

Concerns for migrant welfare in Lithuania and Latvia as projects close



After 18 months of activities, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has decided to close our projects in [Lithuania](#) and [Latvia](#), where restrictions and circumstances prevented our teams from providing care to migrants with full confidentiality and in accordance with our principles.

MSF started operations in Lithuania in September 2021, with the aim of providing medical and humanitarian support to [migrants and asylum seekers](#) crossing into the country from [Belarus](#). Initially, our teams provided mental health and psychological support at nine state border guard posts, where migrants and asylum seekers — from countries including Iraq, Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Cameroon, Nigeria and Afghanistan — were detained in dire conditions.

By January 2022, migrants and asylum seekers had been transferred to Foreigners' Registration Centres across the country. MSF teams offered basic medical and mental healthcare to people detained in two of the three registration centres in Kybartai and Medininkai from January until May. They provided 214 counselling sessions for 98 people who were experiencing distress related to detention, limited freedom and uncertainty about their future and the asylum process, including fears of repatriation.

“Continuous pushbacks at the border are denying vulnerable people from seeking international protection in Lithuania... this significantly limits MSF’s access to provide essential medical and mental healthcare.” Georgina Brown, MSF project coordinator in Lithuania and Latvia

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Since then, MSF has provided remote psychological support to over 200 detained people who reached out to us for assistance. We have also run informal group sessions outside the registration centres for a further 130 people.

“Despite our concerns about the treatment of asylum seekers and migrants remaining in Lithuania, we need to acknowledge that the context has changed,” says Georgina Brown, MSF project coordinator in Lithuania and Latvia.

“The registration centres are nearly vacant and continuous pushbacks at the border are denying vulnerable people from seeking international protection in Lithuania,” says Brown. “This significantly limits MSF’s access to provide essential medical and mental healthcare to migrants and asylum seekers, especially those who are extremely vulnerable. We therefore decided to close our operations in Lithuania on 31 December 2022.”



In Latvia, MSF began providing psychological and psychosocial support to asylum seekers and migrants detained in the Mucenieki and Daugavpils immigration detention centres in July 2022. After some initial visits, MSF provided people with non-food items like books, board games and stationery. Our teams also began providing food, hygiene items and, eventually, financial aid as conversations with people detained in the centres indicated that they faced several barriers to accessing essential goods.

From July to December 2022, we also provided group and individual psychosocial sessions and psychological support in the centres. However, during this period, MSF was not granted unrestricted access to the people who most required care. Therefore, it was challenging for our teams to provide support in an impartial way that ensured medical confidentiality and compliance with medical ethics. For this reason, we ended our operations in Latvia on 31 December 2022.

Despite the closure of our activities in both Lithuania and Latvia, our concerns for migrant and asylum seekers in these countries remain. These are concerns that we have raised publicly in the past.

“People in search of safety and protection are exposed to inhumane conditions, with very limited access to information, appropriate services and protection.” Georgina Brown, MSF project coordinator in Lithuania and Latvia

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“Arbitrary and prolonged detention continues to have severe consequences on migrants and asylum seekers who are detained,” says Brown. “People in search of safety and protection are exposed to inhumane conditions, with very limited access to information, appropriate services and protection.”

“For those in need of specialised care, such as survivors of torture or sexual violence, there is either no dedicated service or specialised medical and psychological staff in the structures where they are detained, or the support provided by such staff is not adequate,” says Brown. “We have also observed that there is no adequate legal assistance or information for people willing to present an

asylum claim.”

As recently denounced by MSF, people attempting to cross into Lithuania and Latvia via Belarus, in search of safety and protection, continue to be subjected to violent pushbacks which place their lives in danger. During 2022, the Lithuanian border guard service conducted over 8,000 pushbacks, and the Latvian border guard service conducted over 4,000.



