

## USDOS – US Department of State

### 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report: Lithuania

#### Lithuania (Tier 1)

The Government of Lithuania fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The government continued to demonstrate serious and sustained efforts during the reporting period, considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking capacity; therefore Lithuania remained on Tier 1. These efforts included convicting significantly more traffickers; allocating more funds to NGOs for victim assistance and toward implementation of the national action plan (NAP); and identifying and assisting more trafficking victims. Furthermore, the government adopted a law on assistance to victims of crime, including trafficking, ensuring victims received assistance before, during, and after criminal proceedings. In addition, the government trained child rights specialists on identifying child trafficking victims. Although the government meets the minimum standards, authorities prosecuted fewer suspected traffickers and inconsistently implemented victim identification and referral mechanisms throughout the country, especially in rural areas. Additionally, authorities did not proactively identify and screen for trafficking indicators among vulnerable populations, such as children and migrants. Moreover, shortcomings in victim protection during the investigation and trial process, which allowed traffickers to intimidate victims into not cooperating with authorities, continued to hamper law enforcement efforts.

#### PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Proactively identify victims and screen for trafficking indicators, particularly among vulnerable groups, such as children and migrants, through enhanced training for authorities on recognizing indicators of exploitation.
- Implement formal victim identification and referral mechanisms for victim assistance throughout the country, especially in rural areas.
- Increase efforts to vigorously investigate and prosecute sex trafficking and labor trafficking cases and convict traffickers.
- Expand efforts to protect victims from threats and re-victimization during the investigation and trial of trafficking cases, including by developing clear procedures on how to protect victims.
- Train investigators and prosecutors on a victim-centered approach and building trafficking cases, including collecting evidence to corroborate victim testimony.
- Provide specialized services to child victims in foster care homes and mixed-use shelters.
- Ensure victims have access to appropriate mental health professionals during the interrogation process.
- Provide knowledgeable legal counsel for victims assisting prosecutions.
- Develop a more comprehensive data collection system that disaggregates data, including by type of trafficking.

#### PROSECUTION

The government maintained law enforcement efforts. Articles 147 and 157 of the criminal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties ranging from two to 12 years' imprisonment, which were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with penalties prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape. Five specialized prosecutors led the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases in country. In 2021, authorities investigated seven trafficking cases (one sex trafficking, three labor trafficking, and three unspecified), compared with eight in 2020. The government initiated prosecutions of 33 suspected traffickers, compared with 40 in 2020; statistics included data from ongoing prosecutions from previous years. Courts convicted 30 traffickers, a significant increase and nearly double from 16 in

2020. All convicted traffickers received sentences with prison terms ranging from one to nine years; however, four traffickers received suspended sentences. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of government employees complicit in trafficking crimes.

Government officials reported that collecting adequate evidence remained a problem in prosecuting trafficking cases, particularly since trafficking activity recently shifted online to methods that did not include physical coercion. As a result of the pandemic, remote court hearings became the main litigation tool, which according to law enforcement posed challenges. In addition, the pandemic compounded the already existing difficulties associated with communication and cooperation between law enforcement officials in Lithuania and other countries. Furthermore, the government reported that prosecuting criminal acts, including trafficking, that occurred outside Lithuania and obtaining evidence from abroad involved a lengthy and complicated process. Nonetheless, Lithuanian authorities cooperated with their European counterparts on several trafficking-related investigations, two joint investigation teams, and one extradition. A police officer served as an attaché in the Lithuanian embassy in the United Kingdom (UK) to assist in international criminal investigations, including by ensuring cooperation in preventing, investigating, and solving trafficking crimes that involve Lithuanian citizens in the UK and Ireland. In 2021, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) commissioned the National Police to conduct a study on the decline in trafficking investigations and related crimes from 2018 to 2020; the study remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Additionally, in cooperation with the General Prosecutor's Office, the MOI launched an anti-trafficking online training platform, including topics on identifying indicators and victims, understanding risk factors, conducting investigations, collecting evidence, assisting and protecting victims, and compensation. Professionals who were in contact with victims, including police, judges, and medical and social workers, received training through the platform. In addition, the government supported several other educational efforts for police, border guards, prosecutors, and judges on various topics, including trafficking trends, identifying victims, and investigating trafficking crimes.

## PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts. Authorities identified 26 victims (three sex trafficking, 10 labor trafficking, 13 unspecified), compared with 24 in 2020, of which three were foreign nationals (11 in 2020). As in previous years, experts expressed concern that the data collected across government agencies was inconsistent and did not provide a comprehensive picture of the trafficking situation. Law enforcement, immigration, and social services personnel applied formal written recommendations for victim identification. According to NGOs, the recommendations did not always work effectively in practice and were not informed by best practices for how to interview victims, especially children. Furthermore, observers reported authorities in some parts of the country underutilized the recommendations and had less experience identifying victims. In 2021, authorities received training on victim identification; however, NGOs noted officials still did not have the skills and experience required to conduct screening for trafficking among migrants and other vulnerable groups. A formal mechanism existed between police and NGOs to refer victims to NGO facilities.

Care facilities provided short- or long-term assistance, such as health care, psychological and social counseling, and shelter, to trafficking victims. In 2021, the government adopted the Law on Assistance to Victims of Crime, which ensured all victims of all crimes, including trafficking, received assistance before, during, and, if necessary, after criminal proceedings. Lithuanian law also entitled all crime victims, including trafficking victims, access to assistance, including counseling, regardless of whether victims sought assistance from law enforcement. The government allocated €300,000 (\$340,140) to NGOs for victim assistance, a substantial increase from €245,000 (\$277,780) in 2020. Government-funded NGOs supported 247 trafficking victims, compared with 208 in 2020. This number included "at risk" individuals and identified victims from previous years who continued to receive assistance. Individuals had the right to receive assistance without reporting the crime, and some chose to do so. Authorities placed Lithuanian female trafficking victims in municipal and NGO-facilitated shelters for victims of domestic violence and had the option to place foreign victims at a refugee reception center in Rukla. Five crisis centers provided assistance to male victims, including finding accommodations. Authorities could place child victims in foster care homes or mixed-use shelters, as there were no shelters specifically for child trafficking victims. Child sexual abuse victims,

including trafficking victims, could seek assistance in the government-operated national support center in Vilnius. Experts raised concerns about inadequate assistance and protection measures for child victims. According to observers, child protective services struggled to identify child victims and refer them to care, especially in rural areas. In 2021, authorities identified one child victim, the same as in 2020. The Ministry of Social Security and Labor funded a training on identifying child trafficking victims for child protection specialists; the topics included recognizing forms of trafficking, emotional and physical impacts of exploitation, assistance to child victims, and the analysis of child trafficking cases. In addition, the Support Center for Child Victims of Sexual Abuse organized a series of trainings on protecting children against sexual violence, including trafficking, for child protection specialists. Municipalities continued to finance and implement reforms to the institutional child care system with the goal to move all children from institutions to families. As part of the reforms, municipalities converted large institutions into community houses, which accommodated up to eight children each. In 2021, 679 children lived in community homes, and 1,468 children remained in state care homes. The minister of social affairs and labor prohibited the placement of new children into care at orphanages as of January 1, 2020. Foreign trafficking victims had the same access to care as Lithuanian victims. Legislation allowed foreign victims a 30-day reflection period to decide whether to cooperate with law enforcement; foreign victims cooperating with law enforcement could receive temporary residency.

While the government encouraged victims to cooperate in investigations and prosecutions, the absence of clear policy on how victims would be adequately protected and law enforcement's shortcomings in this area contributed to victims' reluctance to assist in cases. In particular, traffickers sometimes threatened victims to intimidate them into not cooperating with the authorities, and victims lacked access to mental health professionals during or after their interviews by law enforcement. According to NGOs, law enforcement still did not utilize a victim-centered approach, contributing to a lack of trust on the part of victims toward officers. To address some deficiencies, courts frequently interviewed victims remotely and allowed victims to appoint individuals to serve as their representatives so their rights were defended without having to participate directly in court proceedings. Although the government provided legal representation to victims, observers reported attorneys had little experience with trafficking issues; as a result, NGOs often hired private attorneys for victims. Lithuanian law entitled trafficking victims to apply for financial compensation from their traffickers, but there were no state-run victim compensation programs. In most cases, courts ordered restitution, and it was awarded. In 2021, courts awarded more than €56,000 (\$63,490) for non-material damages to trafficking victims.

In response to an inflow of Ukrainian refugees who were fleeing Russia's war in Ukraine and arriving in Lithuania, the government adopted laws and regulations to provide temporary protection status for one year and expand assistance, including financial aid. The government also opened six registration centers across the country, providing food, medical care, and short-term lodging to refugees. Despite the government's response to address the immediate needs of refugees, observers raised concerns about medium- and long-term support. Officials underscored challenges, such as limited resources and long-term housing, noting accommodation for the refugees could be limited to "simple conditions," and the government may have no choice but to house some refugees in tents. To address this concern, in March 2022, the government announced a compensation program for households hosting refugees, in which volunteers had the option to receive a monthly stipend of €150 (\$170) for the first refugee they host and €50 (\$57) for each subsequent refugee, for a maximum of three months.

## PREVENTION

The government increased prevention efforts. The government continued to implement the NAP for 2020-2022 and allocated approximately €416,000 (\$471,660), compared with €375,000 (\$425,170) in 2020. The NAP focused on strengthening interagency coordination; improving prevention work; strengthening the pre-trial investigations process; and improving assistance to trafficking victims. The Anti-Trafficking Coordination Commission, the lead coordinating body for anti-trafficking efforts, met twice a year and provided government institutions and NGOs with anti-trafficking guidance and training. The government participated in a range of awareness-raising activities, including producing and distributing pamphlets containing information on trafficking in Lithuania, indicators of potential

victims, and a QR code directing professionals to the victim referral mechanism. In collaboration with other Baltic Sea Region countries, the government participated in a project establishing long-term cooperation between stakeholders and academia to educate future journalists on trafficking issues through workshops, panel discussions, and competitions. Additionally, the MOI published guidance on its website for journalists on how to report trafficking cases and avoid stereotypes, such as including sexually explicit images and photographs that reinforce misperceptions and myths about trafficking. The police advertised and managed an email account that the public could use to report potential trafficking situations and solicit advice. The government maintained a 24-hour national hotline available in multiple languages to assist trafficking victims via NGOs; the hotline received 44 trafficking-related calls. The government did not make efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

In 2021, Lithuania experienced a surge in irregular migrant flows, which the Lukashenka regime facilitated, across the border with Belarus; in November, the State Border Guard Service circulated recommendations to its units to help identify trafficking victims and provide information on available resources to assist them. Due to the increase in Vietnamese citizens fleeing Russia and migrating through Lithuania, the State Border Guard Service, in collaboration with a foundation, organized three distance trainings on Vietnamese culture and how to prevent trafficking. In 2021, Lithuania hosted an international conference on capacity building, assistance, and prosecution of forced labor in the Baltic Sea Region. The MOI organized a virtual seminar on best practices to combat labor trafficking in the Baltic Sea Region. In cooperation with Poland and Sweden, the MOI conducted a study aimed at identifying recruitment methods and tools used by employment agencies to recruit Lithuanians to work under exploitative conditions. The State Labor Inspectorate maintained a special group of inspectors to analyze forced labor cases, collect information, and forward evidence to law enforcement. To prevent labor trafficking among foreign nationals, the inspectorate provided information on identifying illegal work and trafficking through its website and the distribution of leaflets at workplaces. The inspectorate cooperated with the Ukrainian State Labor Service to prepare and publish information on employment opportunities, defending worker rights, and preventing labor trafficking. Lithuanian law specified foreign nationals—issued a visa or temporary residence permit—could only work with the employer who had undertaken to employ them and perform only the job function for which they were employed; if foreign workers wished to change employer or job function with the same employer, the law required they submit an application to the Migration Department for approval. Additionally, Lithuanian law prohibited worker-paid recruitment fees.

## TRAFFICKING PROFILE

As reported over the past five years, human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Lithuania, and traffickers exploit victims from Lithuania abroad. Law enforcement reports most trafficking cases involve Lithuanian trafficking networks that prey on Lithuanian victims. As a result of the pandemic, traffickers have shifted recruitment methods from in-person to online settings, mainly through social media, hindering authorities' ability to locate victims and identify traffickers. Traffickers exploit Lithuanian men and boys in criminal activities, such as shoplifting, and Lithuanian women and children in commercial sex in Scandinavia and Western Europe, particularly Spain and the UK. They also continue to exploit women and girls in sex trafficking within the country. NGOs report the majority of trafficking cases occur within Lithuania. Experts expressed concern that individuals with intellectual disabilities, psychological conditions, and/or alcohol or drug addiction are particularly vulnerable to trafficking. Many adult and teenage victims are survivors of sexual abuse and/or violence or grow up in orphanages, placing them at greater risk for trafficking. Traffickers also target the unemployed or individuals from low-income and at-risk families. Authorities report women are recruited for brokered marriages abroad; these women are vulnerable to sex trafficking, domestic servitude, and forced labor. Reports indicate a rise in the exploitation of foreign workers from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus. Foreign workers are at risk of labor trafficking as long-haul truck drivers, builders, ship hull assemblers, and welders. The 1,468 children institutionalized in approximately 46 child care institutions are vulnerable to trafficking. As a result of the Lukashenka regime facilitating illegal migrant flows across the Lithuania-Belarus border, thousands of migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East remain detained near the border and vulnerable to trafficking. Separately, Vietnamese citizens fleeing Russia and migrating through Lithuania to Western Europe are at risk to trafficking. Foreign nationals and Ukrainian refugees,

predominantly women and children, who are fleeing Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine and seeking sanctuary in Lithuania, are highly vulnerable to trafficking. As of April 1, 38,539 Ukrainian refugees have registered in Lithuania; more than 15,000 of the registered refugees are minors.

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