

ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES AND THEIR SOCIAL INTEGRATION

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SUMMARY

Relevance of the subject matter of the audit

In 2019, there were around 6 million refugees living in OECD countries¹. The Russian-led war in Ukraine has led to a movement of refugees: by mid-September 2022, almost 5 million war refugees from Ukraine were registered in the EU and other OECD countries². In 2022, 337 people were granted asylum in Lithuania and over 68,000 Ukrainian war refugees received temporary protection. According to OECD projections, risk factors that could lead to further humanitarian crises are likely to continue unabated in the future, and OECD countries will continue to face migrant flows³, thus they should be prepared to respond to these flows and risks.

Refugee integration covers a wide range of services provided by the state, municipalities and non-governmental organisations (job search, education, social protection, health care, etc.). By improving refugees' employability, host countries can not only harness their economic potential but also facilitate their integration, as refugees who are employed are better accepted in the local community. Failure to integrate refugees comes at a cost, increasing social exclusion, tensions and inequalities in society⁴. It is therefore important that the institutions involved in the integration of refugees are ready to provide the services they need in a timely manner, and that the Ministry of Social Security and Labour ensures proper coordination of support and integration, as well as accountability for results.

¹ OECD (2019), Ready to Help?: Improving Resilience of Integration Systems for Refugees and other Vulnerable Migrants, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264311312-en>.

² OECD (2022), International Migration Outlook 2022, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/30fe16d2-en>.

³ OECD (2019), Ready to Help?: Improving Resilience of Integration Systems for Refugees and other Vulnerable Migrants, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264311312-en>.

⁴ Ibid.

Objective and scope of the audit

The objective of the audit⁵ is to analyse the system of assistance and integration of refugees (beneficiaries of asylum and temporary protection), the changes that are taking place or are planned, and to identify the problems related to this.

The audited entity is the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, which coordinates and supervises the provision of support for the integration of foreigners granted asylum in the Republic of Lithuania. The following other institutions provide assistance to refugees and are involved in their integration: the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Refugees Reception Centre, the Employment Service, and the Migration Department.

The period assessed is 2020-2022.

We collected information in municipalities (Vilnius City, Kaunas City, Klaipėda City, Panevėžys City, Jonava District), the Ministry of Environment, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, the National Health Insurance Fund, the State Data Agency, the National Agency for Education, and non-governmental organisations such as the Lithuanian Red Cross, the Public Institution "Nuoširdus rūpestis", Vilnius Archdiocese Caritas, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, and the public body "National Institute of Social Integration".

The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions. The data collection and evaluation methods used are described in more detail in Annex 2 "Methods for data collection and evaluation" (page 31).

Key audit findings

More effective integration of refugees requires stronger coordination of the integration process, decision-making on the integration of recipients of temporary protection, and the provision of assistance measures.

1. Refugee integration process

An integration process should be established not only for asylum seekers but also for recipients of temporary protection, in order to help them more quickly. There is a lack of coordination among the institutions involved in the integration of refugees in Lithuania, especially the more active involvement of local authorities. The authorities do not have accurate data on refugees living, studying, or working in the country, making it impossible to monitor and assist in the integration of those who are no longer receiving support (Section 1, page 9).

⁵ Preliminary study is the stage of the performance audit process that collects and evaluates information about the area of activity under review in order to identify problems. The results of the preliminary study form the basis for the main study. However, in certain circumstances, in order to rationalise the use of audit resources, the main study may not be carried out and the audit is concluded with a preliminary study: e.g. the audited entity has taken action to resolve the problems, there have been changes in the audited area that may prevent further audit work from having the required impact, etc. The preliminary study report indicates the problems identified without making recommendations to the audited entity.

With 97% of asylum seekers and 49% of Ukrainians participating in integration programmes in 2022 concentrated in three major cities, the risks of high concentrations of refugees in some parts of the country (e.g., tensions in housing supply, segregation, queues for services) need to be assessed and managed (Section 1, page 9).

A negative public attitude towards asylum seekers was determined: in 2021, 47% of Lithuanians said they would not want to live in the same neighbourhood with asylum seekers, 28% would not want to work in the same workplace, and 48% would not want to rent a house to them, thus campaigns are needed to promote public tolerance towards refugees (Section 1, page 9).

2. Provision of support and integration services for refugees

The number of asylum seekers registered with the Employment Service increased faster than the number of people in employment between 2020 and 2022: the number of registered refugees increased 3.4 times (from 114 to 393), while the number of people in employment increased 2.8 times (from 75 to 209). In 2022, 56.9% of Ukrainians registered with the Service were employed. Lack of Lithuanian language skills and qualifications, and negative social attitudes reduce the employability of refugees, people are employed in jobs below their existing qualifications, which is not sustainable. The share of asylum seekers who re-registered with the Employment Service within a 1-year period was increasing between 2020 and 2022: 30% in 2020 and 38% in 2022. Refugees' integration into the labour market would be enhanced by better knowledge of the Lithuanian language and retraining opportunities (Section 2.1, page 16).

There should be remedial classes for refugee children in municipalities where the number of children is sufficient to complete them: in 2020-2023, such classes were established in 13 municipalities⁶, but there were no such classes in Kaunas and Klaipėda. Pupils were taught Ukrainian language and/or Ukrainian history in 10 schools only (out of 33 schools inspected in June 2022 by the working group set up by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport). The education support process should be strengthened: according to data from the National Agency for Education, only about 6% of Ukrainians received education support in 2022. In 2022, 42% of the education institutions surveyed indicated that there is no monitoring of the progress and performance of non-Lithuanian speaking minors. Although refugee children's achievements are not evaluated, individual progress is assessed for each child in accordance with the provisions of the general curriculum. (Section 2.2, page 20).

There is no provision for who and how language training is to be provided to recipients of temporary protection, nor is there any provision for cultural awareness training, which is important for successful integration. 22% of Ukrainians indicated that they did not have the opportunity to attend language courses even though they wanted to. In 2022, the municipalities did not use EUR 311,000 (out of EUR 790,000) to organise language courses for Ukrainians. In 2020-2022, only 5.6% of adult asylum seekers in the Refugees Reception Centre and 37.8% in the municipalities were learning Lithuanian, but there is no requirement to organise cultural awareness training for them in the municipalities. There are no methodologies for language and culture training, and those used are not sufficient to prepare for independent living, acquire the knowledge needed for work, integrate into

⁶ Akmenė District, Jonava District, Kaunas City, Kaunas District, Kretinga District, Marijampolė, Panevėžys City, Prienai District, Radviliškis District, Raseiniai District, Šiauliai City, Švenčionys District, Vilnius City

the community, acquire education, and the effectiveness of the training is not assessed. Greater coordination is needed in teaching refugees about the Lithuanian language and culture (Section 2.2, page 20).

Refugees have access to health care, but linguistic accessibility can be improved: out of 18 healthcare institutions, 7 (39%) do not have measures in place to refer non-Lithuanian speakers to professionals who can provide services in other languages.⁷ (Section 2.3, page 26).

Reasons for concluding an audit with a preliminary study

On 3 February 2023, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour approved a project for the early integration of refugees from Ukraine⁸. The plan is to strengthen the registration of refugees and the issuance of residence permits, improve reception conditions, contribute to early integration activities for refugees in municipalities, prepare for a possible influx of third-country nationals (including the preparation of accommodation places), and to ensure a smooth exchange of data between institutions through the adaptation of the State Data Management Platform. The project has a budget of EUR 10.1 million and is planned to be implemented in 2024. The Ministry has also planned communication campaigns to promote the integration of foreigners⁹, by allocating EUR 700,000.

The refugee assistance and integration system would be better prepared if the recommendations made by the National Audit Office in previous years, which are relevant for all persons living in Lithuania, were implemented. The National Audit Office made recommendations for 2017-2021 in the areas of employment, education, healthcare, but some of them have been delayed or implemented only in part¹⁰ (see details in the Section on preliminary study).

The audit ends with a preliminary study, taking into account the developments in 2023, the planned measures for the integration of refugees, and the status of implementation of recommendations made in previous audits. The insights provided in the report will be useful for the implementation of the measures planned by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and for decision-making on improving the integration process.

⁷ Of the 22 healthcare institutions surveyed, 18 responded. Available at: https://sppd.lrv.lt/uploads/sppd/documents/files/7_TYRIMO%20ATASKAITA_NACIONALINE.pdf.

⁸ Funding description of the project "Reception and Early Integration of Refugees from Ukraine".

⁹ Development Programme 2021-2030 - Mobilisation Development Programme of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the promoter of the development programme. Activity "Organisation of a communication campaign to promote the integration of foreigners, focusing on different objectives (e.g., risk of illegal work, changing public opinion)".

¹⁰ <https://www.valstybeskontrolė.lt/LT/AtviriDuomenys>.