

ACTIVITIES OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF CONSULAR FUNCTIONS

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SUMMARY

Relevance of the Audit

In the current geopolitical situation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must respond quickly and effectively to changing events, ensure close cooperation with international partners, constantly monitor global trends, and efficiently and effectively provide consular services and assistance to Lithuanian citizens abroad. The Ministry must ensure regular consular services, such as the processing of passport and Schengen visa applications, the transmission of legal aid applications, and other important services that ensure the protection of the rights and interests of Lithuanian citizens abroad. It is also necessary to prepare adequately for Lithuania's Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2027.

Audit Objective and Scope

The objective of the audit - to assess whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures effective and efficient provision of consular assistance and consular services.

The audited entity is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which:

- ✓ formulates, organises, coordinates and monitors the implementation of foreign affairs and security policy (bilateral and multilateral relations to safeguard Lithuania's national security interests, international relations and membership of international organisations, economic security, foreign trade, development cooperation,

communication between the international community and the Lithuanian society, public and cultural diplomacy);

- ✓ formulates, organises, coordinates and monitors the implementation of the policy for the protection of the rights and interests of the Republic of Lithuania, its citizens and legal entities abroad, and the Lithuanian diaspora;
- ✓ formulates, organises, coordinates and monitors the implementation of the policy on representation of the Republic of Lithuania abroad, diplomatic and consular relations, diplomatic service, Lithuanian state and diplomatic protocol, international treaty relations and visas;
- ✓ coordinates Lithuania's representation in the European Union and its positions on European Union policy issues.

During the audit, we collected information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomatic representations and consular offices, and interviewed consular officials and staff. We assessed and provided structured information on the Ministry's strategic planning, human resources management and preparations for the EU Presidency.

The audit period is 2021-2024.

The audit was carried out in accordance with international standards of supreme audit institutions. The audit criteria, procedures performed and methods used are described in more detail in Annex 2 'Audit criteria, procedures performed and methods used' (p. 48).

Main Audit Results

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensures the efficient and effective provision of consular assistance and consular services. Improvements have been identified in the organisation and supervision of consular functions, which would help to ensure a better quality of service.

1. Organisation, performance and supervision of consular functions

- ✓ Between 2021 and 2024, the network of diplomatic representations and consular offices expanded, with the establishment of 3 diplomatic representation and 1 consular office, and the closure of 2 consular offices. The Ministry has a longer-term vision (2026-2030) to establish up to three new representations in the Indo-Pacific region, Latin America and Africa. There are no approved criteria for determining which missions will be included in the annual consular mission plan. For the period 2021-2024, the number of missions requested by the institutions was higher (10-29%) than the number of missions planned and executed. In the absence of criteria, the Ministry maintains that missions are carried out according to the human and financial resources available (Section 1.1, page 12).
- ✓ In 2024, the volume of consular activities increased by 47% during the audit period, while the number of posts of consular officers and consular staff actually performing consular functions and/or consular activities in the missions decreased by 17.3%. The workload per consular post varies considerably between representations in terms of the number of consular activities per consular post: in consular offices dealing with visa applications, the workload varied between 51 and 2 184 consular activities per post

in 2024. In 2024, there were 73 consular officers working in 52 diplomatic representations and consular offices, representing 56.6 FTEs of the total number of FTEs actually dedicated to consular work in 2024. 18% (8 out of 45) of the offices whose staff perform administrative functions indicated in the survey that other administrative functions make the performance of consular functions more difficult. In December 2024, 49 out of 73 consular officers performed administrative functions, 11 of whom did not have all these functions in their job descriptions. The Ministry does not have structured information on the performance of other functions in the representations, so it is not known which of the administrative functions performed should be included in the job descriptions (Sub-section 1.1, p. 15).

- ✓ Not all (between 19% and 52%) consular officers and consular staff performing consular functions and/or activities related to the performance of consular functions received consular training every year. The survey showed that 17% of staff had received training more than 3 years ago. 42% (52 out of 124) of consular officers and consular staff indicated that training was insufficient or partially sufficient. The absence of regular consular training for some staff members does not ensure the continuous development of competences (Sub-section 1.1, p. 18).
- ✓ All 26 selected diplomatic representations and consular offices do not register all of their consular functions (13) in the KONSREG system. 16 offices do not differentiate the time for the different services; in 17, the closest possible time to register¹ for consular functions was no more than one week, while in the remaining 9 offices, the waiting time had to be longer than one week; 3 offices did not have reservation times, and 17 did not allow for registration for a visit with family. This has an impact on the availability of services to optimise the delivery of consular services and to make more efficient use of the time available for consular services (Sub-section 1.2, p. 19).
- ✓ The Consular Procedures Management Information System used by the Ministry does not allow for centralised monitoring and analysis of service delivery times. This is only assessed during consular inspections. The self-assessment is carried out by 61% of the consular offices and is carried out at different intervals. At the time of the audit, the system was being upgraded, and the functionality to check compliance with deadlines was planned to be introduced (Sub-section 1.3, p. 27).
- ✓ The requirements for facilities for the personal service of consular visitors are met by 10 out of the 26 offices assessed. The non-compliances relate to the lack of accessibility and mobility for persons with disabilities and the lack of security and confidentiality of the service. This is important to ensure equality of access, confidentiality, and security for all visitors (Sub-section 1.2, p. 21).
- ✓ Not all selected offices (16 to 26) comply with the rules on telephone, email, and social networking. The websites of most of the offices assessed do not provide accurate and sufficient information. All the offices provide insufficiently comprehensive dissemination of e-services. In 15 out of 26 offices, all relevant information is posted in the reception area or outside. The deficiencies do not ensure adequate and sufficient information to citizens about the services provided and the ways of their delivery (Sub-section 1.2, p. 22).

¹ According to the data of 05/03/2025.

- ✓ The Ministry did not approve annual plans for consular inspections for the period 2021-2022, did not carry out any inspections in 2021, and only carried out unscheduled² inspections in 2022. There are no approved criteria for the selection of offices for inspections. According to the Ministry, the date of the last inspection is taken into account. We found that 25% (13 out of 52) of the offices had not been inspected for more than 5 years. Between 2023 and 2024, the Ministry did not carry out about one-third of the planned inspections. There is no defined process for monitoring the recommendations made in the consular inspection reports. The absence of a process for planning inspections and monitoring the implementation of recommendations does not allow for proper supervision of consular activities, which is important for improving the quality of services and the performance of the offices (Sub-section 1.3, p. 29).
- ✓ The Ministry and/or the diplomatic representation or consular office is required to provide training to the external service provider's staff, but there is no indication of how often the training should be provided. No training for visa centre staff was provided in the period 2021-2024, 1 out of 8 diplomatic representations and consular offices had provided training for the staff of 3 visa centres at the time of the audit (21/01/2025). One training session was held for the staff of the passport centres (13/02/2024). The Ministry does not have a defined process for inspections of visa and passport centres, inspection report forms have not been approved, and no monitoring of the implementation of recommendations has been established. Lack of training and proper supervision does not provide sufficient conditions to improve the quality of services provided by external service providers (Sub-section 1.4, p. 33).
- ✓ The Net Promoters Score (NPS methodology), a monitoring indicator that measures individuals' satisfaction with the consular services provided by the Ministry and diplomatic representations and consular offices, was exceeded in 2024. The achievement rate was 155%, and 9% of clients provided feedback/ratings to KONSREG in 2024, but 22 out of 46 diplomatic representations and consular offices assessed³ did not have a statistically significant number of respondents to the electronic registration system for consular services (30). The number of responses/evaluations at the level of the institutions should be encouraged to reach 30 units, as the achievement of the indicator in the current case does not reflect a representative view at the level of the institutions, which is needed to assess and improve the quality of services (Sub-section 1.2, p. 26).

2. Assessment of the Ministry's strategic planning, human resources, and preparations for the EU Presidency

- ✓ The indicators in the National Progress Plan do not cover all of the Ministry's activities, and the target assigned to it does not reflect its full contribution to national progress. In 2024, 5 out of the 18 indicators of the Ministry are not counted, and the consular performance indicator for a part (22 out of 46) of the diplomatic representations and consular offices has a small sample size and is unrepresentative. 46% of the diplomatic representations and consular offices do not have objectives related to consular activities in their action plans, and only the Consulate in Valencia quantifies its

² Annual inspection plans for 2021 and 2022 have not been approved due to Covid-19 and Russia's war against Ukraine.

³ In January 2025, Spinter research conducted the "Survey on Satisfaction of Individuals with Consular Services Provided by Diplomatic Representations and Consular Offices of the Republic of Lithuania".

performance, which does not allow for proper evaluation and reporting on performance (Sub-section 2.1, p. 35).

- ✓ The total number of departures (360) from the Ministry in the period 2021-2024 was higher than the number of recruitments (327). The number of vacant posts is increasing. Staff engagement did not increase during the entire audit period. In 2020 and 2022, the Ministry did not reach the planned value of the Engagement Index (3.6), and it decreased from 3.5 in 2020 to 3.45 in 2022. In 2023, the planned value of the Index (3.75) was slightly exceeded, at 3.8, and it was not calculated for 2024 (Sub-section 2.2, p. 36).
- ✓ The Ministry is coordinating the preparations for the Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2027. The planned actions are being carried out within the set deadlines, except for the implementation of the training programme for persons performing functions related to the Presidency of the Council of the EU, part of which is delayed (the implementation of the training programme is under the responsibility of the Agency for Public Administration) (Sub-section 2.3, p. 38).

Recommendations

1. To ensure more targeted and effective supervision of consular assistance and consular services by the Ministry:
 - ✓ approve the criteria for selecting entities for inspections;
 - ✓ provide for the Consular Procedures Management Information System to assess registration during inspections;
 - ✓ extend the scope of the information to be assessed on websites during inspections;
 - ✓ provide for monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations (audit result 1).
2. To ensure proper supervision of the services provided by external service providers:
 - ✓ assess annually the information provided by bodies that use an external service provider on the provision of training, the performance of inspections, and the results of inspections;
 - ✓ provide for periodic quality assessment of the call centre (audit result 1).
3. To ensure the timely delivery of consular services, provide for regular assessment of compliance with deadlines (audit result 1).
4. To ensure quality service delivery:
 - ✓ include an additional indicator with a target value on the evaluation of the services of external service providers for visa applications and the issuance and/or replacement of identity documents;

- ✓ include additional indicator(s) to provide a representative view of the quality of the email and call centre service (audit result 1).
- 5. To ensure transparent decision-making and public information about them, adopt criteria for the inclusion of missions in the annual plan of consular missions (audit result 1).
- 6. To ensure a balance between the administrative and consular functions of consular officers and staff, take stock of all the administrative functions performed by consular officers and staff and take measures to include them in the job description (audit result 1).
- 7. To increase access to consular services, provide for public information measures on services that can be accessed both electronically and by visiting a diplomatic representation or consular office (audit result 1).

We have submitted proposals in writing to the Ministry on the rotation process for consular officers, the handling of complaints, and the management of crisis and emergency coordination.

The measures and deadlines for the implementation of the recommendations, the expected impact of the audit and the indicators for measuring change are set out in the report in the section 'Plan for the implementation of the recommendations' (p. 40). Up-to-date information on the status of implementation of the recommendations, results and developments is published in open data on the National Audit Office website: <https://www.valstybeskontrole.lt/LT/AtviriDuomenys>.