Red cross publishes its Asylum and Reception Monitoring Report for 2024

The Lithuanian Red Cross (hereinafter referred to as LRC) is the sole non-governmental organization (NGO) operating in Lithuania that conducts independent monitoring of the reception and protection of asylum seekers, as well as their access to the asylum procedure. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is the only other entity that undertakes similar activities, with which the LRC collaborates to carry out monitoring.

In certain cases, the Office of the Comptroller of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania also participates in this effort.

Throughout the year, LRC observers visit border units, accommodation and detention centers for foreigners, and other facilities where asylum seekers are temporarily housed or detained. Following each visit, a detailed report is compiled, outlining the observations made during the visit. These reports are submitted to the relevant institutions.

At the end of each year, the LRC's annual monitoring report systematizes the information gathered by LRC monitors, presenting observations from visits and interviews with asylum seekers and institutional representatives, as well as migration trends of foreigners who may be in need of international protection in Lithuania and the region. The 2024 LRC annual monitoring report provides an update on the issues and changes affecting access to the asylum procedure, highlighting the challenges faced by individuals entering Lithuania through both official border control points (BCPs) and irregular means. The report also examines the conditions for the reception and protection of asylum seekers at border units and in accommodation and detention centers for foreigners.

Furthermore, it discusses the so-called "Latvian transit" phenomenon, which emerged in 2023, involving foreigners who entered Lithuania via Latvia. The report briefly presents the monitoring findings from initial asylum seeker surveys. Over the past few years, the focus of LRC monitoring has undergone significant changes. Prior to 2021, the primary emphasis was on reception and protection conditions. However, in the summer of 2021, a new issue emerged: the push-back of foreigners attempting to cross the border irregularly. While the issue of reception and protection remains relevant, the establishment of three new

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centers in 2021 and subsequent closures have led to improved conditions. In both 2023 and 2024, it was concluded that the reception and protection conditions for asylum seekers generally meet recommended standards.

The main problem since mid-2024 has been the lack of interpreters at the Foreigners Registration Centre (FRC) in Pabrad, administered by the State Border Guard Service (SBGS), and to a lesser extent, at certain branches of the Refugee Reception Centre (RRC). This shortage has particularly affected the quality of services, such as medical or psychological consultations.

The 2024 report concludes that, based on recent observations, access to the asylum procedure in Lithuania is being systematically restricted, and the limited opportunities to apply for asylum remain the most problematic area in the asylum context.

Changes observed in 2024 that have reduced access to asylum in Lithuania include: the closure of two international border crossing points with Belarus; a ban on entering the border crossing with Belarus on foot or by bicycle, requiring arrival by motor vehicle; and a prohibition on disembarking passengers from transit trains passing through Lithuania, except in exceptional cases. In 2024, a new practice was observed, where push-backs are irregularly applied to Belarusian citizens attempting to cross the border, posing an extremely high risk to the health and life of asylum seekers due to the potential violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

Additionally, no cases of registration of asylum applications from citizens of the Russian Federation who entered Lithuania via official border crossing points were recorded in 2024. Given that citizens of the Russian Federation comprised the majority of foreigners seeking asylum at international border crossing points prior to 2022 and currently constitute the second-largest group of asylum seekers in Lithuania, their complete absence from the statistics of applications submitted at border crossing points is difficult to explain. However, unlike in 2023, LRC observers did not record any specific cases in 2024 where asylum applications from citizens of the Russian Federation were not registered at border crossing points. Nevertheless, there have been instances of pushing back citizens of the Russian Federation while attempting to cross the border irregularly.

During the 2022-2023 period, a significant issue arose when foreigners suffered frostbite to their limbs due to prolonged exposure to the harsh winter conditions in the border forests. According to records, five cases of amputations were reported in 2022-2023, with four of these individuals requiring prosthetic legs or

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feet. In 2024, the Lithuanian Red Cross (LRC) received information about a similar incident, in which a foreigner underwent toe amputation due to frostbite at the border.

This case was reported at the beginning of 2024, and by the end of the year, there were no further reports of foreigners being hospitalized after being rescued from the border area. For the second consecutive year, another highly problematic issue persists, namely the detention of foreigners who entered Lithuania via Latvia or were transferred from Poland. In 2024, the LRC observed a practice of de facto detention, where individuals from this group were held incommunicado in VSAT units for extended periods, sometimes up to five weeks.

Unfortunately, the exact conditions of reception and protection afforded to these individuals remain unclear, as LRC monitors lack access to this category of persons. In cases known to the LRC, it was found that during the initial days of detention, foreigners were often denied even the minimum recommended conditions, highlighting a pressing need for improved treatment and care.

Source(s)

- Lithuanian Red Cross | Lietuvos Raudonasis Kryžius (10 June, 2025), (2025 m. balandis). 2024 m. stebėsenos ataskaita translate [(April 2025). 2024 Monitoring Report], https://redcross.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/LRK-metine-stebesenos-ataskaita-2024-1.pdf

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