



2021



LITHUANIAN RED CROSS MONITORING REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2021 was exceptional for all those working in a field of migration: the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania (MoI) and its subordinate institutions: the State Border Guard Service (SBGS) and the Migration Department (MD), the Refugee Reception Centre (RRC), which is under the authority of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania (MSSL), as well as for others, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In general, a number of new stakeholders have emerged during the year who have been included, for example, some of the Lithuanian municipalities that have accommodated migrants.

The unprecedented wave of irregularly arriving migrants in Lithuania has fundamentally shaken the whole migration system in the country and any planning or projections of the expected strain on the system, ranging from accommodation to legal procedures. Lack of preparedness, infrastructure and human resources have altered the procedures applied so far.

Significant changes in national legislation, national and EU asylum and migration policies have caused that the year of 2021 cannot be measured in a balanced way. Therefore, in this Annual Monitoring Report of the Lithuanian Red Cross (LRC), the results for the first and second half of the year are summarised separately. The monitoring of reception conditions has been complemented by the highly relevant dimension of protection conditions. For the first time, a situation was encountered in which actually all migrants entering Lithuania were *de facto* detained.

The aim of this report is to summarise the monitoring results recorded by the LRC in 2021, highlighting the main aspects: the challenges encountered, the changes achieved, as well as the cooperation of NGOs with the state authorities during this critical period.

2021 is also exceptional in the context of migration monitoring. In addition to the LRC, other institutions and NGOs have also been monitoring the situation as circumstances have changed. At the national level, the activities of the Seimas Ombudsmen's Office, the Office of the Ombudsman for the Protection of Children's Rights, the Office of the Ombudsman for Equal Opportunities, and the National Public Health Centre can be outlined. At the international level, the situation in Lithuania was monitored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the World Health Organisation, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, "Amnesty International", and others.

The report provides a wide range of data from different perspectives. Due to the complexity of the situation, some statistical discrepancies may occur. The report is based on data recorded by the LRC, as well as statistical information from the SBGS and the MD. The report contains information collected in the framework of two implemented projects funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and UNHCR. However, this report does not focus on statistical analysis but rather on revealing trends and systematically recurring aspects, inviting for a discussion on lessons learned and the importance of cooperation in the face of challenges.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION OF 2021: FIGURES AND FACTS

Based on the agreement of 2 June 2010 between the SBGS, UNHCR and the LRC and the agreement of 27 February 2020 between the RRC and the LRC, the monitoring in 2021 was carried out by two LRC monitors.

The main objectives of the monitoring are: **to monitor** (to have access to legally defined places of filing requests, to documents, asylum seekers, etc.); **to collect and assess** (to objectively record how procedures are carried out and whether reception conditions comply with the standards in force, as well as to analyse the available material); **to inform** (to provide information and cooperate with the state authorities which are required by law to ensure appropriate reception conditions); and **to deliver change** necessary to ensure the fundamental rights of asylum seekers.

1. MONITORING STATISTICS

116 monitoring visits were carried out in 2021. Of these, 92 were carried out through physical site visits and 24 were carried out remotely (via video platforms or mobile phone) due to the pandemics and limited access. In 9 cases, the initial interviews of asylum seekers were monitored. For more, see *Figure 1*.

92 reports were prepared (AMIF: 52, UNHCR: 40)¹. Due to the scope of the monitored site, both LRC monitors went on 19 visits. For some of the visits during the crisis, the LRC monitors were accompanied by UNHCR, ICRC and IFRC representatives.

For 31 reports (or almost one third of all reports), feedback was received in the form of institutional comments and/or additions to the report.

In comparison, in 2020, when movement in Lithuania and worldwide was restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemics, in total the LRC monitors carried out 37 visits and prepared 37 reports. The AMIF project carried out 9 visits and produced 9 reports, while UNHCR carried out 28 and 28 respectively. Meanwhile, in 2019, 54 monitoring visits were carried out and 54 reports were produced (AMIF: 28, UNHCR: 26).

Figure 1: LRC monitoring visits: mode of access, purpose and the project for which the visit was carried out.

LRC MONITORING VISITS IN 2021					
No.	Date of visit	Place of visit	Access	Monitoring purpose	Project
First half-year					
1	11/01/2021	Šalčininkai BCP	Remote	Reception conditions	AMIF
2	21/01/2021	Eišiškės BCP	In person	Covid-19 prevention recommendations	AMIF
3	25/01/2021	Švenčionys FS	In person	Reception conditions	UNHCR
4	25/01/2021	Raigardas BCP	In person	Reception conditions	AMIF
5	27/01/2021	Pabradė FRC	Remote	Issue-based monitoring	AMIF

¹ 12 monitoring reports of the LRC cover more than one visit carried out, so the number of visits and reports differs.

6	11/02/2021	Švenčionys FS	In person	Reception conditions	AMIF
7	11/02/2021	Pabradė FRC	In person	Case analysis	AMIF
8	17/02/2021	Vilnius	Remote	Reception conditions	UNHCR
9	23/02/2021	Švenčionys FS	In person	Initial interview	UNHCR
10	17/02/2021	Pabradė FRC	Remote	Case analysis	AMIF
11	23/02/2021	Švenčionys FS	Remote	Reception conditions	UNHCR
12	25/02/2021	Rukla RRC	Remote	Issue-based monitoring	AMIF
13	05/03/2021	A. Barauskas FS	Remote	Reception conditions	AMIF
14	06/03/2021	Raigardas BCP	Remote	Reception conditions	UNHCR
15	16/03/2021	Pabradė FRC	Remote	Initial interview	UNHCR
16	09/03/2021	Rukla RRC	Remote	Reception conditions	AMIF
17	13/04/2021	Raigardas BCP	Remote	Initial interview	UNHCR
18	13/04/2021	Kapčiamiestis FS	Remote	Reception conditions	UNHCR
19	16/04/2021	Kapčiamiestis FS	Remote	Reception conditions	AMIF
20	16/04/2021	Tribonys FS	In person	Initial interview	UNHCR
21	24/04/2021	Kapčiamiestis FS	Remote	Reception conditions	AMIF
22	10/05/2021	A. Barauskas FS	Remote	Reception conditions	AMIF
23	10/05/2021	Raigardas BCP	Remote	Initial interview	UNHCR
24	17/05/2021	SBGS Varėna FD	In person	Initial interview	UNHCR
25	20/05/2021	G. Žagunis FS	Remote	Reception conditions	AMIF
26	24/05/2021	Kapčiamiestis FS	Remote	Reception conditions	AMIF
27	25/05/2021	Pabradė FRC	Remote	Initial interview	UNHCR
28	01/06/2021	Rukla RRC	Remote	Initial interview	UNHCR
29	02/06/2021	Pabradė FRC	Remote	Issue-based monitoring	UNHCR
30	02/06/2021	Kena FS	Remote	Reception conditions	AMIF
31	09/06/2021	Švenčionys FS	Remote	Reception conditions	UNHCR
32	15/06/2021	Rukla RRC	In person	Issue-based monitoring	UNHCR
33	11/06/2021	Border Guards School	In person	Reception conditions	AMIF
34	11/06/2021	G. Žagunis FS	In person	Reception conditions	AMIF
35	11/06/2021	A. Barauskas FS	In person	Reception conditions	AMIF
36	11/06/2021	Kabeliai FS	In person	Reception conditions	AMIF
37	22/06/2021	Pabradė FRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
Second half-year					
38	01/07/2021	Pabradė FRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
39	01/07/2021	Border Guards School	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
40	07/07/2021	Vydeniai camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
41	07/07/2021	Alytus camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
42	07/07/2021	Verebiejai camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
43	07/07/2021	Pabradė FRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
44	15/07/2021	Tverečius FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
45	15/07/2021	Adučiškis FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
46	16/07/2021	Linkmenys camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
47	26/07/2021	Kazitiškis camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
48	13/07/2021	Rukla RRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
49	01/07/2021	G. Žagunis FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
50	01/07/2021	Purvėnai FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
51	19/07/2021	Padvarionys FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
52	19/07/2021	Medininkai BCP	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
53	21/07/2021	Druskininkai FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
54	21/07/2021	Kabeliai FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
55	22/07/2021	G. Žagunis FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
56	26/07/2021	Pūškos FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
57	28/07/2021	Kapčiamiestis FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF

58	28/07/2021	Kapčiamiestis camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
59	03/08/2021	Tribonys FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
60	03/08/2021	Purvėnai FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
61	04/08/2021	Rūdninkai training ground	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
62	06/08/2021	Verebiejai camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
63	06/08/2021	Alytus camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
64	10/08/2021	Pavoverė FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
65	18/08/2021	Švendubrė RBCP	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
66	13/08/2021	Lavoriškės FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
67	13/08/2021	Padvarionys FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
68	24/08/2021	Rūdninkai training ground	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
69	26/08/2021	Vydeniai camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
70	26/08/2021	Adutiškis FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
71	27/08/2021	Kybartai penitentiary	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
72	02/09/2021	Kazitiškis camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
73	02/09/2021	Druskininkai FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
74	06/09/2021	G. Žagunis FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
75	07/09/2021	Kabeliai FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
76	07/09/2021	Naujininkai RRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
77	13/09/2021	Medininkai FRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
78	09/09/2021	Linkmenys camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
79	14/09/2021	Pūškos FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
80	14/09/2021	Tverėčius FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
81	15/09/2021	Kapčiamiestis FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
82	15/09/2021	Kapčiamiestis camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
83	16/09/2021	Pavoverė FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
84	08/09/2021	Švendubrė RBCP	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
85	20/09/2021	Kena FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
86	21/09/2021	Jieznas family support centre	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
87	23/09/2021	Verebiejai camp	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
88	27/09/2021	Pabradė FRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
89	29/09/2021	Rukla RRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF

90	06/10/2021	Pabradė FRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
91	11/10/2021	Druskininkai FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
92	11/10/2021	Kabeliai FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
93	18/10/2021	Border Guards School	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
94	18/10/2021	Padvarionys FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
95	20/10/2021	Kybartai FRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
96	25/10/2021	Kabeliai FS	In person	Reception conditions	AMIF
97	26/10/2021	Adučiškis FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
98	25/10/2021	A. Barauskas FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions	AMIF
99	27/10/2021	Tverečius FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
100	03/11/2021	Kena FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
101	03/11/2021	Lavoriškės FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
102	03/11/2021	Lavoriškės BCP	In person	Reception conditions	AMIF
103	05/11/2021	Naujininkai RRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
104	09/11/2021	Švenčionys FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	UNHCR
105	11/11/2021	Lavoriškės BCP	In person	Reception conditions	AMIF
106	16/11/2021	Tribonys FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
107	16/11/2021	G. Žagunis FS	In person	Reception and protection conditions (second)	AMIF
108	23/11/2021	Padvarionys FS	In person	Reception conditions	AMIF
109	25/11/2021	Pabradė FRC	In person	Reception and protection conditions	UNHCR
110	30/11/2021	Rukla RRC	In person	Issue-based monitoring	AMIF
111	02/12/2021	Naujininkai RRC	In person	Issue-based monitoring	AMIF
112	08/12/2021	Pabradė FRC	In person	Issue-based monitoring	AMIF
113	09/12/2021	Kybartai FRC	In person	Issue-based monitoring	AMIF
114	13/12/2021	Jieznas family support centre	In person	Issue-based monitoring	AMIF
115	14/12/2021	Medininkai FRC	In person	Issue-based monitoring	AMIF
116	27/12/2021	Druskininkai FS	Remote	Initial interview	UNHCR
Total:		116 visits	In person: 92	Remote: 24	AMIF: 72 UNHCR: 44

The most frequently monitored objects (including remote monitoring): the SBGS Pabradė Foreigners Registration Centre (FRC) – 13; Rukla RRC – 7; SBGS G. Žagunis Frontier Station (FS) and Kapčiamiestis FS – 6 in each; Švenčionys FS and Kabeliai FS – 5 in each.

2. BORDER MIGRATION STATISTICS

Looking at migration flows from a geographical perspective, **the largest number of irregularly arriving migrants in 2021 were located in the border sections of the SBGS within the borders of the following municipalities².**

- 1. Varėna District Municipality** (area of operation of A. Barauskas FS, Kabeliai FS) – 955;
- 2. Šalčininkai District Municipality** (area of operation of G. Žagunis FS, Tribonys FS, Purvėnai FS) – 932;
- 3. Druskininkai District Municipality** (area of operation of Druskininkai FS) – 880;
- 4. Ignalina District Municipality** (area of operation of Pūškos FS, Tverečius FS) – 573;
- 5. Švenčionys District Municipality** (area of operation of Švenčionys FS, Adutiškis FS, Pavoverė FS) – 459.

Countries of origin of irregularly arriving migrants in 2021 (detailed data on how many of these persons have applied for asylum in the course of their stay was not available at the time of drafting)³:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Iraq - 2,858 (66%); | 15. Turkey – 25; |
| 2. Congo – 203 (4.7%); | 16. Democratic Republic of Congo – 23; |
| 3. Syria – 179 (4.1%); | 17. Ivory Coast – 23; |
| 4. Cameroon – 135 (3.1%); | 18. Gambia – 19; |
| 5. Belarus – 106 (2.5%); | 19. Somalia – 19; |
| 6. Afghanistan – 101; | 20. Mali – 18; |
| 7. Russia – 89; | 21. Tajikistan – 17; |
| 8. Iran – 87; | 22. Yemen – 17; |
| 9. Guinea – 81; | 23. Senegal – 15; |
| 10. Sri Lanka – 80; | 24. Eritrea – 10; |
| 11. India – 67; | 25. Other – 71; |
| 12. Nigeria – 29; | |
| 13. Togo – 27; | In total: 4,326. |
| 14. Pakistan – 27; | |

Composition of irregular migrants by age category in 2021:

- 0-9 years:** 509;
- 10-19 years:** 867;
- 20-29 years:** 1,885;
- 30-39 years:** 736;
- 40-49 years:** 243;
- 50-59 years:** 63;
- 60+ years:** 23.

² These statistics do not include migrants arriving through official border checkpoints. See Department of Statistics of the Republic of Lithuania, Irregular Migration Data 2021 (access - 1 January 2022): <https://ls-osp-sdg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/9b0a008b1fff41a88c5efcc61a876be2>

³ See Ibid

3. GENERAL ASYLUM STATISTICS

According to the MD, 3,597 asylum applications were accepted in Lithuania by 1 November 2021. More than 80% of them were submitted in the second half of the year. The highest number of applications was accepted in August (1,160)⁴ – see Figure 2.

The statistics below include not only foreigners who arrived during the main migration flow in summer but also, for example, Afghan translators and their relatives transferred to Lithuania who have been granted refugee status, as well as Eritrean family members resettled from Ethiopia.

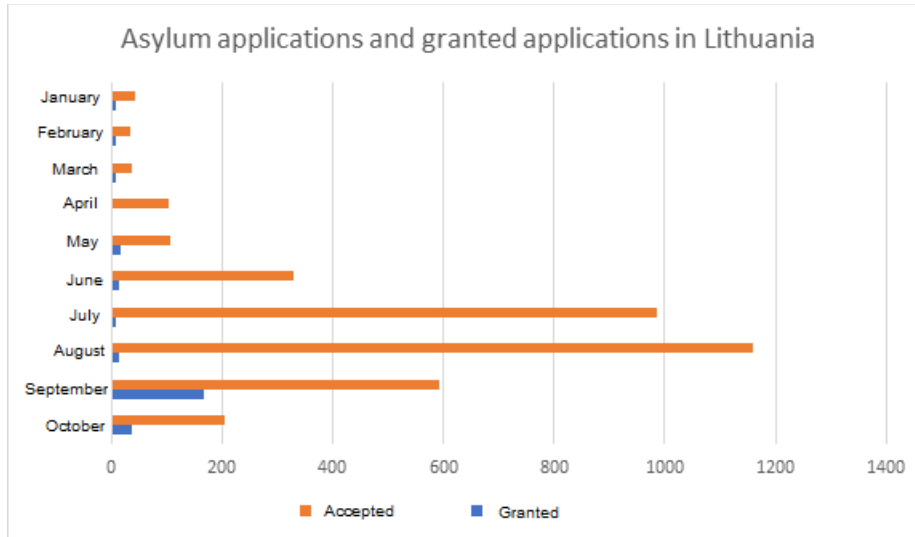


Figure 2: Asylum applications and granted applications by month until 1 November 2021⁵.

Most common countries of origin (data by 1 November 2021)⁶:

1. Iraq: 2,164 asylum applications (60.1% of all applications);
2. Afghanistan: 220 (6.1%);
3. Belarus: 182 (5.1%);
4. Russian Federation: 121 (3.4%);
5. Cameroon: 114 (3.2%);
6. Syria: 109 (3%);
7. Congo: 98 (2.7%);
8. Guinea: 74 (2.1%);
9. Democratic Republic of Congo: 60 (1.7%);
10. Iran: 57 (1.6%);

Asylum applications from these 10 countries constitute almost 89% of all applications (see Figure 3).

⁴ See <https://migracija.lrv.lt/lt/statistika/prieglobscio-skyriaus-statistika/statistika-1/2021-metai>

⁵ No official MD annual statistics have been published. Calculated since current monthly MD data.

⁶ See <https://migracija.lrv.lt/lt/statistika/prieglobscio-skyriaus-statistika/statistika-1/2021-metai>

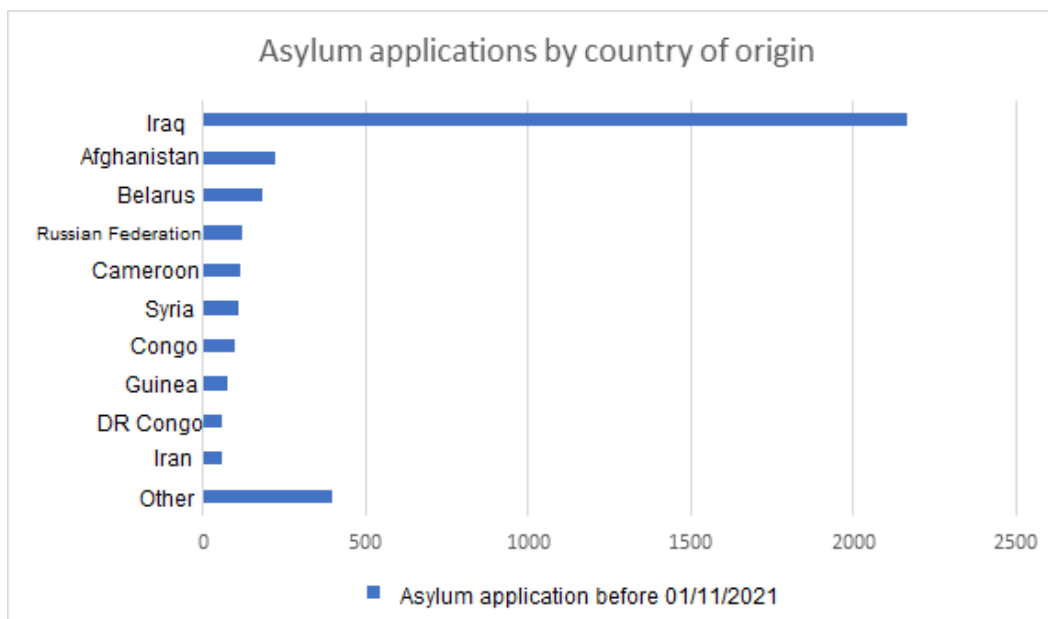


Figure 3: Asylum applications by country of origin until 1 November 2021.

For comparison, in 2020, according to the data of the MD and the SBGS, 321 asylum applications were submitted in Lithuania. By country of origin, the most prominent numbers were among citizens of Russian Federation (88 asylum seekers or 27% of all applicants), Belarus (81/25%) and Tajikistan (62/19%). The citizens of these three countries constituted 72% of all asylum seekers.

By 1 November 2021 the MD had granted 283 applications (granting refugee status or subsidiary protection), **representing 7.8% of the total number of applications⁷** (see Figure 2). The highest number of applications was granted in September (168). 166 of these (or almost 99%) were granted asylum to Afghan nationals⁸. **On 1 November 2021, there were 1,800 asylum applications pending.**

Refugee status or subsidiary protection was granted to citizens of 10 countries: Afghanistan (180 or about 64% of all applications granted), Belarus (53), Eritrea (24), Syria (9), Russian Federation (6), Tajikistan (4), Iraq (2), Turkey (2), Azerbaijan (1), China (1).

According to the data of the SBGS, until 31 December 2021 (inclusive), 3,039 asylum applications have been submitted in Lithuania (276 – at the border⁹, 2 763 – within the country¹⁰). The highest number of applications was submitted in July (1,467). August is notable for the number of asylum applications submitted at the border (194), while other months do not exceed 40. The number of asylum applications at the border in August also increased due to the aforementioned displaced Afghan nationals who applied for asylum at the airport’s BCP.

⁷ See Ibid

⁸ This increase in the number of applications granted by the MD is related to the aforementioned asylum seekers displaced from Afghanistan who had assisted the Lithuanian Armed Forces, the UN, the EU and other institutions during the previous mission in Afghanistan. In summer Afghan citizens were evacuated to Lithuania. <https://migracija.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/prieglobstis-suteiktas-visiems-i-lietuva-perkeltiems-afganistanieciams>.

⁹ It counts foreigners who have applied for asylum at official international land, air, and sea BCPs.

¹⁰ It counts foreigners who have applied for asylum at MD offices, as well as those who have entered the country by irregular crossing the border and those who have been detained on Lithuanian territory.

II. FIRST HALF OF 2021 (JANUARY TO JUNE)

The first six months were marked by the fact that the country was still under quarantine due to Covid-19¹¹. This caused limited physical access for monitors to the sites. Although no official ban was in place and a few visits took place, it was recommended to avoid direct contact. Live visits were allowed during the monitoring of initial interviews but reception conditions were recommended to be assessed remotely. In cooperation with the SBGS headquarters and the Frontier Stations (FS), officers assisted with video calls via computer or telephone, as well as sent photos of the premises, food parcels, etc. on request.

The end of the first half was marked by the unplanned expansion of the Pabradė FRC, when a significant increase in migration flows led to a shortage of space in two reception centres, including the RRC in Rukla, and to the urgent organisation of the country's first temporary tent camp.

1. ACTUAL DATA FOR THE 1ST HALF OF THE YEAR (UP TO 1 JULY 2021)

2021	37 monitoring visits
January - June	14 visits in person and 23 remote visits
	32 reports produced

In total, 37 visits were carried out (22 by AMIF and 15 by UNHCR). **There were 14 visits in person and 23 remote visits.** In 8 cases, initial migration interviews were monitored in the framework of the UNHCR project, while in the other cases, monitoring of reception conditions was carried out, as well as the implementation of the Covid-19 recommendations, the preparedness for reception of asylum seekers in crisis situations, and issue-based monitoring of access to education during quarantine and the mental health situation.

32 reports were produced (18 by AMIF and 14 by UNHCR). One of the reports covers more than 1 visit.

In terms of monitoring visits by marital status, the most frequent monitoring visits were of single men (12 cases); families with one or more children (5); single mothers with one or more children (2); unaccompanied minors (2); single fathers with one or more children (1); spouses (1). In other cases, a larger group of people was monitored on the ground of issue-based monitoring.

1.1. SBGS reports on asylum seekers

In the first half, 91 cases of asylum applications filed at the units of the SBGS (not at the MD offices) were recorded. Of these, 82 were reported to the LRC monitors (90%) and at least 9 were not reported. In 5 cases (2 of them were recorded in April, 3 in May) it was not reported about 13

¹¹ The quarantine was in force from 00:00 am on 7 November 2020 until 12:00 pm on 30 June 2021. A state of emergency was declared nationwide from 1 July 2021.

persons returned under Dublin III Regulation via Vilnius Airport BCP, in 1 case it was not reported about 2 citizens of the Russian Federation who applied for asylum at Lavoriškės BCP, 3 more cases were not reported concerning 20 persons at the end of June at G. Žagunis FS and Adutiškis FS, when signs of the emerging migration crisis were already visible and the receipt of information from the SBGS border units became disruptive.

The largest number of reports on asylum seekers was received from the following border units of the SBGS: Kapčiamiestis FS (15); Vilnius Airport BCP, Švenčionys FS and Pūškos FS (10 each); A. Barauskas FS and G. Žagunis FS (9 each).

The largest number of asylum applications, counting all persons (out of 639), according to the reports, was recorded in the following border units: Pūškos FS (140); Kapčiamiestis FS and G. Žagunis FS (132 each); Švenčionys FS (63); Adutiškis FS (38); and A. Barauskas FS (33).

Data on asylum seekers on the basis of sex, age and marital status as reported by the SBGS: out of 639 registered persons, at least 194 were women, 410 were men, 156 were minors, 28 of them were unaccompanied¹². 35 persons were not identified on the basis of sex, age or marital status due to lack of data.

1.2. Total national statistics on asylum seekers

According to the MD¹³, 653 asylum applications were received in the first half of the year (as mentioned above, during the same period, the LRC monitors received reports from the SBGS about 639 persons as potential asylum seekers). As it is known, some foreigners apply for asylum through the MD units, so there may be discrepancies between the figures here and elsewhere, as the LRC receives current information on asylum seekers only from the SBGS.

Meanwhile, according to the data of the SBGS, 790 asylum applications were submitted in the country in the first half of the year (11 at the border, 779 within the country). Due to the strong increase in migration figures in June, the SBGS summary does not distinguish between asylum seekers registered in SBGS units and those registered in MD offices. This may have led to discrepancies with the data provided by the MD.

1.3. Lithuania in the EU context

According to Eurostat data, the number of first-time asylum seekers in the EU in the first half of 2021 was 200,445 or less than 2% higher than in the first half of 2020, when the number of first-time asylum seekers was 197,730¹⁴.

By the end of the first half of 2021, the number of asylum seekers in Lithuania has started to increase strongly. Meanwhile, in the EU context and comparing the first and second quarters, the number of asylum seekers increased by approximately 10% between April and June¹⁵.

¹² The number of minors (especially unaccompanied minors) has fluctuated as age determination procedures have been organised and the official number of minors has fallen sharply over time.

¹³ See <https://migracija.lrv.lt/lt/statistika/prieglobscio-skyriaus-statistika/statistika-1/2021-metai>

¹⁴ See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZM_custom_1899339/default/table?lang=en

¹⁵ See Ibid

While the first quarter of 2021 is not exceptional compared to the beginning of 2020, the second quarter (April-June) stands out with regard to 4 countries. Lithuania, together with Poland, Bulgaria and Croatia, recorded the highest increase in number of first-time asylum seekers at EU level in the second quarter of 2021 compared to the same quarter in 2020. Lithuania recorded the number of asylum seekers more than 20 times higher compared to the same period a year ago (2nd quarter of 2020: 25, 2nd quarter of 2021: 510), while the numbers in Poland (80 / 700) and Bulgaria (175 / 1415) increased 8 times, and in Croatia (95 / 640) – 6 times¹⁶. It should be kept in mind that 2020 was a pandemic year and the movement of foreigners was severely restricted.

According to the trends in successful asylum applications, for example, for the whole year of 2020, 41% of all first-time asylum applications in EU countries were granted in the first instance¹⁷, while in Lithuania, by mid-2021, only 8.7% of applications were granted (refugee status or subsidiary protection), counting both first-time and repeated asylum applications.¹⁸

According to the MD data, in the first half of the year, the largest share of asylum seekers consisted of the citizens from Iraq (280), Belarus (120), Russian Federation (51), Syria and Iran (44 each), Tajikistan (37), Turkey (15) and Afghanistan (12). The number of citizens of any other country was below 10¹⁹. For more on the percentage distribution, *see Figure 4*.

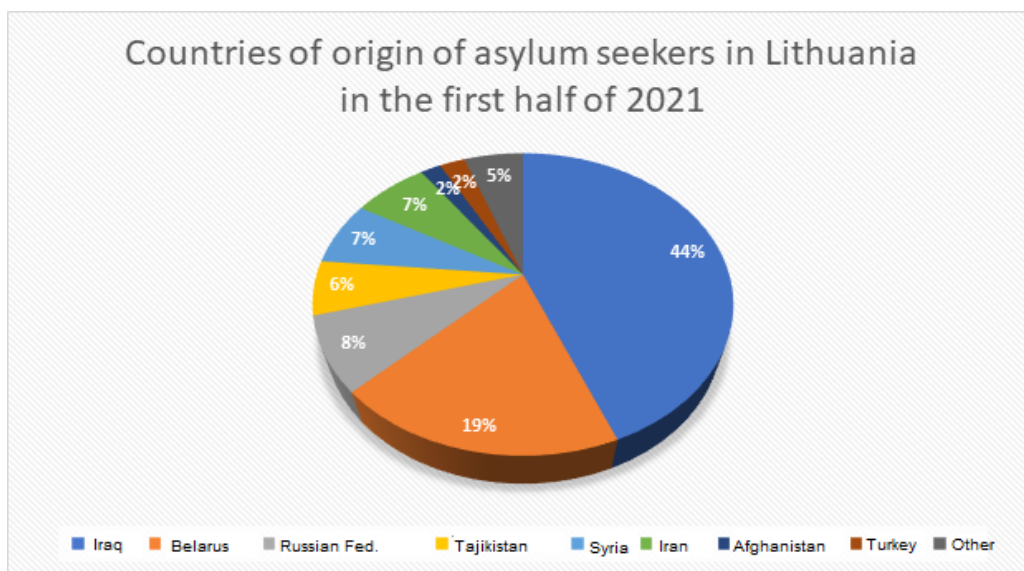


Figure 4: Countries of origin of asylum seekers in Lithuania in the first half of 2021.

At EU level, the countries of origin of asylum seekers vary. Out of 200,445 asylum seekers in the first half of 2021, the largest numbers are among citizens from Syria (40,340), Afghanistan (24,840), Pakistan (8,270), Iraq (7,855), Turkey (6,385), Somalia (6 370), Bangladesh (5,950), Morocco (5,505), Nigeria (5,200) and Venezuela (4,980)²⁰. Citizens of these 10 countries represent almost 58% of all asylum seekers. For more on the percentage distribution, *see Figure 5*.

¹⁶ See Ibid

¹⁷ See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asylum_statistics

¹⁸ See <https://migracija.lrv.lt/lt/statistika/prieglobscio-skyriaus-statistika/statistika-1/2021-metai>

¹⁹ See Ibid

²⁰ See https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asylum_quarterly_report#Where_do_asylum_applicants_come_from.3F

At EU level, the top 10 does not include, for example, the Russian Federation or Tajikistan, one of the most frequent countries of origin of asylum seekers in Lithuania in recent years.

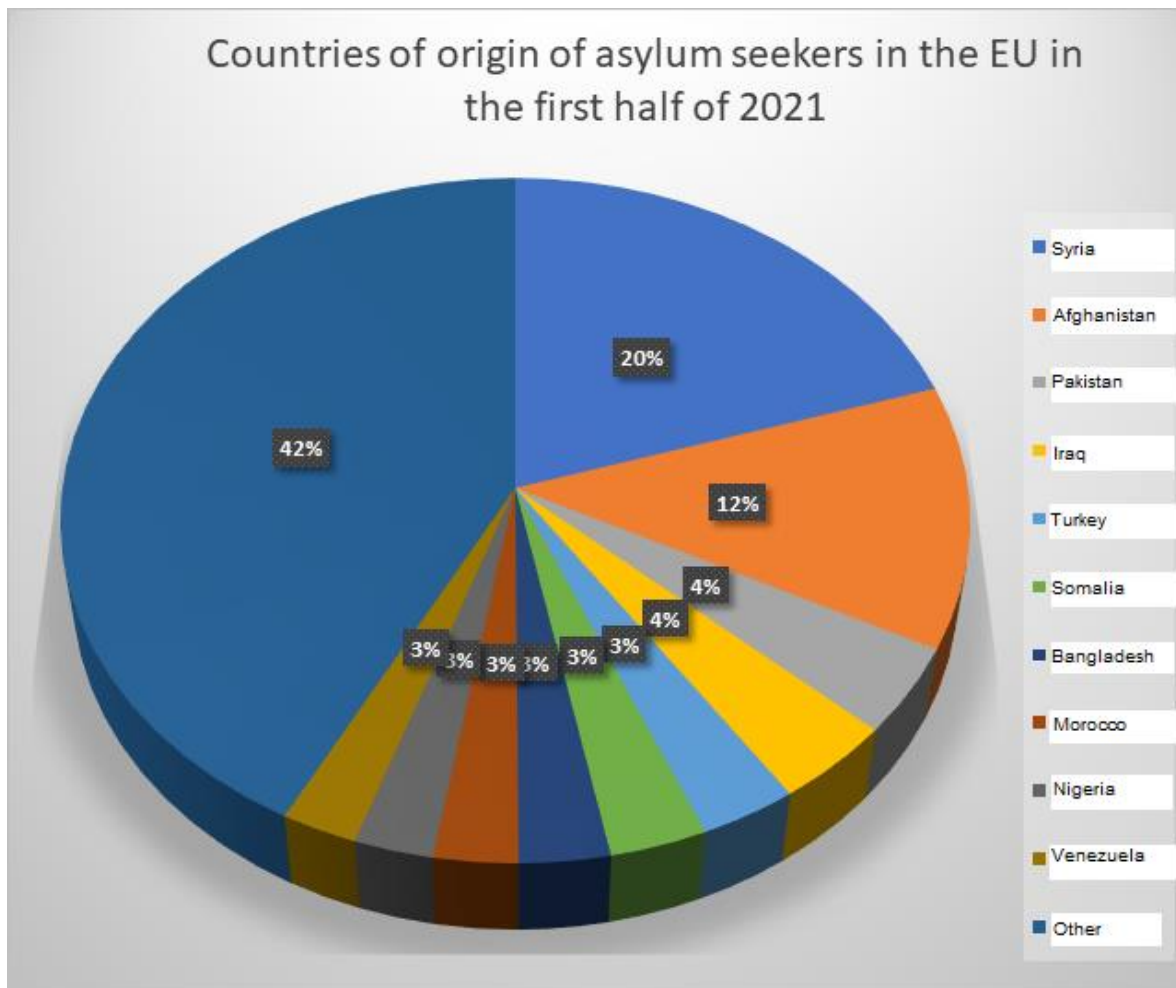


Figure 5: Countries of origin of asylum seekers in the EU in the first half of 2021.

2. MONITORING RESULTS FOR THE 1ST HALF OF 2021

This section presents the main observations and shortcomings recorded in each of the following areas: (1) reception of asylum seekers, (2) restriction of freedom of movement and (3) access to procedures. The sub-sections below highlight examples recorded during the monitoring, such as the lack of access to contact relatives in certain monitored cases, the long periods of stay at the border, the restrictions on movement concerning the quarantine imposed due Covid-19, as well as procedural shortcomings in the conduct of the initial migration interviews.

A separate sub-section also highlights the decrease in standards of reception conditions and the change in guidelines used by monitors.

2.1. Reception of asylum seekers

2.1.1. Communication and possibility to contact relatives

In at least 9 cases in the first half of the year, the LRC monitors recorded that asylum seekers were not provided with the possibility to contact their relatives and to inform about their location during their stay in the SBGS BCPs or FSs, as well as in the Pabradė FRC tent campus (11/02/2021: Švenčionys FS; 24/04/2021: Kapčiamiestis FS; 20/05/2021: G. Žagunis FS; 02/06/2021: Kena FS; 09/06/2021: Švenčionys FS; 11/06/2021: SBGS Border Guard School; 18/06/2021: Tverečius FS and Pūškos FS, 22/06/2021: Pabradė FRC).

2.1.2. Access of minors to education

Continuing the issue-based monitoring of minors' access to education during quarantine started in November 2020 in Pabradė FRC, a similar monitoring was carried out in Rukla RRC in February 2021. It was noted that distance learning is organised in this centre, the necessary conditions are in place, and other educational support is provided.

2.1.3. Mental health in quarantine conditions

In the first half of the year, attention was paid to mental health in quarantine conditions in Pabradė FRC, following the report on a suicide attempt by an asylum seeker. Considering the particular case (monitoring started on 27/01/2021), information was collected on access to psychological services when quarantine limited access to such services. It was recommended to strengthen the monitoring and referral of people with psychological challenges, addictions and other similar complaints to specialists. Mental health monitoring was also developed in the detention section of Pabradė FRC but it was not completed due to the unexpected migration crisis.

2.2. Restriction of freedom of movement

2.2.1. Restrictions on movement associated with Covid-19

Several monitoring cases have been carried out in relation to the quarantine and the resulting restrictions. In accordance with the Government Resolution No 1226 of 4 November 2020 “On the declaration of quarantine in the territory of the Republic of Lithuania”²¹, the residents of Pabradė FRC were not allowed to leave the centre for more than 2 hours (excluding activities related to employment and education). For this reason, **the rights of asylum seekers to move outside the territory of the centre for important reasons may have been unjustifiably restricted during the quarantine**, compared to the rest of the population of the country. This practice was also partly applied in Rukla RRC but in this case the internal rules of procedure were invoked (monitoring of 25/02/2021).

For example, the 11 February 2021 report records that an asylum seeker seeking to live on his own is unable to travel from Pabradė FRC to Vilnius to search for a place to rent, and to return back.

The monitoring carried out on 17 February 2021 is also related to the restriction of mobility and the challenges it poses, and it revealed that a resident of Pabradė FRC suffering from toothache at

²¹ See Sub-clause 2.2.13 of the Resolution Clause 2.2 “Regarding working, economic activities and other conditions”, which stipulates that it is forbidden for asylum-seekers accommodated in FRCs, who have the right to move within the territory of the Republic of Lithuania, to leave the FRC for more than 2 hours a day: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/a2b5da801f4a11eb9604df942ee8e443>

the weekend could not be treated on the spot, the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) refused to come, and the asylum seeker's journey to and from Vilnius would have breached the 2 hour rule.

2.2.2. Length of stay in border units of the SBGS

In the first half of the year, cases of **asylum seekers (including families with small children) staying longer than 48 hours in SBGS BCPs²²** and receiving only dry rations were recorded. The reasons for long stays at the border in the first half of the year varied: waiting for the Covid-19 test results, protracted initial migration procedures and/or failure to coordinate promptly referrals to long-term accommodation centres (Pabradė FRC or Rukla RRC).

For example, the report of 11 January 2021 on a Tajik family in Šalčininkai BCP (single father with 2 minor children) records that Covid-19 tests were received almost a week later. All that time the family spent in the asylum seekers' room in the BCP during renovation works and were fed on dry rations. Also, following the test results, the adult asylum seeker was found to be infected with Covid-19 and together with the children was taken to the Abromiškės Rehabilitation Hospital for isolation. Afterwards the family was returned to the premises of the BCP.

In another case (report of 2 June 2021) it was recorded that an Iraqi family with two small children spent 9 days in the Kena FS before being referred to the Pabradė FRC. This is the longest time of stay of asylum seekers at the border in the first half of the year recorded by the monitors. During this time the asylum seekers were not able to contact their relatives and the NGOs delivered twice additional food because the children did not eat the dry rations. Moreover, in this BCP there is no possibility to open a window and ventilate the premises, asylum seekers are usually locked in.

2.3. Access to procedures

2.3.1. Monitoring of initial interviews

In 2021, the LRC monitors participated in 9 initial surveys in 7 different locations. 6 interviews were conducted and monitored remotely (some of them were mixed interviews, e.g. the asylum seeker, the officer and/or the monitor were together in the room but the interpreter participated remotely). **8 initial interviews were monitored in the first half of the year** and 1 in the second half of the year.

Interviews with asylum seekers from Turkey, Nigeria, Myanmar, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Syria, Iraq and Iran were monitored. Two of the asylum seekers interviewed were unaccompanied minors, one was a woman and one was a person with disabilities.

In the first half of the year, information on the ongoing interviews was regularly received from the border units of the SBGS under control of Vilnius Frontier District (FD) and Varėna FD, as well as from the Pabradė FRC.

The most common **procedural shortcomings recorded in the interviews monitored were the lack of information to the participating asylum seekers about the course of the interview** (4

²² The provision in Chapter IV of the Order of the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania "On the Description of the Conditions of Accommodation of Asylum Seekers at Border Inspection Posts" regarding the duration of 48 hours expired on 8 July 2021 and the latest version of it does not contain any maximum duration of stay at Border Inspection Posts.

cases), **the failure to provide the asylum seeker with information on the purpose of the interview** (5 cases), and **the failure to familiarise asylum seekers with the protocol at the end of the interview** (4 cases). It should be noted that most of the interviews were conducted and monitored remotely due to safety concerns in the context of the Covid-19 pandemics.

The practice of remote monitoring was continued in 2020. In order to improve the quality of remote interviews, LRC presented EASO and UNCHR guidelines on remote monitoring to SBGS officers in early 2021. During the year, the situation in remote interviewing improved as it was switched to using the secure paid version of Zoom. However, the issue of additional cameras necessary for high quality communication and monitoring remains unsolved. Usually, one camera is used, therefore a monitor can see only an officer or only an asylum seeker. Some information is lost as it is difficult to assess the communication as well as body language of the people in the room.

2.4. Applying the humanitarian standards

In June, in preparation for the increased flow of irregularly arriving migrants, a temporary tent camp of two sections to accommodate 350 men was set up in Pabradė FRC with the support of the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

As the flows increased, the monitors relied not only on EASO standards applied in the EU²³ but also on the generally accepted handbook on humanitarian standards, SPHERE²⁴, which sets lower standards that are relevant not only for Europe but also for other continents. The reason for this is that current situation has led to a fall in the standards of reception conditions, as tents have been built alongside the usual dormitories and other facilities, which eventually have been replaced by modular houses. Also, the protection factor has become relevant. The manner of accommodation has raised protection challenges, and it has become important to monitor how the protection of migrants, their dignity, right to adequate services, procedures, legal assistance, etc. is ensured.

During the monitoring of the Pabradė FRC tent camp on 22 June 2021, substantial non-compliance with minimum humanitarian standards was recorded: (1) inadequate placement of tents in terms of fire prevention; (2) temperatures in living tents not complying with hygiene standards; (3) lack of access to medical services; (4) incomplete information, lack of interpreters and staff; (5) lack of drainage system and lack of base of the tent campus; (6) lack of hygiene products; (7) lack of privacy in sanitary facilities. After reception conditions have changed, these and other aspects will be later recorded as systemic (*see Part III of the report*).

Some of the recommendations have been subsequently implemented in the Pabradė FRC. For example, the cooling/heating infrastructure has been adjusted, the supply of hygiene and other items has been improved, and residents were able to cook additional food in their tents or in a common area. However, the basic layout of the campus (spaces between tents, the extent of sanitary facilities, the lack of hard surfaces in case of flooding, etc.) remained actually unchanged until the relocation of the foreigners into the modular houses.

²³ See "EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators": <https://easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Guidance-on-ReceptionConditions-LT.pdf>

²⁴ See SPHERE handbook (2018 edition): <https://spherestandards.org/handbook-2018/>

3. CONCLUSIONS

Assessing the results of the monitoring during the first half of the year, it can be stated that the acceptance of asylum applications, the provision of material conditions, the initial procedures (interviews) and the accommodation in the centres functioned practically without any major disruption, apart from the objective challenges that the quarantine posed for the State and society.

The SBGS reported 90% of asylum applications at border units, allowing to perform monitoring in person, where possible, but recommending the use of remote measures. On the part of the SBGS, remote measures were ensured.

Asylum seekers living in reception centres also faced quarantine challenges. First of all, it concerns the potentially unjustified restriction of the movement of asylum seekers in Lithuania compared to the rest of the population. Secondly, access to services. Services were available but due to the objective reasons they did not correspond to the pre-quarantine situation, i.e. they were provided remotely, required advance registration, etc.

Key observations:

1. Non-reporting of asylum seekers was recorded but it was not systematic and rather random cases.

2. Serious systematic non-compliance with reception conditions was not in fact recorded or recorded minimally and there is no reason to consider that the non-compliance is recurrent. **The main non-compliance is the limited possibility for asylum seekers to contact their relatives after submitting their asylum application in the SBGS BCPs and FSs, as identified in several monitoring reports.** This non-compliance was not absolute in the first half of the year but a few recorded cases call for attention.

3. Access to education (Rukla RRC), mental health and partly to health care services (Pabradė FRC) was monitored as parts of services in reception centres. **Recommendations were made to strengthen mental health prevention and to ensure better access to mental health services** (it concerned all centres during the quarantine period).

4. Even after applying the EASO standard, which is lower than the one applied to the EU countries, the first alarming non-compliance with the minimum humanitarian standards was recorded in the temporary camp of tents in the Pabradė FRC. For more on the emerging systematic challenges, *see Part III of the report.*

5. Throughout the quarantine period, it was established that asylum seekers were only allowed to leave the Pabradė FRC for 2 hours, excluding circumstances related to work and education. **Such restriction may have unduly restricted the freedom of movement for a sufficiently long period of time, when the rest of the population had such right after mitigation of the quarantine restrictions.**

6. Compared to 2020, the quality of the initial migration interviews has improved (especially in case of remote interviews). However, **it was recommended to improve the infrastructure part and install more video cameras so that all participants of interviews can be seen.**

III. SECOND HALF OF 2021 (JULY TO DECEMBER)

From a monitoring perspective, the second half of the year was fundamentally different. Firstly, the number of migrants increased significantly. Secondly, the number of accommodation places for foreigners increased (initially, in temporary accommodation centres and then in newly established long-term accommodation centres). Thirdly, the accountability was de-fragmented, as new stakeholders have emerged in the migration system (several municipalities agreed to provide temporary accommodation). Fourthly, the identification of migrants, the registration of asylum seekers, the relocation of asylum seekers, etc., these factors made it difficult to track the situation and collect information.

In order to manage the crisis, amendments to the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Legal Status of Aliens have been initiated, which provide that if a state of war, a state of emergency, a case or event of emergency is declared due to a mass influx of aliens, the rights of asylum seekers may be restricted. The work of monitors with asylum seekers and other migrants (in some cases it was not possible to identify what number of them holds the status of asylum seeker) has also changed, as actually all migrants crossing the border irregularly have been legally refused entry into Lithuania and *de facto* detained. This has led to restrictions on movement, inaccessibility of means of communication and other constraints. The search for missing relatives has become particularly relevant, as migrants have got lost during the journey and due to the turmoil at the border. Family members living in other EU countries were also looking for missing people.

The so-called return²⁵ policy²⁶ was introduced in August and it stipulated that asylum applications can only be accepted after legal entry or legal presence of a migrant in the country. Asylum applications made outside the established procedures are not accepted and migrants crossing the border irregularly are not allowed to enter the country. The SBGS can accept asylum applications only considering vulnerability and individual circumstances. It is also possible to submit an asylum application at a diplomatic mission or consular post of the Republic of Lithuania. The LRC monitors did not monitor the process of refusal of entry in 2021.

At the end of the year, a joint issue-based monitoring was carried out to assess the access of foreigners to medical services in *de facto* detention facilities.

1. ACTUAL DATA FOR THE 2ND HALF OF THE YEAR (UP TO 31 DECEMBER 2021)

2021	79 monitoring visits
July - December	78 visits in person and 1 remote visit
	60 reports produced

²⁵ The measure or policy applied is referred to differently in different sources: return, redirection, deterrence. In humanitarian context (other than legal documents), this action or measure is also known as “pushback”.

²⁶ See Decision of the Minister of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania - Head of State Level Emergency Operations “On the Management of the Mass Influx of Aliens in the Border Territories of the State Border of the Republic of Lithuania with the Republic of Belarus and the Reinforcement of the Border Protection”: https://vrm.lrv.lt/uploads/vrm/documents/files/LT_versija/Sprendimas_Nr_%2010V-20.pdf

In total, 79 visits were carried out (50 by AMIF and 29 by UNHCR). **78 visits were carried out in person and 1 was carried out remotely** (the latter being the only initial interview monitored in the second half of the year).

In total, 60 reports were produced (34 by AMIF and 26 by UNHCR). 11 reports cover more than 1 visit. 1 UNHCR report (about Kapčiamiestis camp) was not submitted because at the time of the report drafting this camp, which was under the responsibility of the Lazdijai District municipality, had been closed down and the migrants evicted.

According to preliminary data, counting only temporary camps and not reception centres, **during the monitoring visits carried out in the second half of the year, at least 2,400 asylum seekers (about 400 of them minors) and other migrants were monitored.** The number of people living in the camp on the day of the visit was counted²⁷. Since October, the total number of foreigners referred to permanent accommodation places ranged from 3,000 to 3,500²⁸.

1.1. SBGS reports on asylum seekers and other migrants

As of 1 July 2021, the system of reports of the SBGS on asylum seekers was not working smoothly. Reports on the number of asylum seekers, their gender, country of origin, etc. did not reach the LRC monitors regularly. Over time, the SBGS started to produce the summarized weekly statistics, which did not provide sufficient demographic information on asylum seekers, and subsequently even this statistics was not provided. The provision of statistics was resumed in autumn when the situation stabilised.

At least 167 cases of non-notification from the border units of the SBGS were recorded in the second half of the year. Meanwhile, 158 cases of one or more persons applying for asylum were reported. The actual number of (non)notification is likely to be higher, as the LRC monitors recorded 3,056 notifications on migrants in their statistics between 1 January and the end of the year (the exact number of migrants considered as asylum seekers according to the data of MD is unknown), while the number of migrants who irregularly crossed the border officially recorded in 2021 was 4,326.

1.2. Organization of second visits

During the migration crisis, 32 camps were visited (Pūškos FS, Tverečius FS, Adutiškis FS, Švenčionys FS, Pavoverė FS, Lavoriškės FS and BCP, Kena FS, Padvarionys FS, Medininkai BCP of SBGS Vilnius FD; G. Žagunis FS, Tribonys FS, Purvėnai FS, A. Barauskas FS, Kabeliai FS, Druskininkai FS, Švendubrė RBCP, Kapčiamiestis FS of SBGS Varėna FD; SBGS Pabradė FRC; SBGS Border Guard School; Public Security Service under the Ministry of Interior (PSS) Rūdninkai training ground; Poškonys school (Šalčininkai district); Kapčiamiestis premises (Lazdijai district); Alytus aerodrome (Alytus city); Vydeniai school (Varėna district); Verebiejiai school (Alytus district); Linkmenys school, Kazitiškis school (both in Ignalina district); Rukla

²⁷ Some people may coincide, as foreigners were transferred from one temporary camp to another, so revisits are not counted.

²⁸ According to the data of the SBGS of 27 December 2021, there were only 7 migrants residing in temporary accommodation places (BCPs and FSs), all of them were newly arrived asylum seekers in the Republic of Lithuania. For the rest, the vast majority of foreigners were already directed to long-term accommodation places by the end of the year.

RRC; SBGS Kybartai FRC; Naujininkai RRC; SBGS Medininkai FRC). The only object not visited out of 33 was Petroškai camp (Lazdijai district) for Covid-19 infected persons.

32 visits were carried out for the second time to camps which received LRC recommendations regarding non-compliance with minimum humanitarian standards:

1. Target grouping at the initial stage (by gender, ethnic, religious, racial and other potentially discriminatory groups, including unaccompanied minors)²⁹.
2. Separation of single men and women in the living space and access to separate sanitary facilities³⁰.
3. Possibility to contact relatives³¹.
4. Provision of humanitarian aid (clothing, footwear, blankets, hygiene products, etc.)³².
5. Electricity and heating³³.
6. Access to health care services and medicines³⁴.
7. Resettlement of vulnerable people to camps with adequate infrastructure and proper security³⁵.
8. Preventing hierarchical structures and castes³⁶.
9. Provision of hot meal³⁷.
10. Ensuring adequate informational coverage³⁸.
11. Ensuring proper asylum procedures³⁹.
12. Prevention of the use of violence, deterrence, coercive measures, collective punishment⁴⁰.
13. Access to water (drinking and domestic)⁴¹.
14. Ensuring privacy in the living space and in general⁴².
15. Possibility to launder clothes and bed linen⁴³.
16. Ensuring access to education for minors⁴⁴.
17. Ensuring a minimum living space⁴⁵.

Following the second visits, after assessment of the aspects recommended to be corrected in the arrangement of the reception conditions showed that **in 1 case** the recommendations made **were fully taken into account** under present circumstances, **in 21 case they were partially taken into account** (correcting part of the problematic aspects rather than the entirety of the problems), and **in 1 case** the recommendations **were not taken into account** (there were recorded analogous substantive non-compliances with minimum standards).

²⁹ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standards 6 and 11.

³⁰ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, indicators 6.2 and 8.6.

³¹ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standards 18, 19 and 20.

³² See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standards 23, 24, 25 and 26.

³³ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, indicators 20.1 and standard 9.

³⁴ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standard 29.

³⁵ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standards 34 and 36.

³⁶ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standard 11.

³⁷ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standard 21.

³⁸ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standards 30, 31 and 32.

³⁹ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standards 30, 31 and 32.

⁴⁰ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standards 37, 38, 39 and 40.

⁴¹ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standards 8 and 22.

⁴² See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standards 6, 8 and indicator 32.2.

⁴³ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standard 16.

⁴⁴ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standard 27.

⁴⁵ See “EASO guidance on reception conditions: operational standards and indicators”, Standard 5.

The recommendations were taken into account by:

1. Vydeniai camp;

The recommendations were taken into account partially by the following:

1. Verebiejai camp (warm water showers, additional toilets installed, improved order and cleanliness; also improved catering for people, mobile commerce arranged);
2. Alytus camp (warm water showers, additional toilets installed, improved order and cleanliness; also improved catering for people, mobile commerce arranged);
3. Adučiškis FS (expansion of sanitary facilities; improved food supply; improved access to water; possible agreement among themselves on where to live; access to medical services; provision of medicines; improved provision of clothes and blankets, hygiene products);
4. Druskininkai FS (initiated supply of hot meals; visits of medical staff; improved provision of clothes; household waste management);
5. Kazitiškis camp (expansion of sanitary facilities; improved access to water; improved communication with relatives; improved access to medical services; improved provision of clothes and blankets; household waste management);
6. G. Žagunis FS (expansion of sanitary facilities; improved provision of clothes and blankets);
7. Kabeliai FS (expansion of sanitary facilities; expansion of residential infrastructure; access to health care services and medicines; improved provision of clothes; management of household waste);
8. Švendubrė RBCP (resettlement of some vulnerable persons; supply of hot meals; improved security situation; improved provision of clothes and blankets);
9. Linkmenys camp (expansion of living space; contact with relatives; access to health care services and medicines; improved provision of clothes and hygiene products);
10. Tverečius FS (expansion of living space; improved access to clothes and hygiene products);
11. Pūškos FS (hot water supply; improved provision of clothes and hygiene products; improved contact with relatives);
12. Kapčiamiestis FS (expansion of sanitary facilities; resettlement from tents to rooms and/or modular houses; supply of hot meal; improved communication with relatives; improved security situation; improved provision of clothes and blankets);
13. Kapčiamiestis camp (more comfortable accommodation; improved provision of clothes, shoes, mattresses, blankets; vulnerable and socially excluded people were resettled to other camps);
14. Pavoverė FS (received additional clothing and hygiene products; allowed to choose living space);
15. Pabradė FRC tent camp (transfer of people into modular houses; heating provided for those remaining in tents);
16. Border Guard School (improved health care services; possible longer stay outdoors);
17. Padvarionys FS (expansion of living space and provision of heating; improved catering; improved access to water; people recovered their phones; improved access to health care services; improved provision of clothes and hygiene products; household waste management);

18. Kena FS (additional shopping organised; personal phones recovered; improved access to health care services);

19. Lavoriškės FS (improved catering; personal phones recovered; improved access to health care services; possible greater freedom of movement within the territory);

20. Švenčionys FS (expansion of sanitary facilities; expansion of living space; improved catering; improved access to health care services; improved provision of clothes, shoes and hygiene products);

21. Tribonys FS (expansion of sanitary facilities; expansion of living space; improved catering and possibility to cook; improved access to health care services; improved provision of clothes, shoes and hygiene products; public access to at least partial information);

The recommendations were not taken into account by:

1. PSS Rūdninkai training ground;

Five objects were revisited more than once (Padvarionys FS, G. Žagunis FS, Druskininkai FS, Kabeliai FS, Verebiejai camp).

2. MONITORING RESULTS FOR THE 2ND HALF OF 2021

This section presents the main observations and shortcomings recorded in each of the following areas: (1) reception of asylum seekers, (2) restriction of freedom of movement and disproportionate use of force and (3) access to procedures. The sub-sections below highlight the non-compliances identified during the monitoring with references to particular examples.

A summary of the establishment of new reception centres and the expansion of existing centres is also presented, as well as a summary of the monitoring carried out on access to health care services in permanent accommodation centres.

2.1. Reception and protection of asylum seekers and other migrants

2.1.1. Accountability and functions in the newly established camps

In July, a number of new camps were spontaneously set up for the temporary accommodation of foreigners. 8 of them belonged to 7 different municipal administrations and 1 to the PSS. Other camps were set up within the SBGS units as part of an internal expansion.

It was the new camps not under the control of the SBGS that created administrative and accountability challenges in carrying out different functions. Firstly, the perimeter protection of the territory, which was provided in different camps by various entities: the SBGS, the PSS, Lithuanian Armed Forces, National Defence Volunteer Forces, Lithuanian Riflemen Union and police. Secondly, the logistics chain and supplies (food, water, clothing and footwear, hygiene products, sanitation, medicines, etc.). Third, access to health care services. Fourthly, migration procedures, which were coordinated between the SBGS and the MD; also, specialists from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defence and other institutions were involved.

The Decision of the Minister of the Interior – Head of State Level Emergency Operations “On the Internal Procedures and Rules for the Administration of Accommodation Places for Foreigners”⁴⁶ adopted on 14 August 2021 partially helped to address the challenges and defined the functions, but systematic problems remained.

2.1.2. (Non)compliance with minimum humanitarian standards

In places of temporary accommodation, as well as in regular and then newly established reception centres, the monitors recorded higher or lower non-compliance with the minimum humanitarian standards in accordance with EASO and/or SPHERE guidelines. At the beginning of the migration crisis, actually all reports mentioned non-compliance with the standards in various aspects. During the second visits, it was recorded that only one of 32 accommodation places visited had not improved, while in other cases the non-compliance had been remedied or the situation had partially improved, which is considered to be good practice. For more on the main challenges and second visits, *see 1.2. Organization of second visits.*

It should be noted that during the crisis the LRC monitors were faced with the good practice of the representatives of the border units of the SBGS seeking advice on the application of humanitarian standards. For example, the proactivity of the staff of the Pūškos FS in this respect is noteworthy.

The perception that not everyone is treated equally and that similar standards are not applied in the reception of asylum seekers and other migrants has led to discontent or even riots. For example, on 28 July 2021, it was recorded that the residents of the Kapčiamiestis FS have information that migrants accommodated in the Kapčiamiestis camp, located a few kilometres away, receive a full catering three times a day and in general have better conditions (they all live in a building, not in tents). It is noted in the report that the unequal conditions cause frustration and dissatisfaction.

2.1.3. (Non)availability of Services

One of the key aspects identified by the LRC monitors was the (non)availability of services in the new camps. Services were often available with limited or no accessibility. Only in late autumn the situation stabilised, but in September, October and in some places in November a lack of services was still recorded, especially in the border units of the SBGS.

Between the beginning of July and mid-November, shortage of various services was recorded at least at 27 sites visited. Foreigners had no or insufficient access to health care services, psychological services, leisure and education, as well as to additional shopping opportunities.

For example, during the visit to the Border Guard School of the SBGS on 18 October 2021, educational services have not yet been organised for school-age children. In other centres, such services had already started in autumn.

The arrival of mobile shops was particularly relevant to the residents of the Pabradė FRC when they were not allowed to leave the territory. This was recorded in the reports of 27 September 2021 and also 25 November 2021, when a large campus of modular houses was already functioning in the Pabradė FRC, accommodating more than 500 people.

⁴⁶ See https://vrm.lrv.lt/uploads/vrm/documents/files/LT_versija/SPRENDIMAI/Sprendimas_Nr_%2010V-31.pdf

The situation regarding access to health care services started to improve towards the end of summer, when mobile medical teams as well as psychologists started visiting camps. However, due to the number of people the assistance provided was insufficient. For example, on 14 September 2021, it was established that in the Pūškos FS there are still no regular medical visits, only EMS arrives on call. A similar situation was stated during the monitoring of the same date in Tverečius FS: no regular visits of medical teams; if needed, foreigners are registered for consultation at the nearest town clinic.

2.1.4. Identification and allocation

The lack of services is closely linked to identification, registration and appropriate allocation of persons based on vulnerability and special needs. **The issue of prompt and appropriate allocation remained relevant until late autumn and was recorded in more than 20 reports.**

Examples are given below:

- 1. On 1 July 2021 a man with disability was moved from the tent camp to the dormitory at the Pabradė FRC and accommodated in a room with another person with disability and he has to sleep on the upper deck of a bunk bed (he has a prosthetic leg).*
- 2. On 19 July 2021 a cancer patient lives in the basement of Medininkai BCP.*
- 3. On 21 July 2021 the staff of Kabeliai FS was not aware of a pregnant woman accommodated there.*
- 4. On 21 July 2021 there are vulnerable people in Druskininkai FS. For example, there is a person unable to walk on his own from the tent to the sanitary unit.*
- 5. On 26 July 2021 unaccompanied minors live with adult males in the Kazitiškis camp.*
- 6. On 28 July 2021 there are pregnant women and unaccompanied minors in Kapčiamiestis FS.*
- 7. On 3 August 2021 there are pregnant women and patients requiring special care in Purvėnai FS and Tribonys FS (later it was added that one pregnant woman from Tribonys FS has suffered a miscarriage).*
- 8. On 4 August 2021 there are minors, sick and addicted persons in Rūdininkai training ground.*
- 9. On 10 August 2021 there are records of vulnerable people: small children, elderly women with health problems in Pavoverė FS.*
- 10. On 18 August 2021 there are pregnant women, sick people, babies and unaccompanied minors in Švendubrė RBCP.*
- 11. On 24 August 2021 at least one minor was still living in the Rūdininkai training ground and there are patients who are not allocated to other places.*
- 12. On 26 August 2021 vulnerable people were recorded living in inadequate conditions in Adučiškis FS (pregnant woman, women and children living in a garage and tents).*
- 13. On 7 September 2021 a 10-year-old boy with post-traumatic mental disorder and impaired development is staying with his father in a tent camp in Kabeliai FS. Special treatment is required.*
- 14. On 8 September 2021 families with small children, pregnant women and vulnerable people with special needs are accommodated in Švendubrė RBCP.*
- 15. On 9 September 2021 a minor with his father is accommodated in the single men's section of the Linkmenys camp.*
- 16. On 14 September 2021 an unaccompanied minor was living in Tverečius FS.*

- 17. On 14 September 2021 a pregnant woman was living in the Pūškos FS.
- 19. On 11 October 2021 there were unaccompanied minors still remaining in the Kabeliai FS.
- 20. On 20 October 2021 there are vulnerable people in Kybartai FRC: sick people as well as LGBTQ persons.
- 21. On 25 October 2021 there are pregnant women in A. Barauskas FS.
- 22. On 27 October 2021 persons with mental disorders live in Tverečius FS.

In all cases, representatives of the SBGS and other camps were informed about these and other cases, so that vulnerable people could be resettled when some other places became available.

The monitors also noted that sometimes the country of origin is misidentified. For example, in the monitoring carried out on 13 July 2021 in Rukla RRC, the official data indicates that the person is a citizen of Congo. However, the interviewee himself claimed to be a citizen of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

2.1.5. Accommodating different ethnic groups together

In most of the new camps, foreigners were accommodated spontaneously, with actually no regard for sensitive ethnic, religious or racial aspects, nor for the risks arising from gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.

At least in **28 monitoring reports concluded that the composition of the camp population is mixed and this causes or is likely to cause tensions, conflicts or outbreaks of violence.** In this respect, the importance of not only reception conditions but also protection conditions in the organisation of the accommodation of foreigners in both temporary and long-term accommodation should be emphasized.

Several reports recorded examples of the problems of inadequate organisation of accommodation:

1. On 18 August 2021 conflicts arising between different ethnic groups were recorded in Švendubrė RBCP, on 21 July 2021 – in Druskininkai FS and Kabeliai FS, on 14 September 2021 – in Pūškos FS. Africans and Iraqi Yazidis claimed that Iraqi Arabs control access to sanitation facilities. Yazidi women and girls claimed that they are psychologically and physically harassed by Iraqi Arabs. African women feel insecure.

2. On 24 August 2021, disturbing aspects were recorded in the Rūdininkai training ground. According to residents, hierarchy and internal violence exist in the camp. It was recorded that sanitary facilities were assigned according to ethnic groups and discrimination was observed.

3. During the monitoring visit on 02 September 2021, one girl from Sri Lanka was living in Kazitiškis camp and communicating in some limited English. The monitor and the lawyer managed to talk to the girl with the help of her English-speaking friend interpreting over the phone. The girl was experiencing social isolation because there were no more people in the border post from similar cultures speaking the same language.

4. On 09 September 2021, it was recorded in the Linkmenys camp that there are manifestations of hierarchical fragmentation. For example, in the men's section, citizens of Sri Lanka and Pakistan were discriminated against. Sri Lankans mentioned that they sometimes stay without food because other residents go first and take more portions, so men have to share among themselves.

The same happens with the distribution of other products, access to health care, etc. African girls living in the gym of the same camp said that having Iraqi men in the same space makes them feel bad. They said that Iraqi men insult them, take pictures and videos of them sleeping, coming out of the shower rooms, etc. Older Muslim women also sleep next to strange men in the gym.

2.1.6. Communication with relatives

Access to relatives, lawyer or receiving legal advice is an important aspect. **Practices regarding access to personal phones or alternative means of communication varied in the second half of the year.** In fact, this was one of the few things not covered in the documents related to crisis management. This led to very different practices depending on the camp manager.

It should be noted that the best situation in this respect was in the premises provided by the municipalities, where foreigners were able to recover their personal phones relatively quickly and to purchase Lithuanian SIM cards at their own expense or with the help of NGOs. Personal phones were also returned at the reception centres in Rukla RRC, Pabradė FRC and at the Rūdninkai training ground controlled by the SBGS. However, there were cases where phones were not returned or got lost. For example, on 29 September 2021 at the Rukla RRC, it was recorded that not all residents had recovered their personal phones during their resettlement to the RRC.

Another practice applied was the possibility to call relatives regularly. Some border units of the SBGS provided shared phones or family reconnection services were provided by NGOs.

The worst situation with regard to communication was recorded in the border units of the SBGS. In some cases, communication was not possible for more than 2 months because the persons accommodated had not yet recovered their personal phones and NGOs were not allowed to organise the family reconnection service. For example, this situation occurred and was recorded on 02 September 2021 in Druskininkai FS, as well as on 08 September 2021 in Švendubrė RBCP. On 16 September 2021 it was recorded in Pavoverė FS that this service was not recommended for security reasons but in this case it was possible to contact relatives in the camp earlier.

In most cases, the staff of FSs and BCPs of the SBGS pro-actively requested the LRC or other NGOs for the Restoring Family Links service (communication with relatives) in order to improve the psychological micro climate in the camp and to avoid discontent and riots among foreigners.

It should be noted that the monitoring visits also documented good practices in the border units of the SBGS. For example, on 19 July 2021, it was recorded that some of the residents of Padvarionys FS got their mobile phones, and on 18 October 2021, practically all residents of this camp were using phones. The same situation was recorded on 19 July 2021 at the Medininkai BCP under the Padvarionys FS.

2.1.7. Meeting relatives and delivering parcels

In contrast to the possibility of contacting relatives, the procedure for meeting relatives and delivering parcels was regulated in the aforementioned Decision of the Minister of the Interior – Head of State Level Emergency Operations “On the Internal Procedures and Rules for the

Administration of Accommodation Places for Foreigners”⁴⁷. However, at the end of the year, this practice was still not effectively applied and did not meet the needs of *de facto* detained foreigners to see their visiting relatives and receive parcels (especially cash, as many of them ran out of personal funds during their stay in Lithuania).

The most frequent complaints about parcels arrangements were received from the residents of the Kybartai FRC and Medininkai FRC. Meanwhile, good practice regarding meetings was recorded, for example, on 18 October 2021 in Padvarionys FS, when an Iraqi woman was visited by her husband, who has a residence permit in Germany. The officials used the educational premises for the meeting and the family could spend two days for 5 hours together.

It should also be noted that the visiting arrangements were essentially restricted by the state of emergency imposed on 10 November⁴⁸. However, the delivery of parcels should not have been affected in any way by this regulation.

2.2. Restriction of freedom of movement and disproportionate use of force

As mentioned above, due to the law amendments *de facto* all foreigners who entered Lithuania irregularly were detained and considered to be refused of entry to the country. Actually all monitoring reports record restrictions on movement, with no exceptions for minors, pregnant women, other vulnerable people and those with special needs. This section focuses on two aspects: (1) the restriction of freedom of movement and (2) the potentially disproportionate use of force against foreigners in their places of accommodation.

2.2.1. Restrictions on movement

Despite the fact that all foreigners were *de facto* detained, additional categories of restrictions can be identified. Firstly, the possibility of leaving not only the camp site itself, but also a building or room was limited. Secondly, the walking outside was also restricted.

Until the beginning of the migration crisis, the only Pabradė FRC detention site was applying practices typical of detention facilities, i.e. additional physical protection, limited access to the building, separation of residents by sectors, etc.

When the crisis started, there remained 2 reception centres where a small proportion of the residents had the right to leave the premises (Rukla RRC and Pabradė FRC). Only all the residents of Jieznas Family Support Centre (FSC) have the right to leave the premises.

At least 10 reports recorded additional restrictions on movement inside the camp:

⁴⁷ See Section II of Decision “On the Internal Procedures and Rules for the Administration of Accommodation Places for Foreigners”. “Arrangement of accommodation places”: https://vrm.lrv.lt/uploads/vrm/documents/files/LT_versija/SPRENDIMAI/Sprendimas_Nr._%2010V-31.pdf

⁴⁸ The state of emergency came into force on 10 November 2021 (extended until 14 January 2022) (1) in the entire border area along the state border of the Republic of Lithuania with Belarus and 5 km inland from the border area; (2) in places of accommodation for foreigners designated by the authorities of the Republic of Lithuania (in the territory of the Pabradė FRC, in the territory of the Medininkai FRC and in the territory of the Kybartai FRC, in the Rukla RRC and in its adjacent territory, in the RRC Naujininkai Refugee Camp), and within a 200-meter perimeter around the places of accommodation.

1. On 1 January 2021 at the SBGS Border Guard School, it was recorded that persons staying for 20 days or more were not allowed to go outdoors. This includes pregnant women and children. The entrances to the different floors are also locked.

2. On 16 July 2021 there was no possibility for residents to go outside in the Linkmenys camp, residents were under quarantine. The indoor temperature is high in the premises and there is a shortage of fresh air.

3. On 19 July 2021 it was recorded that in Padvarionys FS the residents in the detention room are locked. The formal reason for this is that these persons have negative Covid-19 tests, so it is sought to avoid contact with new arrivals and it is also undesirable that they move freely around the officers' workplace.

4. On 19 July 2021 persons living in the basement of Medininkai BCP are locked and are not allowed to go outside for fresh air. The site is undergoing reconstruction works. Meanwhile, a woman asylum seeker and her daughter, who live upstairs in another room, are able to move around more freely.

5. On 9 September 2021 the Linkmenys camp has strict outdoor walking schedules, which are minimal, and some people who are discriminated against by other residents do not go outside at all. According to people, in practice being outdoors is limited to 15 to 30 minutes a day.

6. On 20 September 2021 men from Kena FS complained that they are locked in their rooms after 10 pm and then for some of them (12, who live in the former training premises) the toilet is not accessible. They are forced to urinate in bottles.

7. On 18 October 2021 at the Border Guard School of the SBGS, people can go for a walk outside for 2 hours a day according to a fixed schedule. There is a small area for walking, with additional fencing. Residents are not happy that they cannot go out at the time of their choice, for example, in good weather. They are only allowed to go outside according to a walking schedule set by the security. Sometimes it occurs in the evening hours when it is dark and cold.

8. On 20 October 2021 Kybartai FRC has so-called rehabilitation rooms where people are placed separately and isolated from others. The reasons for this are often unexplained.

9. On 3 November 2021 Kena FS has limited conditions for outdoor walks. Walking outside close to the building is allowed for 1 hour a day in groups of 5 people.

10. On 3 November 2021 in Lavoriškės FS it is allowed to be outdoors from 10 am to 10 pm.

As at the end of the year all foreigners were moved out of the border units of the SBGS and the temporary municipal camps were closed, additional restrictions on movement inside the territory were applied only to the Pabradė FRC (detention part) and the Kybartai FRC. Inside the territory, movement was also partially restricted to the residents of new modular houses established in the Pabradė FRC and the Rukla RRC, which were separated from the rest of the territory by additional fence. However, there were no restrictions on residents' time spent outside, and the area equipped with leisure facilities, etc.

2.2.2. Disproportionate use of force

A factor contributing to the progressive increase in restrictions on movement, and also to the possible disproportionate use of force, is the relatively high incidence of unauthorized departures of foreigners from accommodation places. In some cases, the runaways are linked to the possibility

to leave the camp existent prior to the amendment of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Legal Status of Aliens. But, for example, in Pabradė FRC or Rukla RRC, the practice of granting temporary leave to some foreigners is still used⁴⁹, and in Jieznas RRC such right to leave the territory is granted to all residents. In other cases, the attempts of runaway have been carried out by physically breaking through a barrier or other security barriers surrounding the territory. Some of such persons were detained in Lithuania, some in other EU countries and returned to Lithuania, some were not found⁵⁰.

8 monitoring reports recorded the possible use of excessive force and/or other punitive, coercive and intimidating measures:

1. On 1 July 2021 there were recorded testimonies at the Border Guard School that the officers demonstratively approach with dogs and allegedly imitate attack actions when residents are near windows or open them.

2. On 18 August 2021 the residents of Švendubrė RBCP claimed that they are treated like convicts (according to them, PSS officers refer to migrants as (quotation) “prisoners”, “without rights”, racist and derogatory remarks are made, including, for example, threats that if they do not clean their toilets and showers, they will be locked up and will be forced to use th toilet outdoors), that the officers lack awareness of their legal status etc.

3. On 24 August 2021, collective punishment measures were recorded at the Rūdininkai training ground for an attempt by some of the residents to escape (according to interviewees, officers of an unnamed authority went into tents, beat them with sticks and used electric shock).

4. On 26 August 2021 the residents of Adučiškis FS complain that they feel pressure from the officers. According to them, one night they were searched for a phone. People were threatened with electric shock, dogs and guns. The officers did not deny that a search was carried out but denied the statements about threatening.

5. On 2 September 2021 there were recorded testimonies at Druskininkai FS that, for example, when a resident refused to eat the food provided to him and demonstratively threw it on the ground, the officers, according to the migrant, took him to the detention room and kept him there and used violence and threatening. Another resident testified that due to the fact that allegedly 4 illegally stored phones were found in the camp, the searches were carried out and some of the foreigners were taken one by one to a nearby forest. The officers allegedly wore camouflage uniforms without distinctive markings, beat them and used electric shock to extract confessions.

6. On 9 September 2021 possible inadequate conduct of officers with regard to migrants was recorded at the Linkmenys camp. Several people alleged that officers had come to the gym with dogs and threatened the residents. They said that there was not only psychological but also physical violence, and that several people were allegedly hit by officers.

7. On 27 September 2021 the residents of Pabradė FRC claimed that some officers behave unethically towards them. For example, when they were exercising, one of SBGS officers released a fighting dog onto the sports field, which attacked a kicked ball. This action frightened people.

⁴⁹ These centres accommodate foreigners who arrived in Lithuania before the migration crisis in summer of 2021 and before the amendment of the law, as well as those who are subject to a court-ordered alternative detention measure. Free movement within the country is also generally granted to the citizens of Belarus who have applied for asylum.

⁵⁰ The LRC does not have precise data on persons who have absconded and have subsequently been found or not found.

Video footage taken by the migrants shows how people who were exercising retreat when they see an unleashed dog, and after a while a SBGS officer appears smoking and takes his dog out.

8. On 20 October 2021 Kybartai FRC applies a measure for unexplained reasons to lock people in so-called rehabilitation rooms, isolating them from others. There is also a regular measure of night checks with floodlights.

In another case, the Verebiejai camp was revisited following signals from residents. A report on the possible use of excessive force was drafted.

According to the information available to the LRC, no formal complaints from foreigners have been lodged following such negative information and no official investigations (in the absence of complaints) have been initiated. In many cases, foreigners were unable to identify the exact institution where officers may have used excessive force or exceeded their powers. As mentioned above, more than one institution provided guard function in the camps during the crisis.

It should be noted that in most cases, the foreigners interviewed told the monitors that they were afraid to talk openly about the violence or use of force they had experienced and were unwilling to cooperate with law enforcement institutions in order to initiate investigation of possible illegal activities or exceeded powers.

2.2.3. Separation from relatives

In addition to the restriction of movement, another relevant problem that has been recorded is the occasional separation of relatives and accommodation of them in different camps. This mostly occurred due to 3 reasons: (1) unintentional separation due to a complicated situation, i.e. the large flow of people and inadequate identification and registration; (2) deliberate separation justified by the lack of space in one or the other camp; (3) due to the isolation concerning Covid-19.

Below you can find some examples of separation from relatives recorded in the monitors' reports:

1. On 1 July 2021 at the SBGS Border Guard School, it was recorded that in the same dormitory family members were separated and accommodated on different floors, although there was enough space.

2. On 1 July 2021 at least two cases of family members being separated upon entry into Lithuania have been determined at the SBGS Border Guard School. In one case, two adults, a brother and a sister, were separated.

3. On 7 July 2021, at least one case was identified in the Vydeniai camp, where a young man claimed that his brother was separated from him upon entering Lithuania.

4. On 13 July 2021 a couple of people interviewed in the Rukla RRC stated that their family members had been relocated to another place after entering Lithuania.

5. On 18 August 2021 the residents of Švendubrė RBCP testified about isolation of those with positive Covid-19 test result. People who tested positive were taken away but their relatives have not been informed for a while about their exact location, their state of health etc.

6. On 2 September 2021, the separation of a 15 year old teenager from his adult sister and her family was recorded in Druskininkai FS. The family does not know his location.

7. On 6 September 2021, after the outbreak of Covid-19 in G. Žagunis FS, some people were quarantined in the nearby Poškonys school, where some people have been living for more than 28 days in accordance with the requirements of the National Centre of Public Health. One family has been living in such separation for 20 days: the mother and her 2.5 year old child live in the Poškonys school, the father and his 4.5 year old son live in G. Žagunis FS. According to the father, the forced separation of the family causes psychological distress for the child.

8. On 7 September 2021 a young African man was separated from his pregnant partner in Kabeliai FS. He was separated because he was involved in a fight in the Alytus camp.

9. On 3 November 2021 two African women in Kena FS stated that they were separated from their partners.

10. On 3 November 2021 at Lavoriškės FS, one girl stated that during the transfer from the previous camp she was separated from her two adult brothers, who now live in Medininkai FRC.

The LRC monitors informed the camp administrator or another representative about these and other similar recorded cases of separation of relatives. If there was space in the designated temporary camp or reception centre, the separated families were reunited. However, this process continued until late autumn before all the people were moved to long-term accommodation.

2.3. Establishment of new reception centres and expansion of existing centres

By October, in addition to the Pabradė FRC, Rukla RRC and Jieznas FSC, **3 new reception centres had been established:** Medininkai FRC, Kybartai FRC and Naujininkai RRC⁵¹. The LRC monitors were given the opportunity to assess the premises in Kybartai and Naujininkai before the establishment of the long-term accommodation. On 27 August 2021, a visit was carried out to the Kybartai penitentiary and on 7 September 2021 to the former Naujininkai lodging house.

On assessment of infrastructure and conditions in Kybartai it was concluded that this or another facility with the primary purpose of detention could only be a temporary solution to resettle people from the tents in a cold weather. If another facility without stigmatising elements is found, it was recommended that the foreigners awaiting the decision of MD should be moved to premises corresponding to dignity and human rights. By the end of the year, no major improvements had been made to the centre. The Kybartai FRC was still overcrowded (640 on 27 December 2021), with limited access to hot water, etc. This centre remains one of the major critical issues to be addressed in 2022.

The former Naujininkai lodging house, including its infrastructure, environment, etc., was also assessed by the LRC monitors and recommendations were made. The comments were taken into account and the premises were urgently renovated and adapted to the needs of the accommodated foreigners (mostly families). At the end of the year, the Naujininkai RRC was one of the few accommodation facilities for foreigners that received minimal comments during the re-monitoring process and the progress has been recorded.

⁵¹ Some sources refer to the facility as the Naujininkai Refugee Camp, but for the sake of convenience in this report the facility is referred to as the Naujininkai RRC, as it is a structural unit of the Rukla RRC, with its own premises, infrastructure, staff, services, etc.

The installation of the Medininkai FRC also was not smooth. The site was characterised by a relatively small area, a lack of common spaces. Despite the lack of quality in infrastructure planning, the Medininkai FRC has another major challenge: the target group(s) of the centre is not fully defined. Paradoxically, the Medininkai FRC has accommodated families with children, single men and women, LGBTQ community members, a wide ethnic diversity, etc. Considering the vulnerabilities and other problematic aspects, this centre remains in an undefined status due to its location, specifics, lack of staff, etc., as it cannot be compared to Rukla RRC, Naujininkai RRC, or Jieznas FSC, which accommodate the vulnerable persons and those with special needs.

The transfer of people from the SBGS border units has also led to a significant increase in the size of the existing centres in Rukla RRC and Pabradė FRC. Not only the number of residents has increased, but also new infrastructure has been installed, such as camps of modular houses inside the territory, additionally surrounded by a fence and preventing free movement inside the territory.

In Pabradė FRC, despite the challenges posed by the significant increase of residents, such as access to health care services, outbreaks of infectious diseases (scabies, tuberculosis), the organisation of additional shopping within the centre, etc., a systematic approach and a clearly structured procedures for the reception of asylum seekers are evident. The logical planning of the territory and the logistic chain, as well as the availability of experienced staff, help the centre to maintain a functioning order. There are, however, aspects to be improved. For example, food supply and choice in providing a vegetarian alternative in the modular house sectors. Also the arrangement of contacting relatives in the detention section.

The Rukla RRC focuses on vulnerable people, who need to be provided with adequate living conditions, protection, access to appropriate services, etc. The reception conditions in the centre are being improved in line with the recommendations but the significant increase in the number of residents poses a lot of challenges. Most of them are related to the accommodation of vulnerable people in the modular house camp. The minimum living conditions in this part of the RRC are ensured but the layout of the area is not convenient and suitable for the targeted vulnerable group. The camp is located on a paved area, there is no green area, movement is limited within the whole RRC area (access to the common area is only possible with the permission of administration), the toilets for men and women are not separated and are located on one side of the camp only, and the campus is accommodated with pregnant women. Also, the area, where many minors live, is guarded by heavily armed officers, which causes to people additional stress. Shopping is limited to the local shop, where prices are above average and the choice is limited. Several hundred residents feel frustrated when they see that other migrants living in the same area have better conditions (live in dormitories, some can leave the territory, etc.), and complain about inequality.

Jieznas FSC is a small centre compared to other long-term accommodation facilities, with up to 50 beds. It should be noted that Jieznas FSC is the only open-type migrant camp in Lithuania where freedom of movement is not restricted. It provides sufficient living space, ensures the fundamental right to dignity, privacy and security, education and employment services for minors, as well as provides employment opportunities in accordance with the legal status available. All these circumstances, as well as the relationship with the staff and the efforts they make, contribute to a relatively good micro-climate for the people who live here, the majority of whom are families.

2.4. Migration procedures

2.4.1. Access to procedures

At least 28 monitoring reports in the second half of the year recorded one or more aspects related to migration procedures: (1) lack of information in the language you understand on legal status, general procedures (including appeal, deadlines, the procedures for submitting documents, contact details, etc.); (3) lack of access to state-guaranteed legal aid or private legal counsel; (4) misleading information on the rights and obligations of asylum seekers; (5) the assistance of interpreter and quality of interpretation; (6) prejudice, pressure to return voluntarily or rejection of the asylum application, etc.

Most of the foreigners monitored were not informed or were not sufficiently informed about who were the lawyers representing them or which migration officer was in charge of their case. As mentioned in the previous sections of the report, some migrants did not have the means of communication (phone, access to e-mail) to make contact, as there were restrictions on communication in the accommodation places. There were cases where foreigners claimed to have lodged an asylum application but when they asked for further information, they found out that their applications were not registered. Following the intensive and accelerated processing of asylum applications, in late summer and early autumn, the lack of information on the MD decisions in a language people could understand was recorded in almost all reports.

Below you can find some examples of observations recorded in the reports relating to access to procedures and information:

1. On 21 July 2021, Kabeliai FS recorded that officers distributed information material to migrants in various languages, the content of which was intended to intimidate and affect. The handouts, which do not indicate the primary source of information, presume that none of the irregularly arriving foreigners have received or will receive asylum.

2. On 05 August 2021, in the Alytus camp it was recorded that most people had already spent there a month but had not yet had an initial interview. According to the residents, they were visited by (quotation) an unnamed “migration worker who was rude and threatened that all migrants would be deported and that no one would get asylum this year (in 2021)”.

3. On 24 August 2021, during the repeated visit to the Rūdninkai camp, the migration interviews had already started. People stated that during the interviews they experience pressure to return voluntarily to their country of origin and the information provided is of subjective character. According to them, they were threatened that if they refused to return voluntarily, (quotation) “they would face a long cold winter in tents”. None of the migrants interviewed confirmed that they had been informed of the possibility to appeal against a negative decision by the MD. People confirmed that they had access to interpreters but some of them were not satisfied with the quality of the interpretation.

4. On 26 August 2021 according to the people in the Vydeniai camp, the MD staff and other officials with whom they had to communicate about the procedures use (quotation) “psychological coercion methods”, pressure to sign voluntary return documents, urge them to refuse asylum applications, do not inform them about their rights established by the law, etc.

5. On 15 September 2021 a lack of information about the procedures and the current legal situation has been recorded in the Kapčiamiestis camp. People receive the decisions of the MD in Lithuanian, which they do not understand, but they are asked to sign the acknowledgement of the decisions. An email address is provided for appealing against decisions but people did not have email access at the time of the visit.

6. On 6 October 2021 in the detention section of the Pabradė FRC, it was recorded that (1) an Iraqi citizen stated that he had his identity document with him when entering Lithuania, which was taken during the inspection together with other belongings. However, it was later established during the interview that this person did not have the document with him. Similar testimonies were given by 3 other Iraqi citizens who entered Lithuania in July. According to the migrants, the documents appeared after they had signed the voluntary return agreement. (2) An Afghan citizen showed a court decision which, according to him, contains information not corresponding true circumstances told by him. The man claimed that he have not provided such information. (3) The migration documents of the people staying in the women's section also contain inaccuracies. For example, information about the presence of a lawyer in the proceedings, although the asylum seeker stated that no lawyer was present during the interviews.

7. On 20 October 2021 according to the residents of Kybartai FRC, the MD ignores the requests sent by e-mail.

8. On 3 November 2021, Kena FS recorded that an African woman applied to the MD for state-guaranteed legal aid but received an official reply that she was not entitled to this service because she was not an asylum seeker. The foreigner assured that she was applying for asylum.

9. On 3 November 2021 asylum seekers from Lavoriškės FS stated that they did not fully understand their legal situation and claimed that there was a lack of information and clarification. For example, one of them stated that she had sent a letter to the MD but had not received a reply. Another stated that she did not know to whom to send her appeal against the decision, as she did not see any indication of what to do after receiving the negative decision.

10. On 16 November 2021 (1) people in G. Žagunis FS who received negative decisions of the MD said that they were informed of the contacts (including the email address of a lawyer for state-guaranteed legal aid) for further actions. However, migrants raised the issue that they could not make contact when only an email address was provided, as they did not have phones with a web browser, personal email access, etc. (2) Several asylum seekers interviewed stated that during the migration process (they could not indicate an exact date) there were persons who did not identify themselves and who, according to them, made pressure on them for voluntary return.

These cases were referred to camp administrators or representatives. The main responses to the observations made were: (1) the camp does not manage accurate data on the legal status of one or another resident; (2) there is a lack of data on the exact date and/or representatives of the authorities who visited the camp when the incidents referred to by the foreigners might have occurred; (3) local representatives (e.g. head of the FS or BCP or other representatives) are not competent to comment on the proceedings related to the MD.

2.4.2. Reporting on initial interviews

The increase in migration flows has led to a significant decrease in the number of reports of initial interviews of asylum seekers received from the SBGS. Reporting was irregular and fragmented. In the first half of the year 53 notifications were received, while over 600 people applied for asylum during the same period, in the second half of the year only 31 notification was received (over 2,000 persons applied for asylum during that period).

In the second half of the year, information on the initial interviews was often received on the same day, a few hours before the interview, which made it difficult for monitors to plan and attend the interviews. This is one of the main reasons why only one interview was monitored during the second half and it is objectively difficult to assess how the access to the procedures was ensured for asylum seekers (access to information, presence of interpreters and lawyers, access to the protocol, etc.) only according to migrants' testimonies without personal participation of monitor.

In the second half of the year, the majority of reports received were from the Pabradė FRC, which is considered as a good practice.

2.5. Access to medical services in permanent accommodation centres

At the end of the year, 6 reception centres (SBGS Pabradė FRC, Medininkai FRC and Kybartai FRC, Rukla RRC and Naujininkai RRC, Jieznas FSC) carried out a joint issue-based monitoring in order to assess the compliance with the decision of the Minister of the Interior – Head of State Level Emergency Situations “On the provision of healthcare services to foreigners”⁵² and the accessibility of the medical services at the places of these 6 centres. Identical questionnaires were submitted to the managers of all centres in order to obtain information on vulnerability identification, local medical capacity, EMS on call, mobile medical teams, logistics, etc.

The foreigners interviewed were also asked identical questions. In total, the monitors conducted 85 interviews with foreigners from 18 different countries of origin in 6 centres (43 interviews were conducted with individuals and 42 with family households consisting of 2 or more family members). In total, information on access to medical services was related to 201 person. During interviews the information on 129 adults (58 women and 71 men) and 72 minors was collected.

The data obtained from the centres showed that (1) despite the number of residents, not all centres have local medical staff and in general the amount of staff is not sufficient in relation to the number of residents; (2) the frequency of visits by mobile medical teams is sufficient but given the number of residents, the number of visiting medical staff is insufficient to respond to the needs; (3) the centres have complete first aid kits as well as routine medicines; (4) the centres are often assisted by the local municipality with the delivery of medical services and medicines; (5) with the exception of the Naujininkai RRC, actually all centres are located in settlements where there are no hospitals and where patients have to be transported to larger medical facilities in other towns; (6) in many cases, the number of psychologists is insufficient or unavailable, and therefore, the services of NGOs or others are used; (7) the vulnerability assessment is partly carried out in the centres but it is slow (lack of capacity and a clear system).

⁵² See Decision No 10V-4 of the Minister of the Interior - Head of State Level Emergency Situations “On the provision of healthcare services to foreigners”. [Current version](#).

A survey of randomly selected foreigners showed that (1) **upon request about 91% of them get access to medical specialists.** (2) **82% are able to identify the professional who provided the service** (family doctor, specialist, nurse, etc.). (3) **72% have a positive view of the quality of the service provided.** (4) **65% reported being able to understand the content of conversation with a medical specialist:** diagnosis, health record, prescriptions, etc. (5) **96% said that privacy is guaranteed during visits.** (6) **89% said that the need for medicines was responded to.**

According to the surveys, (1) **the average waiting time to see a doctor after request is slightly more than 4 days.** (2) **Respondents state that an average waiting time for medicines is 2 days.** (3) **EMS arrives on average in more than half an hour.**

According to the foreigners and their family members interviewed, 67% of them were fully vaccinated against Covid-19 during the survey period (the LRC does not have information on what percentage of all foreigners is vaccinated). Over 25% of them are not vaccinated for one of the following reasons: (1) they were infected earlier or cannot be vaccinated due to medical reasons; (2) refused to be vaccinated; (3) the vaccine was not offered to them or they are on a waiting list.

35% of respondents reported having infected with Covid-19 (22% infected in Lithuania and 13% in other countries). For those infected in Lithuania, in all cases person was isolated from the rest of the people. 4% reported being separated from other family members due to mandatory isolation.

It should be noted that **at the end of the year, the situation regarding access to health care services in places of permanent accommodation had improved compared to previous monitoring visits.** The better situation is within the centres under control of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (Rukla RRC and Naujininkai RRC) as well as Jieznas FSC. The situation in the centres under control of the SBGS (Pabradė FRC, Medininkai FRC and Kybartai FRC) was worse where people told they were waiting longer for access to doctors, especially specialists.

Among the challenges arising from infrastructure deficiencies, there should be **noted at least two important aspects** particularly relevant for the camps of container houses of Medininkai FRC and Rukla RRC: (1) **the distance from the houses to the sanitary facilities due to the risk of cold diseases during the cold season** and (2) **the use of shared sanitary facilities with regard to privacy, hygiene and prevention of infectious diseases.**

Systematic rather than local aspects remain the biggest obstacle to improving the provision of health care services. Firstly, the access system is still under development, responding to challenges. Secondly, there is a lack of funding and staffing (especially in the regions). The last but not least aspect, amendments in the legal framework and restrictions imposed during the process have hindered adequate access to health care services.

The report also highlighted the problems of communication and interpretation. While attempts are made to address this problem in reception centres, for example by using EASO assigned interpreters or other interpreters, also English or Russian speaking migrants, there is no proper algorithm for communicating with a foreigner once he or she arrives at a medical facility.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The second half of the year was highlighted by a migration system that faced serious challenges and was in fact heavily imbalanced for 3 months: from the identification and registration of foreigners to ensuring the reception and protection conditions. The quality of reception conditions and services worsened in the second half of the year, for some time there was reduced or no access to procedures, legal aid, etc.

The number of reports on asylum seekers by the SBGS dropped from approximately 90% to almost 49%. This means that the LRS monitors received reports on only about every second case, and information about vulnerable persons and their needs did not reach them. The information about the number of asylum applications accepted and the proportion of foreigners who in general were able to apply at the border due to the amended legal framework are not available to the LRC, as the so-called reversal activities were not monitored. Monitors visited border units of the SBGS only with permission, and so-called *ad hoc* monitoring of the current situation practically was not applied.

The main challenges encountered, which were numerous in the second half of the year, are presented in Part III of this report, based on specific examples, figures and recorded facts. Meanwhile, the main summarized conclusions are presented below according to the groups of the problematic challenges:

1. When assessing the second half of the year, it should first be noted that **there were delays in the registration of asylum applications of some foreigners, lack of clarity in the procedures, and the procedures themselves were rushed.** As late as the end of the year, there were reports on the acceptance of asylum applications of foreigners who had entered Lithuania earlier.

2. **The identification, registration and further referral of asylum seekers and other migrants was not effective and smooth for a long time.** This had a serious impact on the quality of vulnerability assessment, the principle of family unity, the continuity of vaccination for Covid-19, etc. The consequences of ineffective identification were felt until late autumn.

3. In the second half of the year, **movement restrictions were universally applied to asylum seekers and other migrants who irregularly entered Lithuania.** All of them were *de facto* detained, with no exceptions for vulnerable people, persons with special needs, families, minors etc.

4. **Reception conditions prior to resettlement to long-term accommodation (up to October and in some cases even later) were unsatisfactory.** This concerns overcrowding in the camps, heating, food, drinking and domestic water, hygiene conditions in sanitary units and common areas, access to health care services and medicines, as well as other services such as social services, psychologist consultations, leisure and education.

5. **Protection conditions prior to resettlement to long-term accommodation (up to October and in some cases even later) were unsatisfactory.** This concerns the right to privacy and decent living conditions, the separation of single men and women, as well as unaccompanied minors, ethnic, religious, racial and other social tensions, possible violence from the side of security

officers, additional restrictions on movement within the camps, with no access to the outdoors or severely limited time of stay.

6. Information on asylum procedures, access to legal aid, the ability to understand the information provided and to appeal the decisions received were insufficient.

7. Access of monitors to foreigners' accommodation places was possible and unhindered (except in reasoned cases due to outbreaks of Covid-19, security concerns due to riots, etc.) but reports on asylum applications and initial migration interviews were received irregularly and the normal situation was restored only at the end of the year.

IV. SUMMARY

In summary, the year of 2021 can be divided into three periods.

The first period was up to June, when the country had a fully functioning migration system, including proper reception conditions for asylum seekers, guarantee of the right to asylum, access to procedures, etc. The monitoring results during this period show that, in general, most of the non-compliance with the standards recorded could be attributed to the quarantine restrictions applied in Lithuania. The only observations not related to the quarantine restrictions were the recorded cases where the right to means of communication and the possibility to contact relatives was not always ensured.

The second (crisis) period started in June and lasted until October when most of the migrants left their tents and were accommodated in existing or newly established reception centres. No more than 300 persons stayed in the premises of the SBGS BCPs and FSs and in the newly established modular houses after this period. The critical point of the second period was reached in July, when more than 30 temporary accommodation points spontaneously appeared in Lithuania, covering even 9 municipalities (Lazdijai district, Druskininkai municipality, Alytus city and Alytus district, Varėna district, Šalčininkai district, Vilnius district, Švenčionys district, Ignalina district). During the crisis period, the highest number of complaints from monitored asylum seekers, as well as gross violations and non-compliance with minimum humanitarian standards, were recorded.

As highlighted in the October 2021 report of the Seimas Ombudsmen Office⁵³, during this period, equal conditions for foreigners' temporary accommodation were not ensured, the principle of equal treatment was violated and the disproportionate and excessive duration of the restrictions on the rights and freedoms of foreigners amounted to torture, inhuman conditions degrading human dignity. Similar insights have been provided by international experts of the UN Committee against Torture who have assessed the situation in Lithuania⁵⁴.

The third phase from October to the end of the year marks a period of stabilisation. Firstly, the introduction of the deterrence policy and blocking to enter Lithuania irregularly led to a general decrease in the flow of asylum seekers and other migrants. This has limited the fundamental right to asylum but allowed for an improvement of existing conditions. Secondly, this phase is linked to the settlement of the accommodation system, with the opening of new long-term accommodation centres and the introduction of services (access to health care and psychological services, education, social services, leisure activities etc.).

All these phases were recorded by the LRC monitors, they presented observations and recommendations, organized follow-up monitoring visits and strongly encouraged the feedback. The LRC monitors had access throughout 2021, either remotely or through visits in person. The

⁵³ See Report of the Seimas Ombudsmen Office of the Republic of Lithuania of 7 October 2021 on "Ensuring human rights and freedoms in places of temporary accommodation of foreigners having crossed the border of the Republic of Lithuania with the Republic of Belarus": https://www.lrski.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/NKP-2021-1-3_2021-10-07.pdf

⁵⁴ See [Treaty bodies Download \(ohchr.org\)](#)

only aspect of activities of the SBGS that was not monitored in 2021 was the practice of the deterrence policy on the border with Belarus.

We propose to continue and implement all the conclusions and recommendations listed in the previous sections of the report in the year 2022, especially given that the recent situation has been relatively stable, the number of migrants accommodated in Lithuania is gradually decreasing and there are all possibilities for return to a normal functioning migration system.

It is planned that in 2022, the LRC monitoring will focus on the planned issue-based monitoring of major reception centres. It is also likely that the so-called “deterrence” measure will continue to be applied until the physical barrier is built on the border with Belarus, so that the access to Lithuania will remain limited to official international border crossing points, or the exceptions for foreigners on the basis of their country of origin and humanitarian reasons will be applied. Therefore, periodic *ad hoc* monitoring is also planned, i.e. assessing how reception conditions for new asylum applicants and the initial asylum procedures are ensured.

Report prepared by:

Violeta Masteikienė, LRC Monitor

Stasys Vaitonis, LRC Monitor