According to the 2024 Human Rights Monitoring Report in Lithuania , the state of emergency that entered into force in 2021 due to the mass influx of foreigners continued in Lithuania last year. It fundamentally changes the country's asylum policy, as migrants attempting to cross the Lithuanian border at places not designated for this purpose are turned back at the border on the assumption that their arrival is artificially organized with the participation of foreign states. In other words, turning back individuals during a state of emergency becomes the default response.

According to the data of the State Border Guard Service (SBS), in 2024, 1,002 persons were turned back who attempted to cross the Lithuanian border with Belarus irregularly. In most cases, these people did not even enter Lithuania or returned to the territory of Belarus on their own after seeing officers patrolling the border. For this reason, the country of origin or other data that would help identify them remained unknown for as many as 592 persons (59 percent).

Among the 410 persons whose data on the country of origin was collected, the most common attempts to enter Lithuania were made by citizens of Iran, Afghanistan, Cuba, Iraq and Somalia. It is worth noting that among the turned back persons there were also 16 Syrian citizens, who are granted international protection in the European Union in as many as 88 percent of cases.

It is true that the applications of 43 foreigners who crossed the border of the Republic of Lithuania with the Republic of Belarus at an undesignated place were nevertheless accepted, but the SBGS could not indicate the reasons why these individuals were given the opportunity to submit asylum applications, because, according to the SBGS, such data is not collected or systematized. The practice of refoulement is incompatible with Lithuania's international obligations and obligations arising from its membership in the European Union in the field of human rights and freedoms protection and asylum law the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms prohibits the collective expulsion of foreigners.

Therefore, Lithuania has received comments not only from local but also from international human rights organizations. The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances criticized the practice of refoulement in its preliminary report and called for its cessation, as people who are denied entry to the country lose legal protection and are at greater risk of disappearance.

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The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has also presented similar conclusions. Since the identity of the majority of those denied entry to Lithuania in 2024 remains unknown, it becomes much more difficult or even impossible to assist relatives searching for the missing in cases of their disappearance. The decision not to collect personal data is based on the aim of ensuring the application of the General Data Protection Regulation, which in principle should strengthen the legal protection of individuals, but in this case has the opposite effect.

Among other things, the health of those being turned back is also at risk. It is worth noting that last year, only 115 humanitarian aid packages were delivered in cases of turning back ? barely more than a tenth of irregular migrants received them. Although the State Service for Migration did not record any injuries that could have long-term health consequences, there were two cases of hospitalization.

One of the victims was a baby. However, such statistics do not reflect the real situation. For example, according to the Lithuanian Red Cross, a family of Cuban citizens who were pushed back to Belarus were initially stuck at the border between the two countries without food and water, and were later forced to cross the Latvian border irregularly, where, according to a relative of the family, they were subjected to violence by local officials. Eventually, the individuals managed to reach the Medininkai border checkpoint, where they were allowed to submit asylum applications. However, the injuries sustained by the two male Cuban citizens were very serious. One of them had a broken jaw, the other had ribs.

The Seimas Ombudsperson's Office recommends that the Government reassess the need to continue the state of emergency and review the policy of reversal, seeking its compatibility with Lithuania's obligations in the areas of human rights and asylum law. It also proposed to define armed conflicts from which persons fleeing would not be subject to denial of entry to the territory of Lithuania, thus protecting the rights of the most vulnerable groups.

Source(s)

- Seimas Ombudsmen's Office | Lietuvos Seimo Kontrolieriai (20 June, 2025), Lietuvos prieglobsčio politikoje trūksta dėmesio žmogui [Lithuania's asylum policy lacks attention to people], https://www.lrski.lt/naujienos/lietuvos-prieglobscio-politikoje-truksta-demesio-zmogui/

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