 2021

¹⁸ UNHCR, 2022

¹⁹ World Bank, 2021

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ World Bank, 2020

²² World Bank, 2021

²³ Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ European Union, n.d.

²⁸ Official Statistics Portal, 2020

²⁹ Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022

³⁰ United Nations Population Division, 2019

while men mainly do it for working related reasons³¹. Their main age group is between 25 and 29³², and they come from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Latvia, and the United Kingdom³³.

Immigrants are very often employed as welders, metal hull assemblers, tailors, butchers, drivers of international cargo vehicles, concrete workers, electricians, etc. In other words, they take on those professions where there is a shortage of local workers^{34 35}. However, in recent years there has also been an immigration of highly skilled professionals to Lithuania to work in different companies and organisations³⁶. The main requirements in terms of migration for people applying for these jobs include a qualified academic training, based on a higher education diploma, and a set salary, which should not be lower than the salary established by governmental regulations³⁷.

Problems that immigrants deal with in Lithuania are the difference in accessing general health services, the restriction of their rights to participate in the country's political life, and other legal difficulties faced while trying to apply for citizenship³⁸.

Furthermore, there is a major problem caused by the current migration crisis on the border between Belarus and Lithuania³⁹. This is a consequence of the stance adopted by Belarus since 2020 due to the sanctions imposed by the EU⁴⁰; in fact, Belarus has currently cancelled or simplified visa requirements for 76 countries, including several of those affected by the conflict⁴¹. As of 2021, 4,494 irregular immigrants were registered in Lithuania, mostly in the 20-29 age group, coming from Iraq (2,858 persons), Belarus (239), Congo (203), Syria (190), and Cameroon (135)⁴². One of the routes uses the Turkish territory as a transit country and a logistic centre⁴³. Migrants arrive in Turkey, then travel as tourists to Moscow, and from there to Belarus to cities close to the Lithuanian and Polish borders⁴⁴.

Finally, regarding internal migration, its push factors are related to the abolition of collective farms, the attempt to replace them with small-scale private farms, and the influx of resources allocated by the EU rural support programmes that have partially blunted rural-urban antagonisms⁴⁵. In 2019, migration flows were mainly rural-urban (44,300 people)⁴⁶. In addition, there were also 28,900 people who migrated from urban to rural areas⁴⁷.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

³¹ IOM, 2021

³² Official Statistics Portal, 2021

³³ United Nations Population Division, 2019

³⁴ Renkuosi Lietuva, n.d.

³⁵ Republic of Lithuania, 2021

³⁶ Migration Law Centre, n.d.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Labanauskas, 2019

³⁹ Euronews, 2021

⁴⁰ European Council, n.d.

⁴¹ BBC News, 2021

⁴² Official Statistic Portal, n.d.

⁴³ IOM, 2021

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Krupickaitė & Poviliūnas, 2012

⁴⁶ Official Statistics Portal, n.d.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

According to the United Nations, Lithuania has 610,223 emigrants⁴⁸, and the female component (55.14%) is higher than the male one (44.85%)⁴⁹. Their main destination countries are the United Kingdom, Russia, Poland, Germany, and the United States⁵⁰. In 2019, the emigrant population was mostly young (20-29 years old)⁵¹.

Since 2009, Lithuanian emigration has been characterised by highly skilled professionals⁵². According to the human flight and brain drain index, in 2021 Lithuania stood at 5.20 high⁵³. Among the push factors causing emigration there are the socio-economic condition of Lithuania, its low employment rates and low monthly wages⁵⁴. Instead, the pull factors from other western countries are the high labour opportunities and the favourable conditions determined by its membership to the European Union (education networks and European policies)⁵⁵.

This type of emigration is expected to continue, as professional opportunities abroad increase. In that sense, emigration is also perceived as a threat to the identity of the small Lithuanian nation and labour force⁵⁶. Thus, the Lithuanian government has implemented several measures to stem this flow, the most recent being the “Global Lithuania” programme which not only focuses on discouraging emigration but also tries to get the Lithuanian diaspora more involved^{57 58}.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)

According to the United Nations, in 2019 there were 1,900 refugees in Lithuania⁵⁹. Moreover, in 2020 the country reported 321 asylum-seekers, mostly coming from Russia, Belarus, and Tajikistan⁶⁰. In 2021, however, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving into the country, amounting just at the beginning of the year to more than 4,100 people. Among them, there were present 40 different nationalities, although most of them came from Iraq, Belarus, and the Russian Federation^{61 62}.

Concerning refugees, their main countries of origin are the Russian Federation, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Afghanistan⁶³. Since the beginning of 2022, there have been 64,216 Ukrainians who moved into the country. Most of them are female and young (from 20 to 56

⁴⁸ Datos macro

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Official Statistics Portal, 2020

⁵² Labanauskas, 2019

⁵³ The Global Economy, s.f

⁵⁴ OECD, 2020

⁵⁵ Gruzevskis, 2006

⁵⁶ Sipavičienė & Stankuniene, 2013

⁵⁷ Gudelis, 2016

⁵⁸ The Republic of Lithuania, 2022

⁵⁹ United Nations Population Division, 2019

⁶⁰ UNHCR

⁶¹ UNHCR, 2021

⁶² UNHCR, 2022

⁶³ Ibid.

years old)⁶⁴, and have been placed in the centres of Vilniuje, Kaune, Klaipédoje, and Alytuje⁶⁵.

When asylum seekers arrive in Lithuania, during the initial integration process (3 months but extended to 6 months for vulnerable groups), they are provided with free accommodation, job search and assessment of personal qualities and qualifications, as well as educational, social, psychological, and health care services^{66 67}. One of the main refugee reception centres is Rukla⁶⁸. Afterwards, the integration support is provided in the municipality where a person chooses to live (for 12 months, but extended to up to 36 months for vulnerable groups)⁶⁹.

Since the increase of arrivals in 2021, the Lithuanian reception and asylum system has been overwhelmed⁷⁰. In 2022 at least 2,500 asylum seekers have been also arbitrarily detained in the country⁷¹. Most of them came from Iraq, Congo, Syria, Cameroon, and Afghanistan, and arrived after crossing from Belarus. Asylum seekers experience mental health distress, degrading treatment and violence⁷². Considering the conditions faced by refugees in the Kybartai centre, which was originally a prison until September 2011, with barred windows, security doors and a high perimeter wall, the government has developed the 2021-2027 Asylum, Migration and Integration Programme, raising the issue of accommodation and asking for more flexibility in the asylum system⁷³.

Since the Ukrainian war, refugees arriving from that country may be accommodated in Lithuania in any of the reception centres for up to 72 hours. Later, through the StrongerTogether Platform⁷⁴, they are provided with accommodation for 3 months. In addition, the municipality offers long-term accommodation in apartments, care homes, school premises, and orphanages⁷⁵.

There is no available data concerning Internally Displaced Persons by climate or violence⁷⁶. There is also no significant cross-border migration due to climate change observed in Lithuania⁷⁷. Regarding stateless persons, in 2021 the country reduced their number to 2,721⁷⁸, thanks to a 2020 Migration Campaign for stateless persons by which 221 persons received a Lithuanian citizenship after consultations and assistance⁷⁹.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

⁶⁴ Official Statistics Portal

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania

⁶⁷ UNHCR, 2013

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania

⁷⁰ UNHCR, 2022

⁷¹ Médecins sans Frontières, 2022

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ OHCHR, 2022

⁷⁴ Strong Together

⁷⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022

⁷⁶ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

⁷⁷ OHCHR, 2022

⁷⁸ UNHCR, 2022

⁷⁹ European Commission, 2021

Lithuania is Tier 1 in the US Trafficking in Persons Report, since it has shown considerable efforts to combat human trafficking, despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are still human traffickers exploiting domestic and foreign victims in Lithuania, mainly from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus, as well as victims from Lithuania abroad. Men and boys are usually exploited in criminal activities such as shoplifting, and Lithuanian women and children in commercial sex in Scandinavia and Western Europe, especially in Spain and the UK. They are even recruited for arranged marriages abroad. Many of the victims suffer from some degree of mental disorder, alcohol or drug addiction, or psychological problems. Foreign long-haul truck drivers, builders, ship hull assemblers and vendors are exposed to labour trafficking in the state, although most of the cases involve Lithuanian trafficking networks of domestic victims⁸⁰.

In 2020 the Lithuanian government investigated 8 trafficking cases, most of them related to labour trafficking. It initiated prosecutions of 40 suspected traffickers and convicted 16 of them, of whom 12 received prison sentences with terms ranging from 1 to 8 years. In 2020 it also cooperated with foreign counterparts in 21 international trafficking investigations, including a joint investigation with Spain and the UK on a labour trafficking case, which involved 8 Lithuanian victims and resulted in 2 arrests. The general prosecutor's office issued 6 European arrest orders in trafficking cases. Furthermore, it organised a virtual training on protecting refugees from trafficking for 28 border officials and 14 prosecutors. The State Border Guards Service trained 34 border officials on an anti-trafficking program and the National Court Administration organised anti-trafficking training modules for judges⁸¹.

In 2020, Lithuania approved a new Nap for 2020-2022 in which it allocated approximately \$460,000 to improve preventive work and assistance to victims and strengthen the pre-trial investigation process. Moreover, the police set up an email account for the public to report potential trafficking situations and request advice. Furthermore, it launched a 24-hour national hotline available in multiple languages to assist trafficking victims. The State Labour Inspectorate trained 52 new inspectors on identifying labour trafficking cases and reported 29 illegally hired individuals as potential labour trafficking victims⁸².

However, despite all of these efforts, it is still difficult to collect adequate evidence for judicial cases and cooperate with other law enforcement officials abroad. The country lacks specific shelters for child trafficking victims and a clear policy on how victims could report and would be adequately protected by law. Furthermore, traffickers threatened victims in courts, and they did not have access to mental health professionals during their interviews with law enforcement agents. In addition, observers reported that attorneys had very little experience with trafficking issues, and NGOs often hired private attorneys for their victims⁸³.

VI. National Legal Framework

⁸⁰ U.S. Department of State, 2021

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

The 2004 Law on the Legal Status of Aliens represents the legal framework for migration in Lithuania⁸⁴. This establishes entry and exit procedures, temporary and permanent residence, asylum procedures, integration, and naturalisation⁸⁵. In 2014, the country adopted the Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines⁸⁶, which stipulate the responsible actors and procedures for emigration, legal migration, immigration, asylum, and the fight against illegal migration, among others⁸⁷. Moreover, the Order of the Minister of Social Security and Labour On Approval of Order on Rendering of Lithuanian State Support for Integration of Aliens, Received Asylum in the Republic of Lithuania manages the organisation, implementation and administration of the State support for integration⁸⁸.

Regarding human trafficking, sex and labour trafficking, they are prosecuted by Articles 147 and 157 of the criminal code, inflicting penalties ranging from 2 to 12 years imprisonment⁸⁹.

At the international level, since 1997 Lithuania has been a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol^{90 91}. In 1998 it also signed the 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination⁹².

In 2000 it acceded to the UN International Convention on Stateless⁹³, and in 2013 to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Stateless⁹⁴. Furthermore, in 2003 Lithuania ratified the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children⁹⁵, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air⁹⁶. Finally, it ratified in 2013 the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance⁹⁷.

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Migration Department under the Ministry of Interior is the main actor responsible for migration in the country. Its responsibilities are mainly issuing visas and residence permits, asylum, international cooperation, and control of foreign migration issues. It further issues certificates and temporary residence permits to asylum seekers⁹⁸.

Likewise, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour is responsible for the labour policy and the social integration of foreigners who have been granted asylum, the administration of the

⁸⁴ European Commission, 2014

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Republic of Lithuania, 2020

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ European Commission, 2004

⁸⁹ U.S. Department of State, 2021

⁹⁰ UNHCR

⁹¹ United Nations Treaty Collection, 2022

⁹² OHCHR

⁹³ United Nations Treaty Collection, 2022

⁹⁴ UNHCR

⁹⁵ United Nations Treaty Collection, 2022

⁹⁶ United Nations Treaty Collection, 2022

⁹⁷ OHCHR

⁹⁸ European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022

European Refugee Fund and the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals⁹⁹. It also issues work permits for foreigners in the state¹⁰⁰.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also handles the formation and implementation of the visa policy¹⁰¹. The State Border Guard Service and units of the Lithuanian Armed Forces assist the control the national border¹⁰².

Regarding human trafficking, the Lithuanian Criminal Police Bureau is responsible for the coordination and control of cross-border operations. Within the state, the Criminal Police Officers of the territorial units are in charge of coordinating these measures¹⁰³. Furthermore, the Ministry of Interior carries out investigations and implements prevention measures with the aim of combating human trafficking in the country¹⁰⁴.

International Organisations

The European Union plays a key role in Lithuania's migration and refugee management. Since 2007, after joining the Schengen zone¹⁰⁵, Lithuanian citizens have the right to travel, study, work and live in any of the 27 EU member states without any additional permits¹⁰⁶. Labour migration for high-skilled workers is regularised by the Blue Cards¹⁰⁷.

Since the increase of asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa entering the country through Belarus, Member States have offered support such as tents, beds, blankets, and generators¹⁰⁸. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), in charge of controlling the European borders, provide support to Lithuania with standing corps officers and equipment¹⁰⁹. Furthermore, Frontex and the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) sponsor the return of migrants in Lithuania¹¹⁰.

Since 1985, UNHCR is represented in Lithuania with a liaison office located in Vilnius¹¹¹. It cooperates with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support asylum, integration, and statelessness legal and policy development. Moreover, it works with Frontex and the Migration Department to ensure access to asylum procedures and good reception conditions. It also promotes the integration of refugees and their labour market inclusion¹¹².

Other organisms such as the International Labour Organisation are also active in Lithuania. In 2021, it supported the national trade unions to establish legal advisory services for

⁹⁹ Republic of Lithuania, 2020

¹⁰⁰ European Migration Network, 2016

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania

¹⁰³ Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2020

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Department of State, 2021

¹⁰⁵ European Union

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ EU Immigration Portal

¹⁰⁸ European Commission, 2021

¹⁰⁹ FRONTEX, 2021

¹¹⁰ Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania

¹¹¹ UNHCR

¹¹² UNHCR, 2021

migrant workers arriving from Ukraine and Belarus¹¹³. Moreover, IOM provides multiple services to migrants and refugees such as voluntary return and integration, consultations (through the Migration Information Centre), representation in the European Migration Network and research on the field of migration in Lithuania¹¹⁴.

NGOs and Other Organisations

There are multiple NGOs present in the country working for the integration, assistance and protection of migrants and refugees.

The Lithuanian Red Cross helps migrants and refugees coming from Belarus with essential relief items, psychological support, and legal assistance¹¹⁵. Furthermore, it provides counselling and advice to stateless persons on procedures aimed at acquiring citizenship¹¹⁶.

Other organisations, such as Diversity Development Group or Artscape, promote educational projects in the field of diversity and migration to raise awareness about their condition in the country^{117 118}. The Refugee Council of Lithuania is another refugee-led organisation providing educational and advocacy support to refugees¹¹⁹.

Save the Children is assisting Ukrainian refugees at border crossing points and reception centres in the state¹²⁰. Furthermore, the Lithuanian Food Bank, together with Our House, provide food to Belarusian asylum seekers who do not have a right to legally work in Lithuania and lack sufficient resources¹²¹. This organisation has also provided food products for Ukrainian refugees¹²².

The Catholic Church

The Lithuanian Church has been proactively working on assisting migrants through immediate support, as well as assuming a role of mediation between refugees and governmental institutions, while promoting a positive narrative in society. The Lithuanian Bishops Conference has repeatedly appealed to the international community as well as to the country itself to address human trafficking and to welcome the many refugees arriving, pointing out the challenging conditions of migrants at the borders and, recently, of those fleeing from the Ukrainian conflict.

Caritas is one of the Catholic organisations present in Lithuania, whose activity is focused on issues related to poverty, social exclusion, and inequality¹²³. Caritas assists different social groups and helps the poorest such as children, poor families and elderly, homeless people, victims of trafficking and prostitution, sick people, convicts, and people with addictions¹²⁴.

¹¹³ International Labour Organisation, 2022

¹¹⁴ IOM

¹¹⁵ International Federation of Red Cross, 2021

¹¹⁶ UNHCR, 2021

¹¹⁷ Diversity Development Group

¹¹⁸ Artscape

¹¹⁹ Refugee Council of Lithuania

¹²⁰ Save the Children

¹²¹ Our House, 2022

¹²² Lithuania's Food Bank, 2022

¹²³ Caritas, n.d.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Among the many programs runned by Caritas Lithuania, there are those aiming at the integration of people into the labour market, those providing assistance to victims of violence and human trafficking, and also programmes entirely devoted to migrants and asylum seekers, by fostering their integration into the host society through educational activities and the help of local families¹²⁵. Additionally, Caritas, together with other aid organisations, is working with the government to provide assistance to migrants living in centres, and also to those still stranded at the border by preparing, for example, assistance packages¹²⁶.

Lastly, the Santa Marta Group is an alliance of international police chiefs and bishops from over 30 countries around the world, including Lithuania, where the organisation is proactively working in fighting human trafficking.¹²⁷ It works together with civil society in a process endorsed by Pope Francis to eradicate human trafficking and modern slavery.¹²⁸ This problem can take many forms: forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced criminality, and organ removal.¹²⁹

The aim of the Group is to combine the resources of the Church with those of law enforcement agencies to prevent trafficking and modern slavery, provide pastoral care to victims and help them reintegrate into the host community for a safe return.¹³⁰ ¹³¹ Such cooperation was established in Lithuania with a *memorandum* by which the Lithuanian Catholic Church and the Lithuanian police declared their willingness to focus their efforts on solving the issue of modern slavery, to coordinate actions to strengthen intolerance to dehumanising living and working conditions, to encourage opposition to the humiliation of human dignity, to the indiscriminate exploitation of people for the sake of profit¹³².

For an effective cooperation, the Santa Marta Group in Lithuania also partners with the Santa Marta Group present in other countries, organising meetings to share best practices and concretely show the effectiveness of Police, Church and Government working together to eradicate human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

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¹²⁵ Lietuvos Caritas

¹²⁶ CCEE

¹²⁷ Santa Marta Group, n.d.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Santa Marta Group, 2016

¹³² Ibid

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