



MONITORING REPORT **2024**

APRIL 2025

The Lithuanian Red Cross is a non-governmental organization that provides social, humanitarian, and legal assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other migrants regardless of their legal status.

Adhering to the fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Lithuanian Red Cross strives to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being, to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs and without discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions, and does not engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

This report summarizes the information collected in 2024 by the monitoring team of the Lithuanian Red Cross in the framework of the project funded by the United Nations Refugee Agency.

When evaluating the collected data, the monitors of the Lithuanian Red Cross rely on their professional expertise and many years of experience in the field of migration and asylum. We are grateful to our partners and colleagues for their additional insights.

This report is for information purposes only and does not create / entail rights or legal obligations in dealing with individual cases. When citing or distributing this monitoring report, a reference to the source of the information is required:

Lithuanian Red Cross. (April 2025). *Monitoring Report 2024*

Photos: Lithuanian Red Cross

The report was prepared by:

Justina Karaliūtė, monitor

Stasys Vaitonis, monitor

DISCLAIMER: This report in its entirety was translated from the original version published in Lithuanian, *inter alia* by means of AI-powered machine translation tools. Be aware that some parts of its content, first translated from English to Lithuanian, were then back translated to its original (English) language. As a result, even though the final text was proof-read for possible inconsistencies and factual errors, some citations might include wording which is not verbatim representation of the source material. If you are not certain, please refer to the source material cited.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SUMMARY 01

INTRODUCTION 03

I. MONITORING IN 2024: NUMBERS AND FACTS 05

II. BORDER MONITORING 09

III. MONITORING OF FOREIGNERS' ACCOMMODATION AND 24

DETENTION CENTERS

IV. OTHER OBSERVATIONS 33

V. INTERVIEW MONITORING 35

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 37

ANNEXES 40

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASD – Asylum Seekers’ Dormitory
BCP – Border Crossing Point
DDF – Dormitory for Detained Foreigners
DDW – Dormitory for Women Detainees
ECtHR – European Court of Human Rights
EMS – Emergency Medical Services
EU – European Union
EUAA – European Union Agency for Asylum
Eurostat – European Union Statistics Office
FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
FRB – Foreigners’ Reception Building
FRC – Foreigners’ Registration Center
FRONTEX FRO – Fundamental Rights Officer of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency
LLSF – Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Legal Status of Foreigners
LRC – Lithuanian Red Cross
MD – Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania
MIGRIS – Lithuanian Migration Information System
Mol – Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization(s)
FD – Frontier District
FS – Frontier Station
RRC – Refugee Reception Center
RVUH – Republican Vilnius University Hospital
MSSL – Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania
SBGS – State Border Guard Service under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees / UN Refugee Agency

The Lithuanian Red Cross (hereinafter – LRC) is the only non-governmental organization (hereinafter – NGO) operating in Lithuania that carries out independent monitoring of asylum seekers' reception and protection conditions as well as access to the asylum procedure. A similar function is performed only by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereinafter – UNHCR), in cooperation with which the LRC conducts monitoring. As well as, in certain cases monitoring is conducted by the Seimas Ombudsman's Office of the Republic of Lithuania. Throughout the year, LRC monitors visit border units, foreigner accommodation and detention centers, as well as other places where asylum seekers are temporarily accommodated or detained. After each visit, a report is prepared detailing the observations made. Reports are submitted to the institutions in charge. At the end of each year, the annual LRC monitoring report summarizes the information gathered by monitors, presents observations recorded during visits and conversations with asylum seekers and institutional representatives, as well as migration trends in Lithuania and the region concerning foreigners who may require international protection.

The 2024 LRC annual monitoring report updates the issues and changes in the access to asylum procedure, highlighting the challenges arising when entering Lithuania both through border control points (hereinafter – BCP) and in an irregular manner. The conditions for the reception and protection of asylum seekers at border units and in accommodation and detention centers for foreigners are also discussed in detail. The report pays particular attention to the phenomenon known as the "Latvian transit," which began in 2023, i.e., the situation of foreigners who arrived in Lithuania via Latvia. It also briefly presents the highlights of the monitoring of initial asylum seeker's interviews.

In recent years, the LRC's monitoring focus and observed areas requiring improvement have shifted significantly. Until 2021, the main focus was on reception and protection conditions. However, at the end of summer 2021, a new problematic area emerged – pushbacks of foreigners crossing the border irregularly. At the same time, issues of reception and protection remained relevant, as the foreigner accommodation and detention centers operating in Lithuania were overcrowded, and three new centers were established in 2021. Over time, some centers were closed, and the number of people in the remaining ones significantly decreased, resulting in noticeably improved conditions. In both 2023 and 2024, it was concluded that the reception and protection conditions for asylum seekers essentially meet recommended standards. However, from mid-2024 onward, the main problem in terms of reception and protection conditions was the shortage of interpreters at the Foreigners' Registration Center (hereinafter – FRC) in Pabradė, administered by the State Border Guard Service (hereinafter – SBGS), and partially at some branches of the Refugee Reception Center (hereinafter – RRC). The lack of access to interpreters particularly affected the quality of services such as medical or psychological consultations.

The 2024 report concludes that, summarizing the situation observed in recent years, access to the asylum procedure in Lithuania is being systematically restricted, and it is precisely the limited ability to apply for asylum that remains the most problematic area within the asylum context.

Changes observed in 2024 that reduced opportunities to apply for asylum in Lithuania: (1) closure of two international BCPs with Belarus; (2) introduction of a ban on arriving at BCPs with Belarus on foot or by bicycle – entry is only allowed with a motor vehicle; (3) with rare exceptions, disembarkation from the transit train passing through Lithuania was prohibited. In 2024, a new practice was also observed, when in certain cases pushbacks were applied to Belarusian nationals, for whom violation of the non-refoulement principle poses an especially serious threat to health and life. In 2024, there were no recorded cases of registration of asylum applications from Russian nationals who arrived in BCPs. Considering that until 2022 this nationality comprised the largest group of foreigners applying for asylum at BCPs and is currently the second-largest group of asylum seekers in Lithuania (after Belarusian nationals), the complete "disappearance" of Russian nationals from BCP application statistics is difficult to explain.

Nevertheless, unlike in 2023, in 2024 LRC monitors did not document specific cases when asylum applications from Russian nationals were rejected at BCPs. On the other hand, there is known information about a pushback involving a Russian national attempting to cross the border irregularly.

In the 2022–2023 period, a serious issue emerged regarding foreigners suffering frostbite after prolonged stays in border forests during the cold season. In 2022–2023, five cases of amputations were recorded, and four cases required foot or leg prosthetics. In 2024, the LRC received information about one similar case in which a foreigner required toe amputation due to frostbite sustained at the border. The case was recorded at the beginning of 2024, at the end of the year there is no information about foreigners taken from the border for hospitalization.

For the second consecutive year, the detention of foreigners who entered Lithuania via Latvia or were transferred from Poland remained a highly problematic issue. In 2024, practices were observed when persons belonging to the aforementioned group were *de facto* detained in SBGS units under *incommunicado* conditions, sometimes for up to five weeks. The precise reception and protection conditions are unknown, as LRC monitors do not have access to this category of individuals. In known cases, during the first days of detention, even minimal recommended conditions were not ensured.

Restricted access to the asylum procedure, disproportionate restrictions on freedom of movement amounting to detention, collective expulsions, and disregard for the principle of non-refoulement. These are the core problematic pillars defining the state of Lithuania's asylum system and the trends observed in 2024. The groundwork for these issues was laid by the state-level emergency declared on 2 July 2021 due to a mass influx of foreigners and the ongoing tense geopolitical situation in the region, in which Lithuania, guarding the external EU border, plays a part.

The UNHCR has repeatedly stressed the importance of not punishing refugees who choose irregular modes of travel[1] and the relevance of the non-refoulement principle in the context of so-called instrumentalization of migrants and refugees[2]. In 2024, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child issued conclusions specifically addressing Lithuania's compliance (or lack thereof) with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child[3]. Reports by other international organizations – such as the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)[4], the EU Agency for Asylum (hereinafter – EUAA)[5], and the Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO)[6] of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) – also noted non-compliance with international obligations and legal standards, and the improper treatment of foreigners who may require international protection.

Despite the criticism, collective pushbacks at the border and *de facto* detention within national territory continued in 2024. Beyond these ongoing practices, the year stood out for laying the foundation for future structural changes in the asylum and migration systems – both at the national and EU levels.

In May 2024, all EU member states received the long-anticipated and controversial Migration and Asylum Pact (hereinafter – the Pact). This extensive package of legal acts is ambitiously presented as *“a set of new rules aimed at managing migration and creating a common EU-level asylum system that delivers results while continuing to be based on European values”*[7]. The European Parliament and the Council of the EU approved the new rules, purportedly equipping EU countries *“with the tools to address complex migration challenges decisively and creatively so that the EU can maintain strong and secure external borders while also guaranteeing fundamental human rights”*[8]. All EU member states, including Lithuania, committed to presenting national plans on how they will prepare for the Pact's launch in 2026. In Lithuania, institutions and agencies subordinate or accountable to the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Social Security and Labour will be responsible for implementing the Pact[9]. Thus, 2025 will be a year of homework for Lithuania.

[1] See Guidelines on International Protection No. 14: Non-penalization of refugees on account of their irregular entry or presence and restrictions on their movements in accordance with Article 31 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 23 September 2024, Refworld: <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2024/en/148632>

[2] See Legal considerations on asylum and non-refoulement in the context of 'instrumentalization', UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 26 September 2024, Refworld: <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2024/en/148736>

[3] See Concluding Observations on the Combined Fifth and Sixth Periodic Reports of Lithuania, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 2 February 2024, Refworld: <https://www.refworld.org/policy/polrec/crc/2024/en/149237>

[4] See Fundamental Rights Report 2024, 5 June 2024, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA): <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/fundamental-rights-report-2024>

[5] See Asylum Report 2024, 14 June 2024, European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA): <https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/asylum-report-2024>

[6] See Fundamental Rights: 2023 Annual Report, 2024-07-10, European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO): <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/fundamental-rights-2023-annual-report-19Eodz>

[7] See the Migration and Asylum Pact. The Common EU Migration Management System, 21 May 2024, European Commission: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] See the Order of the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania of 10 December 2024 on the approval of the national implementation plan of the European Union Migration and Asylum Pact: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/127386a3b73711efbb3fe9794b4a33e2>

From a national perspective, arguably the most significant 2024 event in the migration context – with the hope of yielding a new and, most importantly, positive impulse – was the establishment of the Reception and Integration Agency under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour[10]. Modeled on international best practices and developed with the help of international experts, the new institution will, from 1 January 2025, consolidate the RRC with its branches in Vilnius, Rukla, and Girionys (Kaunas district), as well as the FRC in Pabradė, formerly under SBGS authority[11]. This means that the full scope of foreigner reception will transfer to a civilian institution, and SBGS will be responsible only for ensuring the detention of foreigners and procedural actions. SBGS remains one of the institutions (along with the Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior) responsible for receiving and registering asylum applications. Foreigners who submit asylum applications at the border will temporarily remain under SBGS care, in cooperation with the Reception and Integration Agency.

It is worth noting that the 2024 monitoring showed material reception conditions are not the biggest challenge. On the contrary, population numbers decreased in all monitored accommodation and detention centers, and reception conditions improved. Much more concerning are issues already mentioned: foreigners' access to the asylum procedure, and other closely related protection aspects such as proper information provision, access to interpretation services, the ability to contact the outside world, legal aid, and more.

How the changed system for receiving asylum seekers will function – and how it will affect not only reception but also protection conditions and effective access to the asylum procedure – remains to be seen. It is to be hoped that when preparing the 2025 report, LRC monitors will be able to state that the asylum and migration system reform has succeeded, with significantly improved conditions and encouraging trends. For now, we invite you to explore the 2024 findings, based on information gathered during monitoring visits, analysis of evolving legal frameworks and relevant documents, statistics and other data accessible to LRC, and open sources.

[10] See the Resolution No. 767 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 11 September 2024 'On the change of the name and organizational form of the Refugee Reception Center' (<https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/f601abc1741311ef9c779dd37198d447>) and the Order No. A1-614 of the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania of 17 September 2024 'On the approval of the regulations of the Reception and Integration Agency' (<https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/d868e012752b11ef9c779dd37198d447>)

[11] The FRC section of the center's territory remains a separate unit administered by the SBGS, and SBGS fully ensures detention control.

VALSTYBĖS SIENOS APSAUGOS TARN INFORMUOJA

I. MONITORING IN 2024: NUMBERS AND FACTS

In 2024, monitoring activities were conducted by two LRC monitors. Gender equality was ensured in monitoring – sensitive or confidential information could be collected by either a female or male monitor. The monitoring was carried out based on the 2 June 2010 agreement between SBGS, UNHCR, and LRC, and the 27 February 2020 agreement between the RRC and LRC.

Monitoring objectives: (1) to **monitor** (to have access to legally defined places for submitting asylum applications, documents, asylum seekers, etc.); (2) to **collect and assess** (to objectively document how procedures are implemented, whether reception and protection conditions meet standards and legal requirements, and analyze the collected material); (3) to **inform** (to provide information and cooperate with responsible state institutions that are obligated to ensure proper reception and protection conditions) and to pursue changes necessary to safeguard basic rights of asylum seekers.

1. LRC MONITORING STATISTICS

In 2024, LRC monitors conducted 52 visits^[12], all in person. For 18 times, both LRC monitors attended the visits due to the scope of the monitoring. Some monitoring visits were carried out jointly with UNHCR representatives. For details on visit dates, locations, nature, and objectives – see *Annex No. 1. Monitoring Statistics, including a map of the sites visited by LRC monitors*.

In 2024, 65 monitoring reports were prepared, including extended thematic monitoring report focused on access to the asylum procedure, supplemented for 2024. The number of visits and reports differs because: (1) some visits included more than one type of monitoring – for example, access to the asylum procedure (initial interviews) and reception / protection conditions; (2) the mentioned thematic report was based not only on information gathered during specific visits but also through in-person, phone, or social media interviews, processing publicly available data, engaging with responsible institutions, and so on; (3) some prepared reports were internal and submitted only to UNHCR. The summary annual monitoring report was prepared based on all 2024 reports, including internal ones.

For comparison, in 2023, two more monitoring visits were conducted (54, all in person), but four fewer reports were prepared (61).

[12] This number does not include visits related to the ongoing surveying of refugees from Ukraine, as different methods are applied to this activity.

As usual, LRC monitors tracked another indicator – feedback from institutions, i.e., comments after report submission, expressed need to supplement reports, etc. In 2024, 16 reports (almost one-third of all) received feedback. In 2023, feedback was provided on 17 reports.

2. ASYLUM STATISTICS

2.1. National statistics

According to publicly available Migration Department (hereinafter – MD) data, **in 2024 the number of registered asylum applications continued to decrease. In 2024, 362 asylum applications were registered in Lithuania (including subsequent ones)[13].**

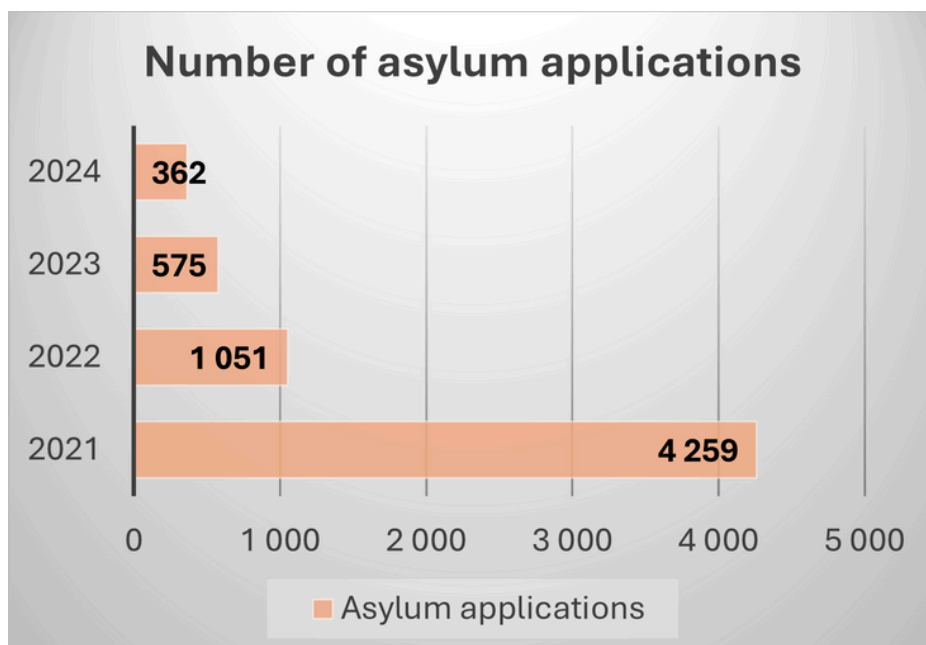
Most asylum applications were received at the beginning of the year (January – 44, February – 41, March – 49), and in August (42). In some months, the number of asylum applications did not reach 20 (April, October). More about the dynamics of asylum applications in Lithuania in 2024 – see *Annex No. 2. SBGS and national statistics*.

For comparison, in 2023, 575 asylum applications were registered in Lithuania – about 40% more than in 2024[14].

Asylum applications were submitted by nationals of 30 countries (in comparison, in 2023 – applicants of 39 countries and one stateless person). Belarusian nationals (140 applications) continued to dominate in this statistic, with Russian nationals in second place (47), in the third place with half as much stands Ukrainians (23), then Tajiks (22), Uzbeks (21), and Iraqis (20). The number of applications submitted by people from other countries did not reach 20. Notably, alongside the “usual” countries of origin – Belarus, the Russian Federation, and Tajikistan – new countries emerged that had not previously been dominant in recent years – Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Cuba (18). Meanwhile, countries that were among the top five in 2023, such as Afghanistan (8) and Syria (5), were in the middle of the statistical table in 2024.

More about the countries of origin of asylum seekers – see *Annex No. 2. SBGS and national statistics*.

IN 2024 THE NUMBER OF ASYLUM APPLICATIONS REGISTERED IN LITHUANIA HAS FURTHER DECREASED

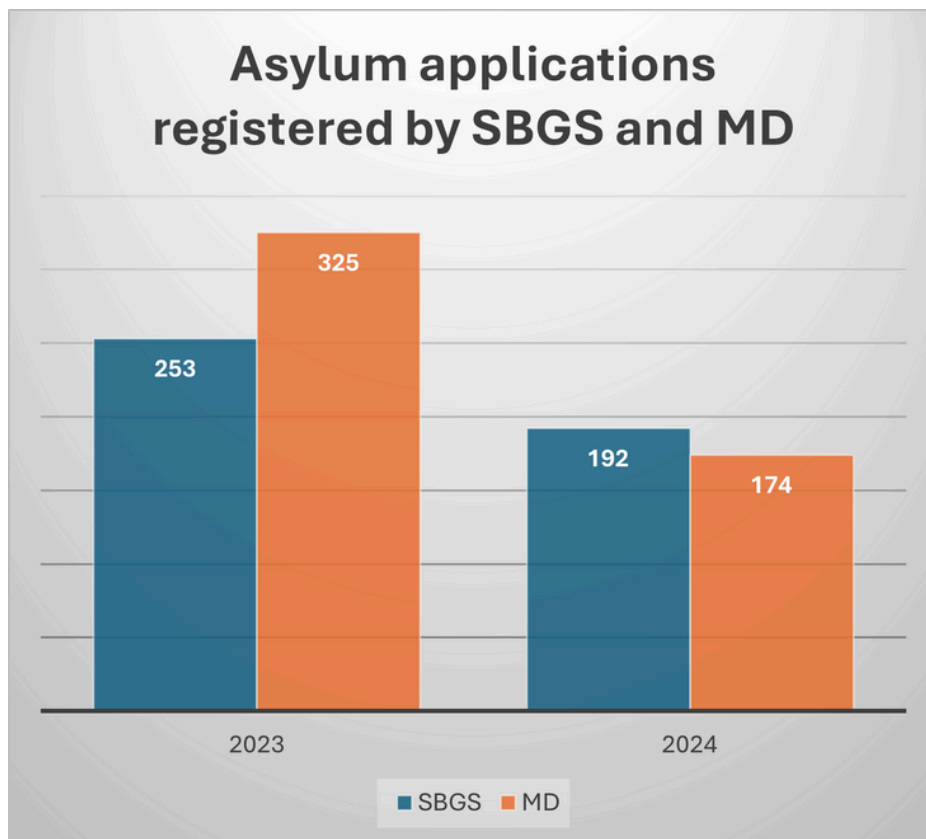


[13] See the 2024 Migration Yearbook, Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania: <https://migracija.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1744263116/1297/MM%202024%20LT.pdf>

[14] See the 2023 Migration Yearbook, Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania: <https://migracija.lrv.lt/media/viesa/saugykla/2024/5/xtUeX75YEX8.pdf>

2.2. SBGS statistics

The LRC receives monthly statistical summaries from SBGS, which include, among other things, breakdowns of asylum applications registered by SBGS and general national asylum statistics, including applications registered at MD territorial divisions. SBGS divides statistical data into: (1) applications registered at SBGS BCPs; (2) applications registered at SBGS frontier districts (hereinafter – FD) and frontier stations (hereinafter – FS), i.e., cases where the state border was crossed irregularly or the foreigner was identified in Lithuanian territory, as well as registrations within the country. The second category includes, among others, foreigners accommodated/detained at SBGS FRC and requesting asylum there, foreigners transferred from other EU countries under the Dublin III Regulation (usually registered at SBGS FRC), persons relocated from third countries and / or EU countries, etc.



COMPARED TO 2023, IN 2024 SBGS HAS REGISTERED AROUND 25 % LESS ASYLUM APPLICATIONS, AND MD – AROUND 50 % LESS ASYLUM APPLICATION

According to SBGS data, in 2024, 366 asylum applications were registered in Lithuania (31 of them at SBGS BCPs, 54 at SBGS FD or FS, 44 at SBGS FRC, 174 at MD territorial divisions, 63 transferred under the Dublin III Regulation).

No persons were relocated from third countries or EU countries in 2024 (in 2023 – 5). These figures slightly differ (up to 5) from the MD figures above, which state that 362 asylum applications were submitted in Lithuania in 2024. This discrepancy may partly be explained by the fact that, for example, some asylum seekers under SBGS jurisdiction were considered by MD as already being in the asylum procedure and therefore not included in the statistics of new applications.

As noted, the number of registered asylum applications decreases every year. Compared to 2023, the number of applications registered by SBGS decreased by about 25%, and those registered by MD decreased even more (almost 50%).

More on the distribution of asylum seekers by month and registration location – see [Annex No. 2. SBGS and national statistics](#).

2.3. Lithuania in the EU Context

Lithuania, along with Hungary, Slovakia, and Malta, remains among the EU countries registering the fewest asylum applications. According to data from the EU statistical office (hereinafter – Eurostat), **during the first nine months of 2024, the total number of first-time asylum seekers in the EU was 685,305** (based on data from 27 EU member states). The top five countries registering the most applications were Germany (176,435 applications), Spain (122,135), Italy (116,070), France (97,285), and Greece (46,065). Austria (16,645), which was in the top five previously, dropped out, overtaken by the Netherlands (24,715) and Belgium (23,500)[15]. The top five countries mentioned accounted for over 80% of all asylum applications submitted in the EU. Neighboring Poland (9,980 applications) also made it into the top ten before the end of 2024. Among non-EU countries, Switzerland also stood out (16,595 applications in the first nine months of 2024).

More about asylum seekers in the EU by country – see [Annex No. 3. EU asylum statistics](#).

Compared to the first nine months of 2023, the number of first-time asylum seekers in the EU decreased in 2024. During the same period in 2023, about 10% more foreigners requested asylum.

LITHUANIA, ALONG WITH HUNGARY, SLOVAKIA, AND MALTA, REGISTER THE FEWEST NUMBERS OF ASYLUM APPLICATIONS AMONG THE EU STATES

2023 was a record year – more than a million foreigners sought asylum in the EU for the first time, which was 20% more than in 2022[16]. After several years of growth, once the full data for 2024 is compiled, it is likely that the number of newly registered asylum seekers will slightly decline.

The top five countries of origin whose citizens most frequently submitted asylum applications in the EU during the first nine months of 2024 were Syria (110,590 / 16.1% of all applications), Afghanistan (54,585 / 7.9%), Venezuela (51,910 / 7.6%), Colombia (38,425 / 5.6%), and Turkey (35,975 / 5.2%). The dominant countries remained essentially the same as in 2023. The number of asylum applications submitted by Ukrainian nationals increased significantly (16,645 / 2.4% of all applications). Ukraine entered the top ten, overtaking Pakistan (15,635 / 2.3%). Apart from this change, the other top ten countries remained the same as in 2023[17].

For more on the distribution of asylum seekers by country of origin – see [Annex No. 3. EU asylum statistics](#).

Aside from Ukraine, the countries of origin dominating among asylum seekers in Lithuania in 2024 did not rank among the top in the EU. The numbers of asylum applications from Belarusian nationals (3,330 applications), Russian nationals (7,895), and especially Tajik (800) or Uzbek nationals (725) did not stand out in the EU context and slightly declined compared to 2023[18].

[15] See Eurostat, Data Browser, Asylum and first time asylum applicants – monthly data 2024, online access – 19 December 2024: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00189/default/table?lang=en>

[16] See First-time asylum applicants up 64% in 2022, 23 March 2023, Eurostat, online access – 19 December 2024: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230323-2>

[17] See Eurostat Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex - monthly data 2024, online access – 19 December 2024: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYAPPCTZM__custom_9056506/default/table?lang=en

[18] *Ibid.*

II. BORDER MONITORING

1. GENERAL STATISTICS

1.1. SBGS Notifications about Asylum Seekers

In 2024, LRC monitors received reports about 196 foreigners whose asylum applications were registered with SBGS^[19] (for comparison, in 2023 LRC received reports from SBGS about 238 registered asylum applications – about 20% more than in 2024). Of the 196 asylum seekers mentioned, 167 were adults (129 men, 38 women), 29 were children (16 boys, 13 girls), 2 of them were unaccompanied and / or separated.

SBGS registered asylum applications made by nationals of 26 countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Egypt, The Gambia, India, Iraq, Iran, Cameroon, Kazakhstan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cuba, Libya, Pakistan, Palestine, South Africa, Russian Federation, Senegal, Syria, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. In 2023, asylum applications were registered from nationals of 27 countries.

LRC monitors collect data received from SBGS border units (FD, FS, and BCP) and the FRC; therefore, this statistic includes information about subsequent asylum applications, as well as foreigners transferred under the Dublin III Regulation, transferred from prisons, identified within the country as not having the right to be in Lithuania, and others. There were also changes during the process – e.g., the country of origin indicated by the asylum seeker changed, individuals withdrew their application, refused to be interviewed and the registration did not occur, or, after factual circumstances changed, it was decided to transfer the individual to Latvia on readmission grounds, etc. For these reasons, minor statistical discrepancies are possible.

According to LRC data, in 2024 SBGS registered at least 97 first-time asylum applications, of which in 34 cases asylum seekers arrived via SBGS BCP (30 via the external border with Belarus and the Russian Federation, 1 at the airport^[20]), 61 crossed the border irregularly (based on available data, 18 of them were apprehended inside the country or transferred from Poland after irregular border crossing in other EU countries), and at least 2 asylum seekers were apprehended transiting through Lithuania within the EU.

[19] Here and further in the report, a *notification* refers to information about a planned asylum application registration, not an registered application. The statistics include all received notifications, without excluding cases where, for various reasons, the application was not subsequently registered.

[20] It is worth mentioning that 3 more foreigners arrived through Vilnius International Airport, but their asylum applications were not registered at the airport, i.e. not at the BCP.

COMPARED TO 2023, THE NUMBER OF ASYLUM SEEKERS ARRIVING REGULARLY SLIGHTLY INCREASED IN 2024, WHILE THE NUMBER OF THOSE CROSSING THE BORDER IRREGULARLY DECREASED ALMOST BY HALF

These numbers may be somewhat inaccurate, as many foreigners were identified inside the country in 2024 whose circumstances of arrival into Lithuania remain unclear, i.e., documentation was lacking, there was no reliable evidence, or the information available to LRC was insufficient to assign them to a specific category.

There were cases where asylum seekers were transferred to Lithuania on readmission grounds. According to LRC data, in addition to the newly arrived, at least 36 foreigners submitted subsequent asylum applications. **Compared to 2023, the number of foreigners arriving regularly slightly increased, while the number of asylum seekers who crossed the border irregularly was almost halved in 2024.**

More about the profile of asylum seekers, the distribution of countries of origin by mode of arrival, and the SBGS border units that sent the most notifications to LRC – see *Annex No. 4. LRC Collected Data*.

2. ACCESS TO THE ASYLUM PROCEDURE

In 2024, the state-level emergency declared in 2021 due to the mass influx of foreigners from Belarus remained in effect, along with related legal regulations, which stipulate that an application for asylum in the Republic of Lithuania may be submitted: (1) at BCPs or in transit zones – to SBGS; (2) within the territory of the Republic of Lithuania – to SBGS or MD; (3) in a foreign country – through the Lithuanian diplomatic missions or consular posts designated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania[21].

It is important to mention that in 2024, manifestations of the legal fiction defined by law were periodically monitored, where the presence of foreigners who submitted an asylum application at BCPs, in transit zones, or shortly after irregularly crossing the state border, as well as their stay in temporary accommodation sites, was not considered as entry into the territory of Lithuania until a decision to admit them into territory was made[22].

When foreigners attempted to cross the border irregularly, SBGS officers continued to apply the so-called pushback measure, legally established in 2023[23]. SBGS publishes daily statistics on foreigners not admitted from Belarus after attempting to cross the border irregularly[24]. Alongside Lithuanian figures, statistics from neighboring countries – Latvia and Poland – are also presented. According to SBGS statistics, in 2024, SBGS officers prevented 1,002 foreigners from entering Lithuania from Belarus at unauthorized points. For comparison, in 2023 there were 2,643 such attempts – 2.5 times more – and in 2022 there were 11,211. Since 3 August 2021, when SBGS officers were granted the authority to pushback foreigners attempting to cross from Belarus at unauthorized locations, a total of 22,962 persons were denied irregular entry into the country by the end of 2024. LRC does not have data on how many of these were unique individuals versus repeat attempts by the same persons.

[21] See Article 140¹² of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Legal Status of Foreigners: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.42837E5A79DD/asr>

[22] *Ibid*, Art. 140⁸.

[23] See Article 4, Paragraph 13 of the Law on the State Border and its Protection of the Republic of Lithuania: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.101063/asr>

[24] See the “statistics of denied illegal migrants”, online access – 2025-01-01: <https://vsat.lrv.lt/>

The legal regulation provides exceptions and grants SBGS officers the discretion not to apply pushbacks when a foreigner is *“fleeing from armed conflicts specified in a Government resolution[25], as well as from persecution”* or *„seeking to enter the territory of the Republic of Lithuania for humanitarian reasons.”* LRC and other independent monitors are not in a position to objectively determine whether (and how) an assessment of the motives and individual circumstances of foreigners attempting to cross the border irregularly is conducted.

It has been monitored for several years now that these exceptions are most commonly applied to Belarusian nationals. However, in 2024, cases were also monitored where Belarusian nationals were pushed-back (more on these cases in the section on access to the asylum procedure after irregular border crossing). According to LRC data, of the 41 foreigners who were not pushed-back after being apprehended in the border area following an irregular border crossing from Belarus, 37 were Belarusian nationals. Only two cases were monitored in 2024 where the exceptions were applied to people of countries other than Belarus. One was a Russian national (female) who entered Lithuania together with a Belarusian national. The other involved urgent humanitarian needs of Cuban nationals with a recently born infant. Border guards provided first aid and brought the mother and child to a hospital. The father was separated for some time but later allowed to rejoin the family. Other adult members of the extended family were separated and pushed-back, and contact with them was temporarily lost.

There were cases where foreigners managed to cross the border irregularly and leave the border area (or travel through Lithuania from Latvia) without being noticed by Lithuanian border guards. If they were later apprehended

in neighboring Poland, they were transferred to Lithuania and had access to the asylum procedure. LRC does not categorize such cases as access to the asylum procedure at the border zone, as pushbacks are not permitted under the law once foreigners are deep within the country.

IN 2024, OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS IN NEED OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION TO APPLY FOR ASYLUM AT INTERNATIONAL BCPS SIGNIFICANTLY NARROWED

In 2024, unlike in 2023, there were attempts to cross the border irregularly at the border with the Russian Federation's Kaliningrad region. LRC monitors are aware of two such cases in which Russian nationals – both adult men – entered Lithuania in this manner, and their asylum applications were accepted. LRC has no data on any pushbacks occurring at the border with the Kaliningrad region.

Regarding access to the asylum procedure through regular means via international BCPs, opportunities to apply for asylum significantly narrowed in 2024. As of 1 March 2024, pursuant to Government resolution[26], two international BCPs operating at the Belarusian border – Lavoriškės (Vilnius district) and Raigardas (Druskininkai municipality) were closed. At the remaining two road BCPs – Medininkai (Vilnius district) and Šalčininkai (Šalčininkai district) – pedestrian and bicycle access was restricted. Boarding and disembarking of transit train passengers was also limited at Kena (border with Belarus) and Kybartai (border with the Russian Federation) railway BCPs.

More on access to the asylum procedure at SBGS BCPs and in diplomatic missions abroad – see *LRC report: Access to the Asylum Procedure at Lithuanian Diplomatic Missions Abroad and SBGS BCPs*[27].

[25] On 3 May 2023, the Government adopted Resolution No. 2023-08339 “On the Protection of the State Border of the Republic of Lithuania in the Event of a Declared National Level Emergency,” which legalized the pushback of foreigners. However, it decided not to specify “armed conflicts,” the withdrawal from which would allow the application of the stipulated exception. The proposal prepared by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania indicates that *“given the current threat context, there are no objective grounds to create a list of armed conflicts, for which the provision on the non-admission of foreigners to the Republic of Lithuania would not apply, so as not to create a pull factor for instrumentalized migration.”* Thus, one of the exceptions provided cannot even be applied in practice.

[26] See the amendment to the Resolution No. 517 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 2 July 2021 “On the Declaration of a National Level Emergency and the Appointment of the National Level Emergency Operations Commander”, 2024-02-21, e-seimas.lrs.lt: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/e16d07a0d08911ee9269b566387cfeb>

[27] See Access to the Asylum Procedure at Lithuanian Diplomatic Missions Abroad and SBGS BCPs, 2024 update, Lithuanian Red Cross. Access: <https://redcross.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ACCESS-TO-PROCEDURE-EN-2024.pdf>

In the context of access to the asylum procedure, the so-called “Latvian transit” is noteworthy – that is, persons who entered Latvia from Belarus irregularly and/or left foreigner accommodation centers in Latvia[28] and traveled in transit through Lithuania, being apprehended by police or SBGS mobile patrols throughout the country – from the Latvian to the Polish border. Between January and November 2024, 529 such foreigners were apprehended in Lithuania. Around 30% had left foreigner accommodation centers in Latvia[29]. Compared to 2023, “Latvian transit” figures were lower in 2024. In 2023, 1,193 foreigners were apprehended in similar circumstances – more than double the number in 2024[30] (excluding December 2024, for which data was not available at the time of reporting).

Access to the asylum procedure for foreigners arriving from Latvia was quite complicated. According to LRC data, such foreigners were usually returned to Latvia (or rarely, to Estonia) under readmission procedures based on a trilateral agreement[31]. Asylum applications in Lithuania were generally only accepted from those whom neighboring countries refused to admit due to lack of evidence confirming their presence in their territory. According to LRC data, at least 13 asylum seekers who arrived from Latvia or were transferred from Poland were registered in Lithuania in 2024[32]. In 2023, there were at least 75 such cases – 4.5 times more.

9 out of 10 foreigners interviewed indicated they had expressed a wish to seek asylum during their initial days in detention, but their applications were ignored and only accepted later when they applied during court hearings on detention. Under de facto detention conditions[33], these foreigners spent 2 to 5 weeks without having their asylum applications accepted in Lithuania. None of the interviewed individuals received a decision from SBGS outlining the basis for their de facto detention.

Foreigners in this situation were initially de facto detained under *incommunicado* conditions (without contact with the outside world or access to legal aid) and later detained by court order (for at least 3 months, sometimes extended). Courts justified detention, among other reasons, on the grounds that foreigners allegedly failed to submit asylum applications immediately and did so only, for example, during court proceedings[34]. However, LRC data shows that the foreigners simply did not have the opportunity to apply, as authorities prioritized finding a way to return them to the neighboring countries through which they entered the EU. In cases where asylum applications were finally registered and LRC monitors were granted access to communicate with the foreigners,

[28] A small portion also consisted of foreigners who had irregularly entered the EU through Estonia, but the travel route remained the same, i.e., they arrived in Lithuania from the Latvian side.

[29] See Ukrainian transported four Indians who had fled illegally from Latvia, 2024-12-17, vsat.lrv.lt: <https://vsat.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/ukrainietis-gabeno-keturis-is-latvijos-neteisetai-sprukusius-indus/>

[30] See Latvian who hoped to earn money miscalculated: instead of nearly 3,000 euros, he may face several years in prison (photo), 2024-03-18, vsat.lrv.lt: <https://vsat.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/uzdirbti-tikejesis-latvis-apsiskaiciavo-vietoj-kone-3-tukst-euru-gali-sulaukti-keleriu-metu-kalejimo-foto/>

[31] See the Agreement of 30 June 1995 between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, the Government of the Republic of Estonia, and the Government of the Republic of Latvia on the Return of Persons Illegally Residing: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.19825>

[32] Foreigners who arrived from Latvia and those transferred from Poland are not distinguished, as in many cases it is not possible to precisely determine the circumstances of their entry into EU territory, or the testimonies provided by the foreigners themselves differ significantly. It cannot be ruled out that foreigners transferred to Lithuania from Poland may also have arrived from Latvia and crossed Lithuanian territory in transit.

[33] In this context, taking into account the applicable norms of international law and the actual conditions under which, based on the collected data, foreigners are held, “de facto detention” refers to “accommodation in temporary accommodation facilities without the right to move freely within the territory of the Republic of Lithuania” under Article 140⁸(4) of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Legal Status of Foreigners, which can last up to 5 months. Decisions under this provision are made by officers of the State Border Guard Service (SBGS), based, among other things, on the SBGS Commander’s Order No. 4-288 of 26 July 2023 “On the Approval of the Sample Decision Form on the Temporary Accommodation of a Foreigner” (<https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/761bdaf02beb11eea0b6cad9848a9596>). Although, according to Article 140⁸(5) of the same law, such a decision may be appealed to court (this is also stated in the sample decision form), access to state-guaranteed legal aid is not provided in such cases, and Lithuanian Red Cross lawyers do not have access to persons in this category.

[34] See the ruling of the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania of 18 December 2024 in administrative case No. eA-2785-815/2024, LITEKO – the Lithuanian court information system: <https://liteko.teismai.lt/viesasprendimupaiska/tekstas.aspx?id=7083d491-c37a-4542-8153-f48809d01c0f>

certain patterns were observed:

- foreigners were *de facto* detained in an effort to quickly return them to Latvia via readmission, but this was not always successful;
- when it became clear that readmission to Latvia was unlikely, SBGS applied to the court to restrict the foreigners' freedom of movement;
- when foreigners expressed their intention to seek asylum during court hearings, their asylum applications were accepted and registered.

ASYLUM APPLICATIONS MADE BY PEOPLE FROM „LATVIAN TRANSIT“ WERE BEING REGISTERED AFTER THEY EXPRESSED THEIR INTENTION TO SEEK ASYLUM DURING COURT HEARINGS OR AFTER NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES REFUSED TO TAKE THEM BACK PURSUANT TO READMISSION AGREEMENT

There was also a practice of detaining foreigners without asylum seeker status by court decision, and once they applied for asylum, their detention was replaced with an alternative measure prohibiting them from leaving the accommodation / detention center[35].

The situation was slightly different for unaccompanied or separated children arriving from Latvia. When apprehended, whether alone or in groups (including those transferred from Poland), they were directed to the Rukla RRC. LRC has no data on unaccompanied children being detained or denied access to the asylum procedure. However, according to MD data, unlike in 2023, no asylum applications were submitted by unaccompanied minors in 2024[36].

2.1. Possibility to Request Asylum at BCPs

According to LRC data, in 2024 not a single asylum application was registered at international railway BCPs (in 2023, one such application was registered). Meanwhile, the number of asylum applications accepted at road BCPs slightly increased compared to 2023, although it remained very low. Unlike in 2023, **in 2024 there was a slight increase in asylum seekers arriving via the external border with Belarus, and a significant decrease in those arriving via the external border with the Russian Federation's Kaliningrad region.**

Based on data provided by SBGS, no asylum applications were submitted at BCPs in April, May, June, September, November, or December of 2024.

In 2024, there were no cases where asylum applications were registered at BCPs from Russian nationals. In 2023, there was just one case where Russian national (female) submitted an application, whereas in previous years Russian nationals made up the majority of those applying for asylum at BCPs. For more comparative statistics – see Annex No. 4. LRC Collected Data.

LRC monitors are aware of two cases – or more precisely, four attempts – where the same foreigners or groups of foreigners unsuccessfully tried to submit asylum applications upon arrival at BCPs in 2024. One case occurred

[35] At the end of December 2023, the alternative to detention measure – “accommodation of a foreigner at the State Border Guard Service or another designated place **with the right to move only within the premises of the accommodation area**” – was replaced by a new alternative to detention measure: “accommodation of a foreigner at the State Border Guard Service or another designated place **with an obligation not to leave the territory of the accommodation area without permission from the head of the accommodation facility or an authorized person.**” Since in practice, despite the change in legal wording, the nature of the restriction on freedom of movement has not changed (to the knowledge of the LRC, at least until 13 December 2024, no person had been granted permission to leave the accommodation area), this alternative to detention will hereinafter be referred to as “alternative to detention without the possibility of leaving the accommodation center premises”.

[36] See the 2024 Migration Yearbook, Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania: <https://migracija.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1744263116/1297/MM%202024%20LT.pdf>

at a railway BCP, the other at a road BCP. More on these cases – see the LRC study: *Access to the Asylum Procedure at Lithuanian Diplomatic Missions Abroad and SBGS BCPs*[37].

It is noteworthy that until March 2024, it was possible to arrive at international BCPs on the Belarusian border by bicycle. The last such formalized border crossing was observed in February, when a Tajik national and her son arrived to the SBGS BCP from Belarus

with bicycles. From March onwards, a ban came into force prohibiting border crossing by bicycle, and asylum seekers had to find other options – purchasing bus tickets, hiring drivers, or attempting to catch a ride in passing vehicles crossing the border.

IN 2024, THERE WAS A SLIGHT INCREASE IN NUMBERS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS ARRIVING VIA EXTERNAL BORDER WITH BELARUS, WHILE NUMBERS OF THOSE ARRIVING VIA BORDER WITH RUSSIA DECREASED

2.2. Possibility to Request Asylum After Irregular Border Crossing

In 2024, LRC monitors documented several cases where third-country nationals seeking international protection were pushed back after irregularly crossing the border, possibly in violation of the *non-refoulement* principle.

I. Russian national. In April, LRC received information about a Russian national who attempted to cross the Belarus–Lithuania border irregularly and verbally requested asylum but was not admitted. SBGS officers instructed the individual to retreat from the physical barrier – the protective fence – and directed him to the nearest operational international BCP located approximately 10–12 km away. The man spent the entire night at the location, became cold, and injured his hands. Armed Belarusian border guards observed the situation from a distance. According to available information, after the outbreak of large scale armed in Ukraine, the man had deserted the military unit in which he served and was facing criminal charges.

The applicant at the border maintained contact with a third party who provided information to LRC monitors. After some time, it was informed that the man said he was “going to surrender,” and communication was lost.

According to the information received by the LRC afterwards, the person first ended up in the custody of the Belarusian Border Committee and was later handed over to Russia, where he awaited trial in a military unit.

II. Belarusian national. In June, LRC received information that a Belarusian national who had irregularly crossed the border and requested asylum was pushed back at the Belarus–Lithuania border. The man later managed to cross the border at a different location and had his asylum application accepted.

LRC monitors spoke directly with the asylum seeker and collected information about the failed first attempt.

According to the person, he initially planned the crossing on his own and chose a border section without a physical barrier, where the border follows a river. After swimming across the Nemunas river, he saw surveillance cameras on the Lithuanian side. He stood in front of one of them to attract attention and waited for border patrols. Lithuanian officers apprehended him and brought him to an SBGS unit, where he was interrogated. Eventually, he was taken back to the border and told to return to Belarus.

[37] See *Access to the Asylum Procedure at Lithuanian Diplomatic Missions Abroad and SBGS BCPs*, 2024 update, Lithuanian Red Cross. Access: <https://redcross.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ACCESS-TO-PROCEDURE-EN-2024.pdf>

The man said he was returned to an unfamiliar location and did not know where to go. He briefly checked his phone for a map, saw no nearby settlements or paths, and his phone died. He then realized that a barrier had also been built on the Belarusian side, trapping him between the two fences. Eventually, he overcame the obstacles and reached the nearest town.

During the first entry, the man received no documents confirming his presence in Lithuania, denial of entry, or non-admission of asylum request. He said his fingerprints were not taken but his photo was.

III. Cuban nationals. In July 2024, a Spanish national contacted LRC stating she had lost contact with her sister (a Cuban national). According to the Spanish national, her sister together with her family members tried to enter Lithuania irregularly and were pushed back by Lithuanian officers. According to the last known information, they were stuck in the Belarus–Lithuania border zone. The group included four family members (the woman, her husband, adult son, and minor daughter) and another Cuban man who joined them during the journey. None had valid travel documents allowing entry to the EU. The Spanish national said the family had no food or water and Belarusian border guards would not let them leave the forest. The minor had diabetes and required medication. With the efforts of Spanish national, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued interim measures[38], however contact with the group had not yet been restored.

Later, the Spanish national informed LRC that contact had been reestablished after eight days. According to subsequent information, Cuban nationals encountered Belarusian officers who forbade them from leaving the border area and threatened them to go toward Latvia. They irregularly crossed into Latvia, where they reportedly suffered abuse by local officers (one person's jaw was broken, another's ribs and arm were fractured). Their phones were damaged, and they were pushed back into Belarus. Eventually, the Cubans escaped the forest, met other foreigners who lent them a phone, and bought bus tickets. With an ECtHR ruling prohibiting their return, they arrived at Medininkai BCP without issue. In Lithuania, they received medical aid, one was temporarily hospitalized and underwent surgery. The next day, SBGS informed LRC monitors that their asylum applications would be registered.

IV. Belarusian national. In September, a person contacted LRC reporting that his brother, a Belarusian national, had irregularly crossed into Lithuania, waited for border guards, and requested asylum. According to the source, the asylum request was not registered, the phone was taken or damaged, and the applicant was returned to Belarus. In Belarus, he got lost in the forest, was caught by Belarusian guards, detained, and charged for participating in protests. According to the informant, this was his brother's first attempt, and he was crossing the border alone.

It is worth noting that even when asylum seekers managed to cross the border, their journeys were often difficult – due to natural obstacles or physical barriers (fences with concertina wire), and the risk of detection by Belarusian or Russian border patrols.

[38] See “ECtHR applies interim measures of protection in the case of B.O. and others against Lithuania”. Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania. Access: <https://tm.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys-1/atstovavimas-eztt/naujienos-2/ezt-byloje-bo-ir-kiti-pries-lietuva-pritaik-laikinasias-apsaugos-priemones/>

DANGERS AND RISKS FACED DURING IRREGULAR CROSSING

Examples of asylum seekers' experiences crossing the border irregularly:

- *January 2024, border with Belarus. (Adult male). It was very cold, the person came across a frozen lake. Although the lake was frozen, the swamp nearby was not, so the asylum seeker slipped in, got wet, and got dirty.*
- *January 2024, border with Belarus. (Woman, man and 3 minor children). The temperature was above zero for several days, but the asylum seekers walked across the lake on ice. The people were well prepared, tied to a rope. The man walked first, checking the thickness of the ice with a stick. When the ice held, other family members followed. In case the ice broke and the rope needed to be cut, the man had a knife with him. The ice surface was already wet, so everyone got their shoes wet.*
- *March 2024, border with Belarus. (Adult woman). The asylum seeker was wading/swimming across the river in a wetsuit and life jacket, experiencing stress. It was dark, her phone got wet, so she couldn't check the coordinates.*
- *April 2024, border with the Russian Federation. (Adult male). The asylum seeker crossed the state border by climbing over two security fences (cut his palms).*
- *April 2024, border with the Russian Federation. (Adult male). The asylum seeker crossed the state border by crossing the bridge.*
- *May 2024, border with Belarus. (Adult male). Having found himself at the border by the river, the asylum seeker inflated a mattress, put all his belongings on it and crossed over to the Lithuanian side. During the crossing of the border, the asylum seeker got wet, some of his belongings got wet, but he managed to cross the border. While mooring to the shore, the asylum seeker grabbed onto the branches of bushes growing on the shore and cut his hand.*

ASYLUM SEEKERS FORCED TO CROSS THE BORDER IRREGULARLY FACE DANGERS – PHYSICAL BARRIERS AND NATURAL OBSTACLES THAT ARE HAZARDOUS TO HEALTH, AND THERE IS ALSO A RISK OF BEING SPOTTED BY BELARUSIAN OR RUSSIAN OFFICIALS

- *June 2024, border with Belarus. (Adult male). The asylum seeker was stuck up to his neck in a swamp while crossing the border, when he got out he grabbed onto nearby grass and branches and successfully got out. The asylum seeker was saved by his fishing skills.*

- *August 2024, border with Belarus. (Adult male). In order to enter Lithuania, the asylum seeker had to cross the Nemunas River.*
- *September 2024, border with Belarus. (Man and woman). When crossing the border, the asylum seekers had with them a metal folding ladder to climb over the physical barrier. After climbing to the top of the fence, which was about 4 m high, the woman threw her backpack to the Lithuanian side, but soon realized that she would not be able to get down to the other side. The woman got entangled in an additional segment of barbed wire on the fence. While she was on top of the fence, a male asylum seeker, who also had difficulties due to visual impairment, started climbing from behind. Since the asylum seekers found themselves in a difficult situation, additional SBGS crews were called, the asylum seekers were taken to the ground, and first medical aid was provided.*
- *November 2024, border with Belarus. (Adult male). The asylum seeker crossed the border by swimming across the Nemunas River.*
- *December 2024, border with Belarus. (Adult male). The asylum seeker found himself at a physical barrier – a security fence with a concertina segment. The man realized that he would not be able to overcome the fence on his own, but the SBGS officers who appeared on the other side of the barrier initially ordered him to move away from the border. Then they drove away and returned after a while. The gates in the fence were opened for the asylum seeker, but before overcoming the concertina obstacle, the man scratched his hands, tore his clothes.*

3. RECEPTION AND PROTECTION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

Upon receiving a notification from the SBGS regarding a submitted asylum application, LRC monitors have access to visit border units, medical facilities, or other locations where asylum seekers are temporarily accommodated / detained. During the visits, LRC monitors assess the reception and protection conditions of asylum seekers. When evaluating reception conditions, attention is paid to the following aspects: 1) the premises in which asylum seekers are accommodated / detained[39]; 2) the ability to use sanitary facilities; 3) organization of food provision; 4) the possibility to spend time outdoors; 5) the provision of hygiene items, clothing, and other essential necessities.

Meanwhile, when assessing protection conditions, the focus is placed not on the material aspects necessary for survival of individuals, but on ensuring dignity and security, access to information, the package of services provided, the ability to contact family members, etc. All evaluations are carried out in accordance with the EUAA guidelines on reception conditions[40], the supplementary EUAA guidelines issued in May 2024[41], and the criteria set in national and international legal acts. The report includes general observations regarding reception conditions at the border units or other locations; more detailed information about each visit is provided in the annex – see *Annex No. 5: Border Monitoring*.

3.1. Material Reception Conditions

As in 2023, in 2024 a general positive trend was monitored: asylum seekers were kept in SBGS border units for the shortest time possible. Typically, asylum seekers spent 1–3 days in border units. The duration of stay largely depended on which day of the week the person arrived in Lithuania. Since SBGS Migration Division officers and MD specialists do not work on weekends, initial interviews and decisions on accommodation / detention are generally made on the first working day after the person's arrival. For example, if someone arrived on Friday, all procedural actions would take place on Monday; for mid-week arrivals, procedures were typically completed within 24 hours. It should be emphasized that the conditions described below were experienced by asylum seekers for a relatively short period, after which they were either permitted to reside on their own or were accommodated / detained at the SBGS FRC in Pabradė.

In 2024, it was observed that border units generally ensured all standard-compliant reception conditions for asylum seekers. Out of 29 visits to SBGS border units, 15 (more than half) were found to fully meet recommended standards (8 January – Švenčionys FS, 25 January – Lavoriškės BCP, 26 January – Švenčionys FS, 19 February – Lavoriškės BCP, 18 March – Švenčionys

**MORE THAN HALF OF MONITORING VISITS
TO SBGS UNITS CONFIRMED FULL
COMPLIANCE WITH RECOMMENDED
RECEPTION STANDARDS**

FS, 16 April – Bardinai FS, 17 April – Šiauliai FS, 13 May – Švenčionys FS, 20 June – Švenčionys FS, 23 July – Medininkai BCP, 15 August – A. Barauskas FS, 26 August – Medininkai BCP, 20 September – A. Barauskas FS, 1 October – Kybartai Road BCP, 4 November – Kapčiamiestis FS). Notably, at Švenčionys FS (visited 5 times) and Lavoriškės BCP[42] (visited 2 times), all visits confirmed full compliance with standards.

[39] According to the Order of the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania “On Approval of the Description of the Conditions and Procedure for the Accommodation of Temporary Asylum Seekers at Border Checkpoints and Structural Units of the State Border Guard Service under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania”, the reception facilities for asylum seekers must have natural lighting, artificial lighting, and the premises must be heated and ventilated. The premises must also have the following furniture and appliances: bed, table, chair, wardrobe, disposable tableware, kettle. Each asylum seeker must be issued a pillow, blanket, and bedding set.

See.: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/caf7f150135a11e6a23dfca0984f2ff9/asr>

[40] See EUAA Guidance on Reception: Operational standards and indicators, 2016, EUAA: <https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Guidance-on-ReceptionConditions-LT.pdf>

[41] See Guidance on Reception Operational Standards and Indicators, 2024, EUAA: <https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/guidance-reception-operational-standards-and-indicators>

[42] Visits to the Lavoriškės BCP were carried out in January - February 2024. Since 1 March 2024, when this BCP was temporarily closed, asylum seekers were no longer accommodated there.

In other cases, relatively minor deviations from standards were recorded. It is commendable that some border units adapted reception conditions to the specific needs of the asylum seekers they typically accommodated. For example, at Švenčionys FS, where asylum seekers often arrive after irregularly crossing rivers or swamps, staff placed clothes dryers and electric heaters in the rooms, available even in summer, to dry wet clothes and footwear.

A similar practice was monitored at Lavoriškės BCP, where most asylum seekers were women with children. Here, staff placed a folding baby crib and toys in the room.

One 2024 case involved an asylum seeker being accommodated in conditions not meeting minimum standards and considered degrading:

- *On 2 August 2024, during a visit to Kapčiamiestis FS, it was found that an asylum seeker was accommodated in a temporary detention room usually used for detaining lawbreakers. The room lacked sufficient furniture (no table or chair), and the window could not be covered during night or rest hours. The asylum seeker had no access to a shower and was not provided with clean bedding or towels. The toilet in the room was separated by a partition, and a sink was available, but washing was minimal due to video surveillance. The asylum seeker had swum across the Nemunas river to reach Lithuania but was not provided facilities to dry his wet clothing. During the visit, he kept his wet clothes in bags. He was not allowed even minimal outdoor time.*

A second visit to Kapčiamiestis FS on 4 November 2024 found that standard-compliant reception conditions had been ensured. The key difference was that the asylum seeker was now accommodated in a room designated for asylum seekers, had constant access to sanitary facilities including a shower, was given clean, dry clothes, allowed to use a washing machine, and granted free access to the fenced outdoor area.

In 2024, a new positive food provision practice was monitored. Although asylum seekers continued to receive pre-packaged meals, their contents changed. Military-style meal kits were introduced, including heatable stews and porridge with meat. These could be heated using water or boiling water. Since water and kettles were available in all border units visited by the LRC monitors, this ensured asylum seekers could have hot meals, not only cold canned food and snacks. However, it was noted that labels on these meals were often in Lithuanian only, so asylum seekers could not verify ingredients – a concern especially for Muslims avoiding pork.

3.2. Protection

Key protection conditions assessed included: 1) ability to use a phone; 2) access to relevant information; 3) safety and privacy; 4) provision of first aid or emergency medical services (hereinafter – EMS).

Generally, phone use was not restricted when asylum seekers arrived via regular means (through BCPs) and were accommodated in BCP premises. After irregular border crossing and accommodation in FSs, phones were often temporarily taken "for investigative purposes," as pretrial investigations due to the irregular border crossing are formally launched. An exception was noted at Švenčionys FS, where in 2 of 5 visits, asylum seekers were allowed unlimited phone use and provided with Lithuanian SIM cards. In other cases, phones were temporarily taken, but short use was still permitted to contact relatives. There were no cases where asylum seekers were held without any contact with the outside world. Only at Medininkai BCP a two-day delay occurred in issuing SIM cards and contact with family members could not be restored.

NO CASES REPORTED WHERE ASYLUM SEEKERS WOULD BE HELD IN SBGS UNITS WITHOUT POSSIBILITY TO CONTACT THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Since most of the asylum seekers who crossed the border irregularly and were visited by LRC monitors were individuals who crossed the border alone or with family members / partners, in many of the cases observed, the aspect of security and privacy, when it is necessary to accommodate persons of the opposite sex or strangers, as well as to separate unaccompanied children, etc., was not relevant.

However, there were cases where it was relevant to pay attention to the accommodation of asylum seekers when allocating rooms:

- *On 25 March 2024, during a visit to Medininkai BCP a group of asylum seekers were visited, consisting of 2 family units and 2 single persons, but related to the families.*
- *On 30 May 2024, during a visit to Druskininkai FS, a woman with her son and 2 single men were accommodated.*
- *On 20 September 2024, during the visit to the A. Barauskas FS, a woman and a man who had crossed the border together and applied for asylum, but were not related by family ties, were accommodated.*

In the first case, it was monitored that asylum seekers were accommodated properly, i.e. separated into different rooms according to gender and family ties: 1) partners were accommodated together; 2) a single woman was accommodated in a separate room; 3) a mother with her daughter and the woman's cousin were accommodated together; 4) the mother's partner was in a separate room. Although accommodating a partner^[43] separately from a woman and her daughter isn't unequivocally not recommended (LRC always encourage taking individual circumstances into account), in the monitored case, the essential problem was not separate accommodation, but the fact that the asylum seekers were locked in their rooms and could not communicate with each other. They could not communicate with each other for at least two days, as they were not able to use phones and physically meet during the first days of their stay in the BCP. In other cases, good practice was monitored in Druskininkai FS and A. Barauskas FS, where men and women who were not related by family ties were accommodated in separate container houses or rooms, while, if necessary, not eliminating the possibility of maintaining mutual contact.

One EMS case was recorded in 2024 requiring immediate ambulance arrival, and such assistance was provided (for more information – see [Annex No. 5. Border monitoring](#)). No cases of denied emergency or first aid were monitored. In a few cases, asylum seekers injured themselves crossing concertina wire at the border. Medical help was offered, but applicants themselves refused, evaluating the fact the injuries were not serious, and used only disinfectants provided.

In 2024, three recommendations were issued for updating or supplementing informational materials. On 25 March 2024, it was noted that in Medininkai BCP asylum seekers were locked in rooms without access to corridor where informational posters were available. It was recommended to place posters inside rooms. This was implemented by the 23 July 2024 monitoring visit. Outdated materials were also found on 23 April at Kaunas Airport BCP and on 21 August at Vilnius Airport FS. At Druskininkai FS, LRC posters were only present in the main building, not in the container units where asylum seekers were accommodated without full access to the whole territory. Other SBGS units had up-to-date materials available in rooms or in spaces close to rooms and visible for asylum seekers. Kybartai Railway BCP was noted for good practice, with LRC posters placed on outdoor boards visible also to train passengers.

3.3. Hospitalized Asylum Seekers

In 2024, the LRC monitors visited medical facilities twice. In the first case, in Q1 2024, an adult foreigner who had suffered frostbite on his foot was hospitalized. He had been apprehended in the territory of Lithuania after crossing the border irregularly in Latvia. The asylum seeker had a toe amputated – this is the only amputation case known to the LRC in 2024. The other monitored case occurred in Q3 2024 when a family (man, woman, and infant) ended up in a hospital due to the infant's health condition. This is the only known case in 2024 where asylum applications of foreigners who crossed the Lithuanian border irregularly were accepted due to a critical health condition, and the only case where asylum applications were accepted from foreigners who crossed the border irregularly and were detained in the border area, who are not Belarusian or Russian nationals.

[43] Applicants could not provide proof of marriage.

As in 2023, the issue of who should take care of reception conditions in cases where foreigners (regardless of their legal status) end up in hospitals after crossing the border irregularly remained relevant in 2024.

IN 2024, AT LEAST ONE ASYLUM SEEKER WAS SUBJECT TO AMPUTATION DUE TO FROSTBITE

According to representatives of the SBGS, the SBGS is responsible for reception conditions only in cases where foreigners are accommodated or detained in SBGS units. LRC does not question this position but encourages proactive contact with the LRC or other NGOs in such cases. In one instance in 2024, it was observed that the SBGS contacted NGOs for assistance approximately three weeks after the foreigner's hospitalization (the foreigner had initially contacted the NGO himself). In another case, the SBGS promptly contacted the regional LRC branch to ensure humanitarian aid.

Foreigner Hospitalized Due to Foot Frostbite

On 2024-03-14, a foreigner in a hospital contacted LRC representatives and requested humanitarian aid in the form of hygiene products and clothing. It should be noted that at the time of the request, the foreigner was not an asylum seeker, so LRC monitors had no information about the person. Upon identifying the need for assistance, LRC contacted SBGS regarding the possibility of delivering humanitarian aid. It was allowed to deliver hygiene products and clothing, but permission to meet with the foreigner was not granted. During hospitalization, the foreigner expressed a desire to apply for asylum. SBGS informed LRC monitors about the submitted application and monitors obtained the right to meet with the applicant.

During the LRC monitoring visit, the asylum seeker stated that he had spent three days in the border forests and had to sleep outside for two nights. As he was at the Belarusian border at the end of February, according to him, there was still a lot of snow in the forest. While trudging through the snow, he lost one shoe, so he continued the journey with one shoe and got frostbite. After being apprehended in Lithuanian territory, the foreigner spent a day in a border unit, then was transferred to the Pabradė FRC, where after a couple of days the medical staff identified the need for hospitalization. In hospital, the doctors initially treated the foreigner for pancreatitis, monitored the frostbitten foot, and eventually identified the need to amputate the big toe of the left foot.

The asylum seeker stated that upon arrival at the hospital, he did not have a phone, which remained in the driver's vehicle. Eventually, the foreigner bought a smartphone and SIM card from another patient in the same ward. According to the asylum seeker, upon being brought to the hospital, he was not issued a basic hygiene kit, and he did not have personal items either, so for approximately two weeks (until he contacted LRC himself), he had no opportunity to properly clean his teeth or wash.

During the LRC monitoring visit, it was recorded that due to his religion, the foreigner could not eat meat or fish, and the hospital could not offer an alternative vegetarian meal. Therefore, the foreigner subsisted for a long time only on side dishes served with meat and fish. It is noteworthy that during hospitalization, different NGOs gained access to the foreigner and could ensure he received additional food, clothing, etc., but access was granted only three weeks after the start of hospitalization.

Key observations:

- The foreigner did not have basic hygiene items for two weeks, i.e., the basic need to maintain personal hygiene was not ensured. Only after two weeks from the start of hospitalization, upon the foreigner's own request for essential items, did SBGS contact NGO Caritas representatives for assistance.

- NGOs were not informed of the need to provide a phone to the hospitalized foreigner. The foreigner did not have a personal phone until he bought one from another person in the same ward. Prolonged hospitalization without the ability to contact relatives or use the benefits of a smartphone had a negative impact on the foreigner's psychological health.
- As mentioned, the asylum seeker is a vegetarian, so most of the food provided in the hospital was not acceptable to him. The issue of nutrition was not resolved for a month, and no additional food supply was ensured.

Foreigners Hospitalized Due to Infant's Health Condition

During the LRC visit, the asylum seekers stated they had been traveling in a group of five at the border, along with their partners and their baby, the woman's mother, and the man's sister. They crossed the border in a swampy area, so everyone was wet and muddy. After crossing the border, they were noticed rather quickly by SBGS officers. The asylum seekers stated that after meeting the officers, the woman and the baby were immediately taken to the hospital (the child was having difficulty breathing), while the man, his sister, and the partner's mother were taken to the border unit. The asylum seeker stated that while in the border unit, he and his sister verbally (in English and Russian) expressed their wish to apply for asylum in Lithuania. According to the asylum seeker male, the SBGS border unit staff stated that they could not accept their asylum applications because the individuals had violated the law by crossing the border irregularly and would be "pushed back" to Belarus.

Soon after, the asylum seeker was taken from the border unit to join his partner and son in the hospital. The asylum seeker stated that before departure, he wanted to hand over his phone to his sister and partner's mother (only he and his partner had phones with functioning mobile service), but according to him, this was not allowed. After the man was brought to the hospital, his, his partner's, and his son's asylum applications were accepted. The asylum seekers stated that they later inquired what happened to their relatives left at the border unit and were told that both women had been returned to Belarus. During the visit, the asylum seekers expressed concern about having lost contact with their relatives[44].

During LRC monitoring, the asylum seekers stated that representatives of the regional LRC office had already visited them, bringing diapers, formula, baby clothes, and hygiene items. The LRC branch representative stated that SBGS border unit representatives contacted her and inquired about the possibilities of providing aid to the hospitalized foreigners.

Key observations:

- This was the first monitored case where, after the transfer of foreigners to a hospital, SBGS representatives immediately contacted the LRC requesting to ensure humanitarian aid. In previously monitored cases, initial humanitarian aid in hospital was provided only after LRC representatives gained access to the people.
- The asylum seekers stated they crossed the border with the woman's mother and the man's sister but were separated. Additionally, since the SBGS did not allow the asylum seekers to hand over a functioning mobile phone to their relatives, they were hindered in maintaining contact after separation.

[44] During subsequent meetings with the asylum seekers, the latter indicated that they had restored lost contact with their family members.

4. RECEPTION OF OTHER FOREIGNERS

As in previous years, in 2024, the flow of foreigners arriving in Lithuania from the territory of Latvia and later detained as having no right to be in Lithuania was observed. This group includes foreigners who crossed the Latvian-Belarusian border irregularly, were not pushed back at the border, and managed to leave Latvia toward Western Europe, or foreigners who left Latvian accommodation centers (i.e., often individuals who had already applied for asylum in Latvia)[45]. Unlike the statistics of foreigners pushed back at the Lithuanian-Belarusian border, the numbers of foreigners detained in Lithuanian territory are not constantly published publicly but occasionally appear in SBGS press releases.

As mentioned, LRC monitors operate based on the agreement between SBGS, UNHCR, and the LRC, which empowers LRC monitors to assess the reception conditions of asylum seekers. Since foreigners arriving in Lithuania from Latvia are usually not considered asylum seekers in Lithuania and are treated as illegally present foreigners during their stay, LRC monitors do not have access to them. Accordingly, due to a lack of access and data, LRC cannot assess the reception conditions for the entire group of mentioned foreigners. However, in rare cases, such foreigners' asylum applications in Lithuania are registered, which gives LRC monitors the opportunity to meet them and clarify under what circumstances they were detained and what reception and protection conditions were or were not ensured for them and others who were with them before their asylum applications were registered. This section describes the reception conditions of foreigners not considered asylum seekers.

In 2024, LRC was informed about 15 foreigners who possibly arrived from Latvia and were detained in Lithuanian territory after submitting asylum applications. Below is summarized information based on the accounts of these people, shared after their asylum applications were registered.

4.1. Material Reception Conditions

As mentioned, LRC monitors did not have the opportunity to visit border units and the Pabradė FRC and properly assess the reception and protection conditions that were (or were not) ensured for foreigners arriving from Latvia before some of them acquired asylum seeker status. All the following information is based on people's accounts of their experiences in the first days after being detained in Lithuania.

- All interviewed foreigners stated that immediately after being detained in Lithuanian territory, they were taken to border units and accommodated in container-type houses.
- During their entire stay at the border unit, they were de facto detained, no court hearings were held regarding movement restriction, and no decisions were received regarding movement restriction.
- Feedback on material reception conditions varied. Some foreigners stated that they had access to full sanitary facilities (i.e., toilet, shower, washbasin) at border units, while others said there was no opportunity to wash. All reported receiving food and hygiene kits at border units.
- All interviewed foreigners stated that during their detention at the border units, they were not allowed to use phones, were not given the opportunity to contact relatives, or inform them of their whereabouts.
- In the monitored cases, foreigners said they spent 3 to 5 days at the border units. After this period, all were transferred to the Pabradė FRC.
- Foreigners stated that at the Pabradė FRC, compared to SBGS border units, better conditions were ensured for all. Everyone had access to full sanitary facilities, hygiene products were issued, and hot food was provided in the canteen. Phone use was limited – phone use was allowed every 2 days for 1 hour. Wi-Fi was available during phone use hours.

[45] There may be exceptional cases when foreigners have arrived in Latvia from Estonia or other EU countries, but, to the knowledge of LRC, such cases are extremely rare, and representatives of SBGS always identify this group of people as those who crossed the border in Latvia or arrived from Latvia.

IN CASES MONITORED PEOPLE STATED THAT THEY WERE DETAINED WITHOUT A COURT ORDER; DURING DETENTION IN SBGS UNITS THEY HAD NO CONTACT WITH OUTSIDE WORLD

- Upon transfer to the Pabradė FRC, their freedom of movement continued to be restricted without a court decision; however, all accommodation conditions and applied restrictions were identical to those detained by court decision. In monitored cases, detention without a court decision lasted from 2 to 5 weeks.

Information collected during one conversation with a group of persons:

On 28 November 2024 visit to the Pabradė FRC, foreigners stated that after being detained in Lithuanian territory, they spent 3 days in a container-type house at a border unit (they could not specify even approximate locations where they were detained or taken to). According to them, the conditions in the container were very poor, they could not use a phone, had no access to a shower, did not understand what food was being served or whether meat products were made from pork, which they do not eat. They said only one bottle of drinking water was issued to several individuals. Foreigners stated that access to the toilet and sink was also limited – they were allowed to go to the toilet for only 1–2 minutes. They said minimal hygiene items were issued, but they still could not, for example, brush their teeth, as 1–2 minutes were not enough, so they had no time even for minimal washing. Smoking foreigners were not allowed to smoke because they could not go outside. Asylum seekers also stated that border unit officers treated them roughly, pushing them while escorting them to the toilet, grabbing them by the neck (during the conversation, asylum seekers demonstrated the physical actions of officers by mimicking them with their hands).

4.2. Situation of Children

Different practices were applied to the restriction of movement and accommodation / detention of accompanied and unaccompanied children who arrived via Latvia. Upon identifying unaccompanied children, SBGS immediately informed the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service representatives, who then decided on accommodation at Rukla RRC, thus placing them in an exceptional situation. Unlike other foreigners who arrived irregularly via Latvia, their freedom of movement was not restricted. **LRC did not record any cases where an unaccompanied child was denied access to the asylum procedure.** However, information collected during monitoring shows that unaccompanied children often did not use this right, as also evidenced by the previously mentioned MD statistics[46].

Meanwhile, children arriving via Latvia with parents or guardians were *de facto* detained together with adults, and some of these children were *de facto* detained after being brought to the Pabradė FRC. During LRC visits to the Pabradė FRC, monitors saw individuals who possibly were minors but were not granted access to them, as according to SBGS, these foreigners were not asylum seekers.

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN WERE ABLE TO ATTEND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Unaccompanied children had the opportunity to attend educational institutions.

[46] It should be noted that at least one asylum seeker was considered an unaccompanied child at least at the time of registration of this person's asylum application, but for reasons unknown to LRC, this application is not classified as an unaccompanied child in the annual MD statistics.

III. MONITORING OF FOREIGNERS' ACCOMMODATION AND DETENTION CENTERS

In 2024, there were four centers in Lithuania designated for the accommodation or detention of foreigners, under the jurisdiction of two ministries – the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter – MSSL) and the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter – Mol). Under the jurisdiction of MSSL, there were three RRC branches in Rukla (Jonava district), Naujininkai (Vilnius city), and Girionys (Kaunas district). Rukla RRC and Naujininkai RRC accommodate vulnerable asylum seekers, foreigners illegally residing in the country, foreigners granted asylum in Lithuania, relocated persons of Lithuanian descent, and vulnerable persons from Ukraine granted temporary protection. Unaccompanied minors are also housed in Rukla RRC. Meanwhile, in 2024, only persons from Ukraine with temporary protection status, most often vulnerable individuals, elderly people, and large families, were living in Girionys RRC. Foreigners accommodated in these RRC branches are not restricted in their freedom of movement; all three centers are of an open type. Meanwhile, the only center under the jurisdiction of the Mol, more precisely under SBGS, is Pabradė FRC, which accommodates all other asylum seekers who have not expressed a desire to reside in a chosen location, and it also serves to detain asylum seekers and foreigners residing illegally in the country.

Throughout the year, LRC monitors regularly visited all foreigner accommodation and detention centers, assessed reception and protection conditions, and access to the asylum procedure. Monitors visited each RRC branch three times[47]. Considering that the Pabradė FRC is the only center where restrictions on freedom of movement are applied to some foreigners – which poses an additional risk factor – LRC monitors visited this center most frequently. The FRC was visited approximately once a month. For full-scale monitoring of reception and protection conditions, FRC was visited eight times, and one additional visit was made to gather information on a targeted group's access to the asylum procedure.

The following presents information gathered in 2024 about all foreigner accommodation and detention centers operating in Lithuania, with emphasis on material reception conditions (housing infrastructure, food, provision of basic items and supplies), protection conditions (information provision, access to interpreters, medical and psychological services, ensuring communication with the outside world), and reception conditions for children. The situation at the Pabradė FRC is discussed separately, including quarantine practices and the situation of foreigners whose freedom of movement is restricted.

[47] Except for the 4th visit to the Rukla RRC, when an initial asylum interview of an unaccompanied child was monitored there and only this case monitoring was conducted, not covering the entire center.

1. FRC

1.1. Asylum Seekers with Restricted Freedom of Movement

The organization of accommodation for foreigners with restricted freedom of movement was thoroughly described in the 2023 LRC annual monitoring report[48]. The relevant practice has essentially not changed, so the information presented in the aforementioned report remains valid.

Two changes related to the restriction of freedom of movement were noted in 2024:

1) At the end of December 2023, following changes in legal regulation, the previously applied alternative to detention measure – “accommodation of the foreigner in the State Border Guard Service or other designated location, restricting movement to the area of the accommodation site” – was replaced with a new alternative to detention measure: “accommodation of the foreigner in the State Border Guard Service or other designated location, obligating the person not to leave the area of the accommodation site without permission from the head of the accommodation or their authorized person.” Unlike the previous provision, the revised legal formulation implies that with permission from the FRC administration, such a foreigner may temporarily leave the center.

EVEN THOUGH THE MODALITIES OF ‘ALTERNATIVE TO DETENTION’ FORMALLY CHANGED, IT HAD NO EFFECT ON THE PRACTICES OF DE FACTO DETENTION

To assess the impact of this change on the situation of foreigners subjected to this kind of alternative to detention measure, at the end of 2024 LRC monitors contacted the FRC with a request to indicate how it was applied in practice. SBGS representatives stated that by 13 December 2024, the FRC administration had received six requests from asylum seekers to be allowed to temporarily leave the center.

According to SBGS, none of the requests were granted. SBGS explained that, in line with legal provisions, a risk analysis was performed in each individual case, and the foreigner was issued a written response (decision) explaining why temporary leave from the center would not be permitted.

2) At the end of December 2023, amendments to the Republic of Lithuania Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners (hereinafter – LLSF) came into force, granting the MD authority in certain cases to decide on the temporary accommodation of an asylum seeker without granting the right to freely move within the territory of the Republic of Lithuania – in other words, to *de facto* detain the person. The LLSF stipulates that foreigners’ freedom of movement should be restricted only if there are no age, health, or individually related circumstances that would preclude such restrictions. Nevertheless, among those *de facto* detained were a pregnant woman, a minor, and a possible victim of human trafficking[49].

[48] See LRC 2023 Monitoring Report, page 38, '2.2. Asylum seekers with restricted freedom of movement': <https://redcross.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2023-ANNUAL-MONITORING-REPORT.pdf>

[49] After appealing the decisions of the MD, the freedom of movement of these foreigners was no longer restricted after a couple of months.

1.2. Quarantine

At the FRC, a practice was applied whereby all persons newly transferred to the center first undergo quarantine[50]. During quarantine, an initial medical examination of the foreigner is conducted, along with a psychological assessment. Quarantine is usually carried out in a specially designated Foreigners' Reception Building (hereinafter – FRB), but other premises may also be used as needed. It should be noted that in 2024, LRC monitors were not granted access to individuals in quarantine or in general to check the quarantine premises. Therefore, when monitoring reception and protection conditions at the FRC, LRC monitors were unable to assess the conditions ensured during quarantine. The following is limited information on quarantine conditions collected from conversations with people accommodated / detained in FRC and administrative staff:

- On 14 February 2024, during a monitoring visit, a representative of the FRC's general practitioner's office stated that, based on requirements from the National Public Health Centre, beginning in early February 2024, foreigners in quarantine were being taken for X-rays to check for tuberculosis. This procedure was carried out at a medical facility in Pabradė. The introduction of this new practice extended the quarantine period.
- Asylum seekers interviewed indicated that upon transfer to the FRC, quarantine lasted between 2 and 10 days[51].
- While the 2023 practice monitored was that phone use was restricted for all foreigners in quarantine, the 2024 practice changed. The FRC administration stated that the ability to use a phone during quarantine depends on the foreigner's legal status. That is, phone use is not restricted for asylum seekers, but foreigners illegally present in the country may use the phone in the same manner as those detained by court order – once every 2 days for 1 hour.
- Foreigners in quarantine are *de facto* detained and are not permitted to move freely either within the building or outside it.

Given that the duration of quarantine is not defined anywhere and, according to the internal rules of the FRC, is determined by the general practitioner's office based on an assessment of the individual's situation, *de facto* detention under quarantine conditions may be extended for an indefinite period. It was noted that the practice of prolonged quarantine was applied to

all foreigners arriving in Lithuania via Latvia who ended up at the FRC (while arrangements for their readmission were pending), which in essence allowed the restriction of freedom of movement without applying to the court for a detention order.

1.3. Material Reception Conditions

Infrastructure

As in 2023, in 2024 the accommodation-related reception conditions for asylum seekers at the FRC were essentially ensured and, with minor exceptions, met many of the standards recommended by the EUAA and national legislation. The FRC has the capacity to accommodate 706 people, but depending on the period, only around 100 people were accommodated or detained at any given time. This ensured sufficient living space and personal privacy for each person. There were no monitored cases where more than four individuals were

[50] See Section II, Parts 14 and 15 of the Description of the Conditions and Procedures for Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners at the Foreigners' Registration Centre: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.305952>

[51] It is worth noting that this length of quarantine was applied to asylum seekers. Quarantine for foreigners arriving in Lithuania from Latvia often lasted longer.

accommodated in one room, nor were unrelated men and women housed together. No problems with access to sanitary facilities were noticed. To improve reception conditions, renovation work began at the end of the year on the Dormitory for Detained Foreigners (hereinafter – DDF). The detention building underwent facade and window replacement, and bars were removed from the windows.

In spring 2024, two multifunctional buildings were completed at the FRC, with a combined capacity to accommodate or detain 462 foreigners. All rooms intended for accommodation in the new buildings were equipped according to standards: each person had a lockable cabinet by the bed and a larger lockable wardrobe, as well as a separate chair. Each room had tables, blinds on the windows, and depending on the floor and room size, they could accommodate 3 or 6 people. Some rooms on the ground floor were adapted for persons with mobility impairments. Each room had a private sanitary unit with a toilet, shower, and sink. Shared kitchens, laundry rooms, and prayer rooms were available on every floor. The two buildings were fenced off from the rest of the FRC territory and from each other with tall fences topped with barbed wire. Additional partitions could be installed to divide sections of the territory or control movement between floors, outside areas, etc. Benches, exercise equipment, and children's play infrastructure were installed around the buildings. In addition to bedrooms, the buildings also housed a second FRC canteen, a gym, a leisure room, etc. These buildings were minimally used throughout the year. In the summer 2024, there were temporarily detained foreigners arriving in Lithuania via Latvia (LRC monitors only visited when the buildings were empty). The new canteen, gym, and leisure spaces were not used at all in 2024.

WITH SOME NON-ESSENTIAL EXCEPTIONS, THE RECEPTION CONDITIONS RELATED TO ACCOMMODATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN THE FRC WERE ENSURED AND UP TO APPLICABLE STANDARDS

Two main infrastructure shortcomings were identified during the year and were recommended for resolution:

- Some bedrooms in the Asylum Seekers' Dormitory (hereinafter – ASD) and DDF lacked blinds or curtains, and people covered windows with improvised materials (sheets, flags, etc.).
- During a visit to the FRC on 6 June 2024, some people in ASD reported having no secure place to store valuable personal belongings and mentioned incidents of theft. Although people shared rooms, there were no individual lockers. In response, FRC representatives installed lockers in the corridors of the ASD and Detention Dormitory for Women (hereinafter – DDW) by the next visit on 19 September 2024, which people could use if needed.

Catering

Unlike in RRC, food in FRC is prepared and served in a canteen. During LRC monitoring visits to the FRC, people regularly complained on quality and portion sizes of meals served at the center. However, LRC monitors cannot objectively evaluate these complaints. Below are the most common concerns expressed by people regarding catering service:

- Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served according to a set schedule. This schedule is not always convenient, and people may not be hungry at the designated time but are unable to obtain food outside the fixed hours. This is especially relevant for early dinner times, particularly for detained foreigners who have limited opportunities to prepare food by themselves. Notably, the dinner time at the FRC was extended by 30 minutes in response to people requests.

- Some foreigners reported that the meals served in the canteen were not culturally appropriate[52], and many people disliked the taste of the food.
- Previously, foreigners were allowed to take food from the canteen back to their rooms, but at the beginning of the year this practice was discontinued. People were required to eat only in the canteen (exceptions were made for Muslims during Ramadan period and individual cases based on health conditions, etc.). This change was met with strong opposition from people. Eleven people in the DDF declared a hunger strike, but the practice was not reversed.

In all FRC buildings except the DDF, foreigners have constant access to shared-use kitchens where they can prepare additional food, although not all of them have money to buy products. In 2023, food products provided by the NGO Maisto bankas (Food Bank) were regularly delivered to the FRC, however, this practice was not continued in 2024. People in DDF are allowed to use the kitchen twice a week, and on occasion, culturally familiar meals are prepared with the help of social workers or NGO Caritas volunteers.

1.4. Protection

Access to Phones

In 2024, the practice regarding the use of phones changed slightly, allowing foreigners detained by court decision to use phones longer. In 2023, phone use was permitted every two days for 30 minutes; in 2024, it was allowed every two days for one hour. According to the FRC's internal rules, for foreigners whose phone use is restricted, access is allowed every two days for 30 to 60 minutes. In all monitored cases, foreigners indicated they were allowed to use phones for the maximum permitted duration. Phone use is restricted for foreigners detained by court decision or *de facto* detained after arriving via Latvia; other people in FRC can use phones freely and have continuous access to Wi-Fi.

Access to Interpreters

On 31 June 2024, the EUAA interpreters, who had been working at all Lithuania's accommodation and detention centers for foreigners since 2021, ended their mission. This led to a significant decrease in access to interpretation services at the FRC. Although the FRC has a contract with a translation bureau for remote interpreting, people reported that interpreters are only used for procedural matters (courts, interviews, etc.) and not for everyday communication.

SINCE THE EUAA INTERPRETERS' MISSION ENDED, THE FRC RESIDENTS HAVE NO DAILY ACCESS TO INTERPRETERS. PSYCHOLOGICAL, MEDICAL AND OTHER SERVICES ARE PROVIDED IN ENGLISH OR RUSSIAN - LANGUAGES SOME OF THE RESIDENTS DO NOT SPEAK OR UNDERSTAND

In practice, this means that Russian or English speaking foreigners are in a more favorable position because they can communicate with staff compared to others. Even during the period when EUAA interpreters were present, situations were monitored where interpreters for certain languages were not available. For example, foreigners speaking Spanish, Pashto, and Sinhalese faced daily language barriers.

Access to Medical and Psychological Services

In the second half of the year, the FRC no longer had a permanently stationed general practitioner. Later, a new doctor began visiting from Švenčionys at least twice a week. Thus, access to medical services was essentially

[52] It should be noted that people can choose one of three catering options: traditional (pork and other meat are served), alternative (all meat except pork is served) and vegetarian (fish is served).

ensured, and people interviewed during monitoring visits did not report problems receiving care. If necessary, people were referred for secondary treatment outside the center. On-call medical staff worked at the FRC on weekends, and emergency services (EMS) were called as needed. The most frequently mentioned problem was the lack of interpreters: medical staff provided information via Google Translate or other translation apps, but people reported not understanding diagnoses or other relevant information.

Although two psychologists work at the FRC and their services are constantly available to all people, the quality of services in some cases suffers due to language barriers. Foreigners speaking less common languages stated that consultations were conducted in English, although they understood English only minimally.

Due to long detention periods, psychological condition of people in the FRC was monitored to be poor. People lived in uncertainty. The worst situations were observed when, after three months of detention, individuals expected to be released, but their detention was extended for another three months. Responding to the need, a psychiatrist began visiting the FRC regularly at the beginning of the year. According to the FRC administration, the psychiatrist usually provided services to 10–15 persons. Not everyone in need agreed to receive help. The practice of regular psychiatrist visits continued throughout the year.

Organization of Accommodation

Men and women at the FRC are accommodated in separate buildings. The ASD is intended for single men; the DDF is for the detention of single men; the Vulnerable Persons Dormitory (hereinafter – VPD) accommodates single women and families; the DDW houses detained single women and families. Accordingly, men and women live together only in cases where families are accommodated at the FRC. Since both VPD and DDW may house single women and families with men, these buildings ensure the possibility to lock personal rooms. Each room in these buildings also has a private sanitary unit, meaning only members of the same family share facilities.

1.5. Situation of Children

In 2024, LRC monitors met four families with children during visits to the FRC. According to LRC data, more children were temporarily accommodated at the FRC, but during some visits they were no longer present or were in quarantine, so monitors could not meet them. It is worth noting that, in general, asylum seekers with children whose freedom of movement is not restricted are transferred to RRC.

One case was monitored where a minor, along with her family, was accommodated in the DDW and had the right to move only within the fenced territory around the building. The girl was allowed to attend the local Pabradė school, where she was escorted by social workers or other FRC staff, but under no other circumstances could she leave the FRC. The girl's mother told LRC monitors that they were offered to move to the VPD, which would allow freedom of movement within the entire FRC territory, but the family declined, as it would have meant separating from a relative who had not been granted the opportunity to move. The restriction of the asylum seekers' freedom of movement was based on the MD decision to examine the asylum application under an accelerated procedure, without admitting the foreigner into the territory of the Republic of Lithuania and placing the person under SBGS accommodation without the right to free movement. This example illustrates that even with identical decisions on "accommodation without the right to free movement," the actual modalities of movement restrictions vary depending on which building at the FRC asylum seekers are housed in.

In two other monitored cases, families with children were accommodated in the VPD, and their freedom of movement was not restricted.

2. RRC

2.1. Material Reception Conditions

Infrastructure

In all visits to RRC branches in 2024, it was stated that accommodation-related material reception conditions essentially met standards recommended by the EUAA and those set in national legislation. All RRC branches ensured adequate furniture, no shortages of access to sanitary facilities were noted, and accommodation allowed for sufficient space. Until the second half of 2024, practice was noted across all RRC branches where single individuals were housed alone in rooms. Only during the monitoring visit to Rukla RRC on 6 November 2024 it was noted that some individuals were housed together, but no more than four people per room. All RRC branches also applied good practice of allocating two adjacent rooms to larger families, thereby ensuring the minimum living space per person.

Girionys RRC provided the newest facilities, furniture, household appliances, etc. However, room and sanitary block renovations were also ongoing at Rukla RRC throughout 2024, and much of the infrastructure was being upgraded. Compared to findings from 2023 visits, material reception infrastructure at Naujininkai RRC also improved significantly in 2024: previously worn-down premises were renovated, access to sanitary facilities increased, and the current number of facilities meet standards. Two rooms were fitted for persons with mobility impairments. For a long time, an outdated and overloaded plumbing system at Naujininkai RRC caused many issues, but breakdowns decreased after repairs, and the heating system was also updated. Outdoor infrastructure was notably improved: new paving, swings for children, a new ramp for persons with disabilities, etc. Still, renovation needs remain, e.g., during the 29 July 2024 visit, a severe storm caused water to leak through roof structures in one of the buildings.

At Rukla and Naujininkai RRC, good practices were monitored allowing people to customize their rooms to feel more homelike rather than institutional. For example, some rooms contained not only standard-issue furniture (bed, table, wardrobe, chair) but also armchairs, sofas, carpets, etc. Shared spaces like kitchens and corridors had potted plants, makeshift gardens, and greenhouses. In special cases, people were allowed to keep pets.

which also improved well-being. Rukla and Naujininkai RRC had numerous recreational spaces: new climbing walls for children, sewing rooms, children's activity rooms, libraries, etc. Meanwhile, Girionys RRC only had rest rooms and one training classroom.

MOST PROGRESS NOTICED IN NAUJINKAI RRC: SEVERAL ROOMS FITTED FOR PERSONS WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS EQUIPPED, FAMILY MEDICAL CLINIC OPENED, OUTDOOR INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWED

Infrastructure issues noted during the year included:

- During the 27 February 2024 visit to Naujininkai RRC, some rooms lacked curtains or blinds. By the 29 July visit, new blinds had been installed.
- On 29 July 2024 in Naujininkai RRC, some persons expressed interest in using the sewing machines in the sewing room, but they were not functional.

- During the 4 November 2024 visit to Naujininkai RRC, some rooms housing large families lacked sufficient furniture for storing personal belongings.
- On 6 November 2024, in Rukla RRC, it was noted that unrelated individuals were housed in the same room. It was recommended to ensure the availability of lockers, which were previously unnecessary when rooms were occupied by only one person.

Food and Basic Supplies Distribution

People in RRC cook for themselves. Each floor in the dormitories has shared-use kitchens. Asylum seekers and foreigners illegally present in the country receive a monthly allowance equal to 60% of the state-supported income level for food. Asylum seekers also receive an additional 10% of the state-supported income level as a cash allowance for small expenses. Persons from Ukraine with temporary protection status living in RRC do not receive such benefits and take care of food independently. At Rukla and Girionys RRC, food packages from the NGO Food Bank were delivered to all persons every Monday. Since Naujininkai RRC is located in central Vilnius, people could take food by themselves. In cases where vulnerable persons were unable to cook, other people assisted them.

Hygiene products are regularly provided to asylum seekers and foreigners illegally present in Lithuania but not to temporary protection beneficiaries, for whom RRC officially only provide accommodation. However, these individuals do receive household chemicals and laundry detergent.

During one monitoring visit a failure to provide the cash allowance noted:

- On 6 November 2024, at Rukla RRC, it was noted that one asylum-seeking family was not being paid the additional 10% cash allowance for small expenses without legal justification. They were only receiving the 60% food allowance.

2.2 .Protection

Access to Interpreters

As mentioned, EUAA interpreters ended their work at foreigner reception and detention centers, including Rukla and Naujininkai RRC, on 31 June 2024. Since then, no interpretation services on-site have been available, though the RRC have contract with translation bureaus that provide remote services. According to RRC representatives and people, daily conversations with social workers are handled via Google Translate or similar tools. However, for visits to the general practitioner, psychological consultations, or vulnerability assessments, remote interpreters are engaged to ensure quality communication.

Still, in some RRC branches, interpretation needs are not difficult to meet due to the limited range of languages spoken by people. For example, fewer than 10% of people in Naujininkai RRC do not speak Russian, and in Girionys RRC, all persons were Ukrainian nationals, who communicated with staff without interpreter assistance.

During a 26 June 2024 visit to Girionys RRC, it was noticed that some important written information was available only in Lithuanian. For example, instructions for using the elevator for persons with disabilities and information about the on-site defibrillator. It was recommended to translate this information, but during a follow-up visit on 18 December 2024, no changes had been made.

Access to Medical and Psychological Services

As of 1 February 2024, Naujininkai RRC began operating a family medicine clinic staffed with a doctor, nurse, and lifestyle specialist, with physiotherapy services also available as needed. Medical services were also provided at Rukla RRC. Girionys RRC had no medical staff on-site, but people had access to the local clinic and could easily reach Kaunas city's healthcare facilities by city bus. Psychological services were available in all RRC branches. As mentioned, interpretation for these services is provided remotely. No complaints were received about service availability during monitoring visits.

Accommodation Organization

In all RRC branches, single men are accommodated separately from single women. As mentioned, all single individuals were housed alone in rooms, with changes in this practice noted only in Rukla RRC during the year. In some cases, men and women live on the same dormitory floor, but all persons have the ability to lock their rooms. In all observed cases, the principle of family unity was upheld, meaning that family members were accommodated together (unless this contradicted the individuals' best interests).

During a 26 June 2024 visit to Girionys RRC, one case was monitored where a family was accommodated in a walk-through room, which other family members had to pass through to reach their room. This practice was no longer observed during the follow-up visit on 18 December 2024.



IV. OTHER OBSERVATIONS

Attempt to Return Asylum Seekers to Belarus

In May 2024, an attempt to return a group of persons who had applied for asylum in Lithuania back to Belarus was monitored. Among the seven asylum seekers who were to be returned were three adult men, three adult women, and one minor. One of the women was pregnant, and the other was possibly a victim of human trafficking – meaning both were vulnerable and had special needs.

After the foreigners arrived in Lithuania via SBGS BCP, the MD decided to examine their asylum applications under the accelerated procedure and not to decide on their entry into the Republic of Lithuania. By the MD decision, foreigners were temporarily accommodated in the FRC, with their freedom of movement restricted. After the MD issued decisions not to grant asylum and informed the asylum seekers, the asylum seekers stated that they disagreed with the decisions and intended to appeal them. Nevertheless, the next day after being informed, the group of seven foreigners was taken from the Pabradė FRC and transported to the Medininkai BCP. Upon investigating the situation, it became clear that asylum seekers were brought to the Medininkai BCP with the intention of returning them to Belarus. Since applicants had appealed the MD's decisions denying asylum, they still held the status of asylum seekers at the time they were taken to Medininkai BCP. Considering the particularly vulnerable situation of some of the foreigners, LRC decided to visit the Medininkai BCP to conduct a protection monitoring visit, but LRC representatives were not granted access to the asylum seekers.

IN 2024 THE LRC WAS NOT GRANTED ACCESS TO ASYLUM SEEKERS WHOM IT WAS ATTEMPTED TO RETURN TO BELARUS

The situation, as it unfolded, was also covered by the media[53], which interviewed SBGS and the NGO Sienos Grupė (Border Group) representatives. SBGS representatives stated that the procedure being carried out for these foreigners was not very frequent but a standard one, whereby foreigners who are

denied entry to Lithuania are “escorted” back to the country they came from. According to the SBGS, foreigners can wait for the court’s decision on their rejected asylum applications while staying in Belarus. An SBGS representative told the media that Belarusian authorities had agreed to accept the asylum seekers, but foreigners refused to leave. SBGS stated that individuals stood on the roadway and did not move, which forced the temporary suspension of traffic at the Medininkai BCP. When the asylum seekers refused to enter Belarusian territory, it was decided to take them back to the FRC.

[53] See After the attempt to deport Cubans - criticism: lived here for a month, but not allowed into the country? 2024-05-16, lrt.lt: <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2274462/i-baltarusija-grazinami-kubos-pilieciai-nesutinka-isvykti-stabdo-eisma-medininkuose>

After the incident, when LRC monitors met with the group of foreigners, the latter stated that they had not been informed in advance about the planned return to Belarus. According to them, early in the morning, SBGS representatives entered all asylum seekers' rooms, told them to pack their belongings, and informed them they would be transferred to another center for foreigners. The time allocated for packing was disproportionately short, and some belongings were placed into trash bags with the help of social workers. Asylum seekers stated that before being transported to the BCP, their mobile phones were taken away, so they were unable to inform NGOs or other individuals about the incident.

No other similar cases were monitored during the year. It should be noted that this practice is applied in situations that, according to Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection, are classified as a "border procedure." It is possible that SBGS officers considered the described action as a "refusal of entry" under Article 14 of the Schengen Borders Code[54], which *inter alia* states that a refusal of entry decision takes effect immediately and that the lodging of an appeal does not suspend its effect. However, in the described situation, Article 46(7) of Directive 2013/32/EU should apply, which concerns an *ad hoc* suspensive mechanism in border procedures. It requires, among other things, that the asylum seeker be provided with legal assistance and at least one week to prepare and submit arguments to the court justifying their right to remain in the territory while awaiting the outcome of legal remedies. It is worth noting that Article 14(1) of the Schengen Borders Code clearly states that the application of refusal of entry rules must not violate provisions concerning the right to asylum and international protection, thus giving priority to Directive 2013/32/EU.

[54] Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code). Access: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016R0399>



V. INTERVIEW MONITORING

In 2024, LRC monitors participated and monitored 11 initial interviews with asylum seekers. Five interviews were monitored at the Pabradė FRC[55], four at Vilnius FD[56], and two at Varėna FD. 7 interviews involved adult men, 3 – adult women, 1 – unaccompanied minor (a boy). In total, initial interviews with asylum seekers from 9 different countries of origin were monitored: 2 – from Belarus and Cuba, 1 – from Afghanistan, India, Iran, Cameroon, Libya, Senegal and Syria. 5 of the monitored interviews were conducted in person (all participants were physically present in the same location), 6 were mixed (interpreter(s) participated remotely). The interviews with Belarusian nationals and one Cuban, Afghan, and Indian nationals were conducted in person[57]. The SBGS officers leading the interviews and LRC monitors participated in all interviews in person. No cases were monitored where officers conducted interviews in uniform, which is a positive aspect, as uniformed personnel may cause fear, anxiety, or evoke negative memories for some asylum seekers.

Monitoring of initial interviews was carried out with reference to the EUAA practical guide on registering asylum applications[58], the EUAA practical recommendations for remote registration[59], and other relevant EUAA guidance.

In 6 out of the 11 interviews' monitoring reports (more than half), no recommendations were made, and it was concluded that interviews were conducted in accordance with recommended standards. Comments were made on 4 interviews monitored. One of the scheduled interviews did not take place because the asylum seeker refused to be interviewed by an SBGS officer and requested that the interview be conducted by a civilian representative of the MD responsible for asylum case handling.

Aspects noted during the monitored initial interviews that require improvement:

- In 2 interviews, SBGS officers failed to control the interpreters or inform them of their duties during the interview. The interpreters independently interrupted the interviews and posed questions to the asylum seekers that had not been asked by the officers.

[55] One of them was conducted at the Republican Vilnius University Hospital, and interview was conducted by an officer from Pabradė FRC.

[56] One of them took place at Rukla RRC, and interview was conducted by an officer of the Migration Division of SBGS Vilnius FD.

[57] Interviews of Russian-speaking applicants are usually conducted without the help of interpreters, so they take place live. In the first half of the year, in Pabradė FRC officers used EUAA interpreters who worked on site.

[58] See EUAA Practical Guide on Registration. Lodging of applications for international protection, EUAA Practical Guide Series, 2021. Access: <https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/Practical-guide-registration-lodging-applications.pdf>

[59] See EUAA Practical recommendations on conducting remote/online registration (lodging), EUAA Practical Guide Series, 2021. Access: <https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/easo-practical-recommendations-conducting-remote-online-registration-lodging-EN.pdf>

- In 2 interviews, SBGS officers did not address the asylum seekers directly but formulated questions in the third person.
- In 2 interviews, SBGS officers did not inform the asylum seekers that the interview was confidential or explain what that meant in practice.
- In 2 interviews, SBGS officers did not review the information entered into the MIGRIS information system during the interview with the asylum seekers, nor did they provide an opportunity to correct or supplement it. In one case, the officer stated that this was done intentionally, considering what she believed were the asylum seeker's best interests (the interview was conducted on a Friday afternoon, and the asylum seeker was temporarily accommodated at a border unit. The officer was in a hurry to finish the interview so that the MD could make a decision on accommodation before the end of the workday, preventing the asylum seeker from being left at the border unit over the weekend).

It is noted that the quality of interviews is improving, and SBGS officers are increasingly taking recommendations into account. It is always good practice when interpreters are also present in person. After the EUAA interpreters completed their mission at the Pabradė FRC, SBGS officers practically no longer had the option of engaging interpreters on-site. Therefore, remote interpretation remains one of the most critical issues affecting the quality and confidentiality of interviews.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions section presents the main trends monitored in 2024, commendable and problematic practices, and corresponding recommendations.

As in 2023, the **primary concern in 2024 remains foreigners' access to the asylum procedure**. Since Lithuania has not yet lifted the state of emergency declared due to a mass influx of foreigners, the pushback practice continues, whereby foreigners who irregularly cross the border generally do not have the opportunity to apply for asylum as prescribed by law. In recent years, even though the overall number of pushed back foreigners has declined, there were monitored cases where Belarusian nationals were among those pushed back – a group that had not been previously affected by this practice, or at least not documented by LRC monitors.

- **LRC notes that in every case, the risks arising from pushbacks must be assessed. If there is a reasonable probability that a person will face irreparable harm, ill-treatment, or other serious human rights violations upon return to Belarus, then foreigners must not be pushed back. This is required by the principle of non-refoulement, which Lithuania is obligated to uphold.**

In 2024, two more international road BCPs at the border with Belarus were closed, and access to the remaining BCPs was prohibited on foot or by bicycle. A ban was also introduced on disembarking from the transit train passing through Lithuania. These changes further reduced access to the territory, and thus the opportunity to apply for asylum in Lithuania. While foreigners in Belarus still theoretically have the possibility to reach a BCP by bus, there were cases where bus drivers refused to transport foreigners without EU visas. Likewise, private vehicle drivers were reluctant to take unknown individuals. As a result, **for foreigners without a private car or means to hire transport, their ability to apply for asylum in Lithuania in accordance with the law is often blocked for logistical reasons alone.**

A trend was also monitored where asylum applications from Russian nationals were not registered at BCPs. This raises concerns, especially considering that until 2022, Russian nationals represented the largest group applying for asylum at BCPs and continue to be among the largest groups of asylum seekers in Lithuania.

- **By ratifying the UN Refugee Convention, Lithuania committed to being a country where foreigners can seek international protection and be protected from persecution. Accordingly, restrictions on entering BCPs on foot or by bicycle and on disembarking from the transit train should not apply to foreigners seeking international protection in Lithuania. Nor should access to the asylum procedure be restricted based on the applicant's nationality or personal characteristics.**

It is likely that reduced access to the asylum procedure, and the resulting decrease in the number of asylum seekers, has led to improved reception and protection conditions in accommodation and detention centers as well as SBGS border units. In 2024, these facilities were less burdened, which made it easier to ensure better conditions.

In 2024, a positive change was noted regarding asylum seekers' ability to use telephones. Access to phones improved in SBGS border units and Pabradė FRC. In border units, there were no cases where asylum seekers were not allowed to use a phone at least briefly. At the FRC, time for detainees was slightly extended, and phone usage rules during quarantine were similar. However, the same cannot be said talking about foreigners without asylum seeker status.

LRC remains concerned about the reception conditions for foreigners arriving via Latvia, especially regarding their temporary accommodation in border units, where known cases show individuals are *de facto* detained under *incommunicado* conditions.

De facto detention has become a standard SBGS practice for this category of foreigners. In monitored cases, people were not provided with the SBGS decisions underlying their *de facto* detention. There were also cases where foreigners were *de facto* detained for up to five weeks without a court order.

- **SBGS decisions to “accommodate foreigners in temporary locations without the right to move freely within the territory of the Republic of Lithuania” amount to *de facto* detention by international standards. These decisions can be appealed in court, but *de facto* detained foreigners lack access to state-guaranteed legal aid and the practical ability to contact lawyers. Since state-guaranteed legal aid is provided during court proceedings concerning detention or alternative measures, LRC recommends promptly referring all such cases to court to ensure at least minimal procedural safeguards for the individuals involved.**
- **In all cases of detention, conditions meeting minimum reception standards and respecting human dignity must be ensured. Considering that these minimum conditions exist solely to preserve human dignity, LRC recommends that their provision not be tied to a person’s legal status. Dignity is a universal human value and must be protected regardless of whether someone has applied for asylum, for example. Even asylum seekers are only guaranteed “standards sufficient to ensure a dignified level of living,” so any conditions falling below this are potentially incompatible with the duty to respect human dignity.**
- **In addition to ensuring material conditions, LRC also encourages providing all foreigners whose freedom of movement is restricted with the opportunity to use a phone and contact their relatives. LRC is prepared to facilitate this service where foreigners lack personal communication devices or where such devices cannot be provided by SBGS. It is important to emphasize that detention of foreigners is an administrative measure and must not have a punitive character. Its sole purpose is to restrict freedom of movement. Therefore, punitive detention conditions – such as restrictions disproportionately limiting other rights unrelated to movement – are not acceptable. For this reason, restrictions on phone use for detained foreigners are disproportionate and unnecessarily interfere with the right to information and communication with relatives and legal representatives. Accordingly, LRC recommends reviewing restrictions unrelated to movement and ensuring unrestricted (in terms of time) use of personal communication devices, with content or functionality limitations applied only as necessary.**

Regarding reception and protection conditions, the main gap monitored during the year was the **lack of interpreter services at the Pabradė FRC**. The population at the FRC is highly dynamic and constantly changing by country of origin, which means more resources are required to provide interpreter services compared to other centers like RRC. However, meeting this need is entirely achievable. Interpreter shortages also affect access to services such as psychological consultations, which may be unavailable or of poor quality due to the language barrier. It should be also noted that **deteriorating mental health is another serious concern, especially among detained foreigners**. Language and communication issues are equally important in ensuring quality access to other services, especially medical care.

- **LRC recommends ensuring access to high-quality interpreter services, especially focusing on daily needs such as medical care, psychological services, meeting humanitarian needs, and providing essential information. We also note that starting from 1 January 2025, the newly established Reception and Integration Agency will take over responsibility for reception conditions for foreigners, and these issues will no longer fall under the SBGS.**

ANNEXES

ANNEX NO. 1. MONITORING STATISTICS**42****ANNEX NO. 2. SBGS AND NATIONAL STATISTICS****44****ANNEX NO. 3. EU ASYLUM STATISTICS****45****ANNEX NO. 4. LRC COLLECTED DATA****46****ANNEX NO. 5. BORDER MONITORING****49**

Annex No. 1. Monitoring Statistics

Figure 1. 2024 LRC Monitoring Visits: date, location, access, purpose.

LRC monitoring visits in 2025				
Nr.	Date of Visit	Place of Visit	Access	Purpose of Monitoring
1	2024-01-08	Švenčionys FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
2	2024-01-25	Lavoriškės BCP	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
3	2024-01-26	Švenčionys FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
4	2024-01-29	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Access to asylum procedure
5	2024-02-05	Kybartai Railway Station ^[60]	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
6	2024-02-14	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
7	2024-02-19	Lavoriškės BCP	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
8	2024-02-27	Naujininkai RRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
9	2024-03-04	Vilnius FD (Mickūnai)	On-site	Access to asylum procedure
10	2024-03-18	Švenčionys FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions + initial interview
11	2024-03-21	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
12	2024-03-25	Medininkai BCP	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
13	2024-03-25	Vilnius FD (Mickūnai)	On-site	Initial interview
14	2024-03-26	RVUH ^[61]	On-site	Initial interview
15	2024-04-08	Pagėgiai FD / K. Skučas FS ^[62]	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
16	2024-04-11	Rukla RRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
17	2024-04-11	Girionys RRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
18	2024-04-16	Bardinai FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
19	2024-04-17	Šiauliai FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
20	2024-04-19	Kybartai Railway Station	On-site	Access to asylum procedure
21	2024-04-23	Kaunas Airport BCP	On-site	Reception / protection conditions + initial interview
22	2024-05-09	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
23	2024-05-13	Švenčionys FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
24	2024-05-20	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Initial interview
25	2024-05-27	Rukla RRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions + initial interview
26	2024-05-30	Druskininkai FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions + initial interview
27	2024-06-06	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
28	2024-06-20	Švenčionys FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
29	2024-06-26	Girionys RRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
30	2024-07-02	Rukla RRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
31	2024-07-12	Visaginas Hospital	On-site	Access to asylum procedure
32	2024-07-17	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
33	2024-07-23	Medininkai BCP	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
34	2024-07-29	Naujininkai RRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
35	2024-07-30	Medininkai BCP	On-site	Initial interview
36	2024-08-02	Kapčiamiestis FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
37	2024-08-12	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
38	2024-08-15	A. Barauskas FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
39	2024-08-21	Vilnius Airport FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
40	2024-08-26	Medininkai BCP	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
41	2024-09-19	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
42	2024-09-20	A. Barauskas FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions + initial interview
43	2024-10-01	Kybartai road BCP	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
44	2024-10-08	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Initial interview
45	2024-10-23	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
46	2024-10-29	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Initial interview
47	2024-11-04	Naujininkai RRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
48	2024-11-04	Kapčiamiestis FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
49	2024-11-06	Rukla RRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
50	2024-11-28	Pabradė FRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions + access to asylum procedure
51	2024-12-05	A. Barauskas FS	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
52	2024-12-18	Girionys RRC	On-site	Reception / protection conditions
TOTAL		52 visits	52 – on-site, 0 – remotely	

[60] During the monitoring visit, information was collected about the reception and protection conditions at the Kybartai Road BCP, however, since the asylum seeker had already left this SBGS Pagėgiai FD unit, the interview took place at the local railway station.

[61] RVUH – Republican Vilnius University Hospital

[62] Until October 2024 – Viešvilė PU: <https://vsat.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/viesviles-pasienio-uzkardai-1941-m-maskvoje-susaudyto-lietuvos-generolo-k-skuco-vardas-foto/>

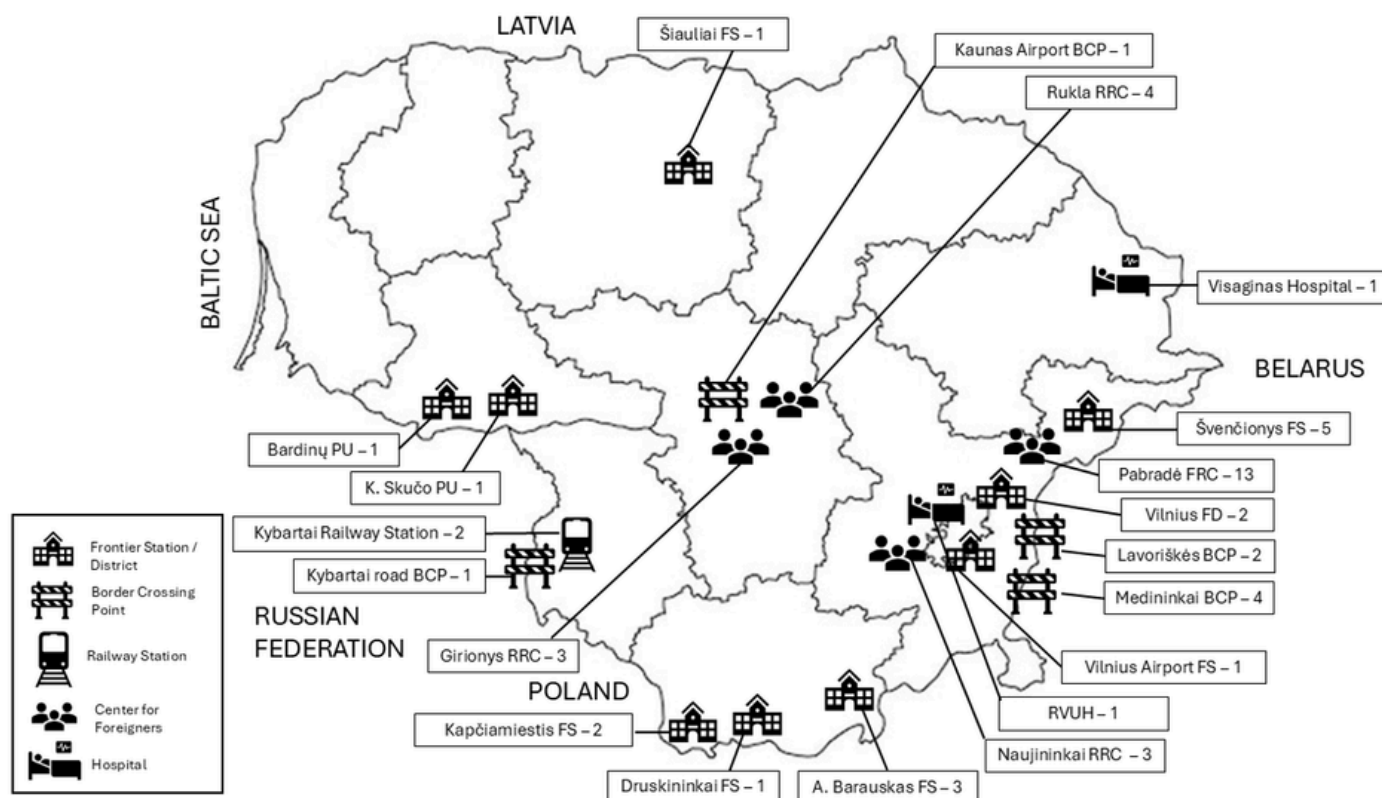
23 visits were carried out in foreigner accommodation and detention centers, 25 visits were made to SBGS border units (FDs, FSs, BCPs). The purpose of the monitoring 4 times was to assess the conditions in the border units of SBGS, in the territory of which asylum seekers were temporarily accommodated or asylum applications were submitted, however, the visits were not carried out in the border units, but in other facilities (2 – at the railway station and 2 – in hospitals to which asylum seekers were admitted due to health problems).

Pabradė FRC stood out among foreigner accommodation and detention centers, with monitoring visits carried out there 13 times, or at least once per month. It was the most frequently visited site by monitors in 2024. Rukla RRC was visited 4 times, Naujininkai RRC and Girionys RRC – 3 times each.

Among SBGS border units (FDs, FSs, BCPs), in 2024 LRC monitors most frequently visited Švenčionys FS (5 times), Medininkai BCP (4 times), and A. Barauskas FS (3 times). Monitoring visits were conducted at 3 out of 4 SBGS FDs. The only exception was the Coast Guard FD, which in 2024 received no asylum applications. The majority of visits – 15 – were conducted in the territorial units of the Vilnius FD, followed by 6 visits in Varėna FD and 4 visits in Pagėgiai FD.

In 43 cases, reception and protection conditions were monitored in foreigner accommodation and detention centers, SBGS border units, or other locations. In 11 cases – initial asylum interviews were monitored, and in 6 cases – visits were conducted to gather information on access to asylum procedure. The number of visits and reports differs because, in some cases, one visit includes monitoring of different types (e.g., reception / protection conditions and additionally an initial interview or access to the asylum procedure).

Figure 2. 2024 LRC Monitoring Visits by Site and Location.



Annex No. 2. SBGS and National Statistics

Figure 1. The MD statistics on asylum applications by country of origin and timeline (month, quarter, year).

Nr.	Country of Origin	January	February	March	I Q	April	May	June	II Q	July	August	September	III Q	October	November	December	IV Q	TOTAL
	TOTAL	44	41	49	134	19	30	21	70	23	42	22	87	17	32	22	71	362
1	Belarus	27	21	14	62	3	15	6	24	8	13	9	30	8	6	10	24	140
2	Russian Federation	7	8	7	22	5	2	3	10	1	7	3	11	2	1	1	4	47
3	Ukraine		1		1	3		1	4	1	8	2	11		6	1	7	23
4	Tajikistan	2	2	2	6	1	2	5	8	1	5	1	7	1			1	22
5	Uzbekistan		3	1	4	4	3	2	9		4	2	6		2		2	21
6	Iraq		1	10	11	1			1		2		2			6	6	20
7	Cuba			7	7		4		4	7			7				0	18
8	Azerbaijan			3	3		1		1	1		2	3	1	2	1	4	11
9	Pakistan			1	1				0	1		1	2		7		7	10
10	Afghanistan	1			1		1		1	1			1	1	4		5	8
11	Turkey	1	2		3	1	1		2				0		2	1	3	8
12	Cameroon	1		1	2				0	2			2	2			2	6
13	Syria		1		1				0		1	1	2	1		1	2	5
14	India			1	1				0		1	1	2				0	3
15	Iran		1		1		1		1				0				0	2
16	Nigeria	1			1			1	1				0				0	2
17	Somalia			1	1			1	1				0				0	2
18	Georgia				0			1	1				0			1	1	2
19	Armenia	1			1				0				0				0	1
20	Kazakhstan		1		1				0				0				0	1
21	Gambia	1			1				0				0				0	1
22	South Africa	1			1				0				0				0	1
23	State of Palestine	1			1				0				0				0	1
24	Egypt			1	1				0				0				0	1
25	Libya				0	1			1				0				0	1
26	Democratic Republic of the Congo				0			1	1				0				0	1
27	Senegal				0				0		1		1				0	1
28	Venezuela				0				0				0	1			1	1
29	Bangladesh				0				0				0		1		1	1
30	United States of America				0				0				0		1		1	1

Figure 2. Statistics on asylum applications are provided by the SBGS, including applications submitted to the MD.

2024	Applications at the SBGS BCPs	Applications at the border (arriving irregularly) and within the country				TOTAL
		SBGS FD / FS	SBGS FRC	At the MD units	Transfers under the Dublin III Regulation	
January	2	8	5	26	2	43
February	3	10	0	20	8	41
March	9	4	3	17	16	49
April	0	3	3	9	4	19
May	0	9	3	15	3	30
June	0	2	0	14	5	21
July	9	7	1	9	2	28
August	5	3	6	22	6	42
September	0	4	2	13	3	22
October	3	1	4	8	1	17
November	0	2	15	9	6	32
December	0	1	2	12	7	22
TOTAL	31	54	44	174	63	366
335						

Annex No. 3. EU Asylum Statistics

Figure 1. EU countries registered the most asylum applications (until 1 October 2024).

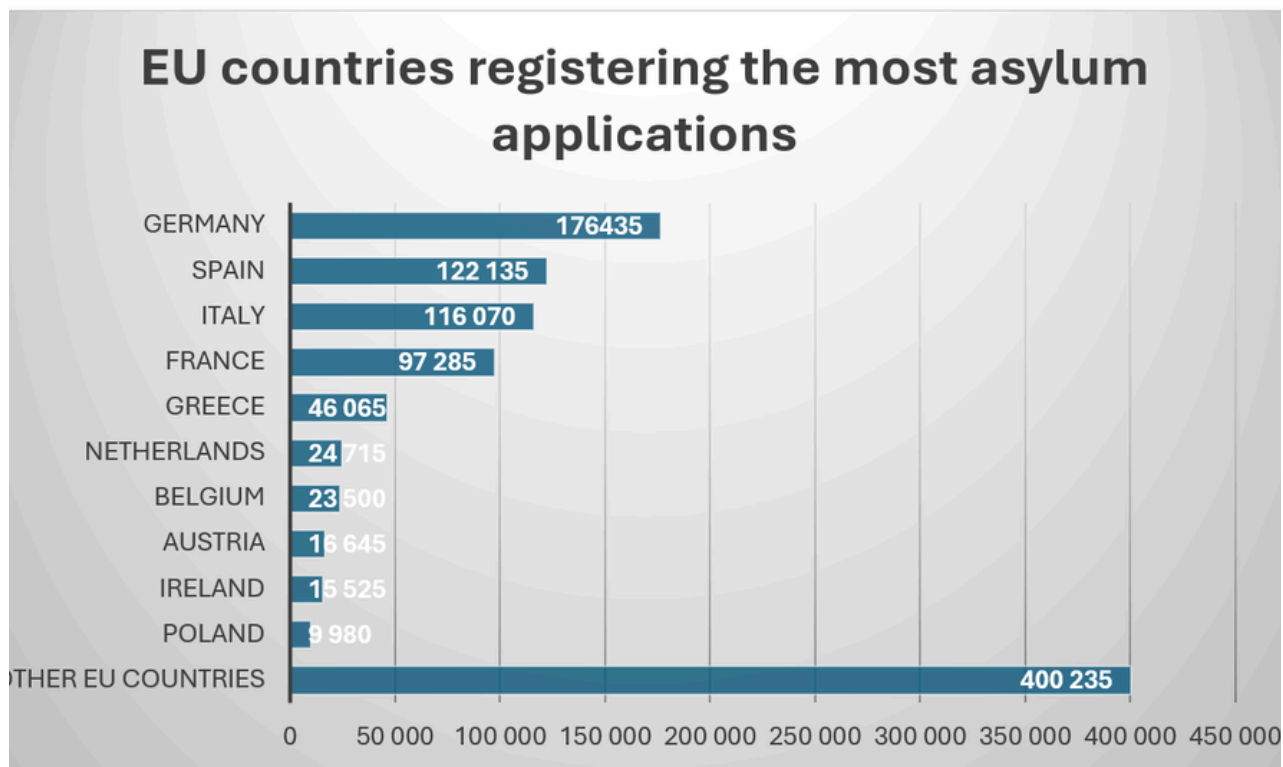
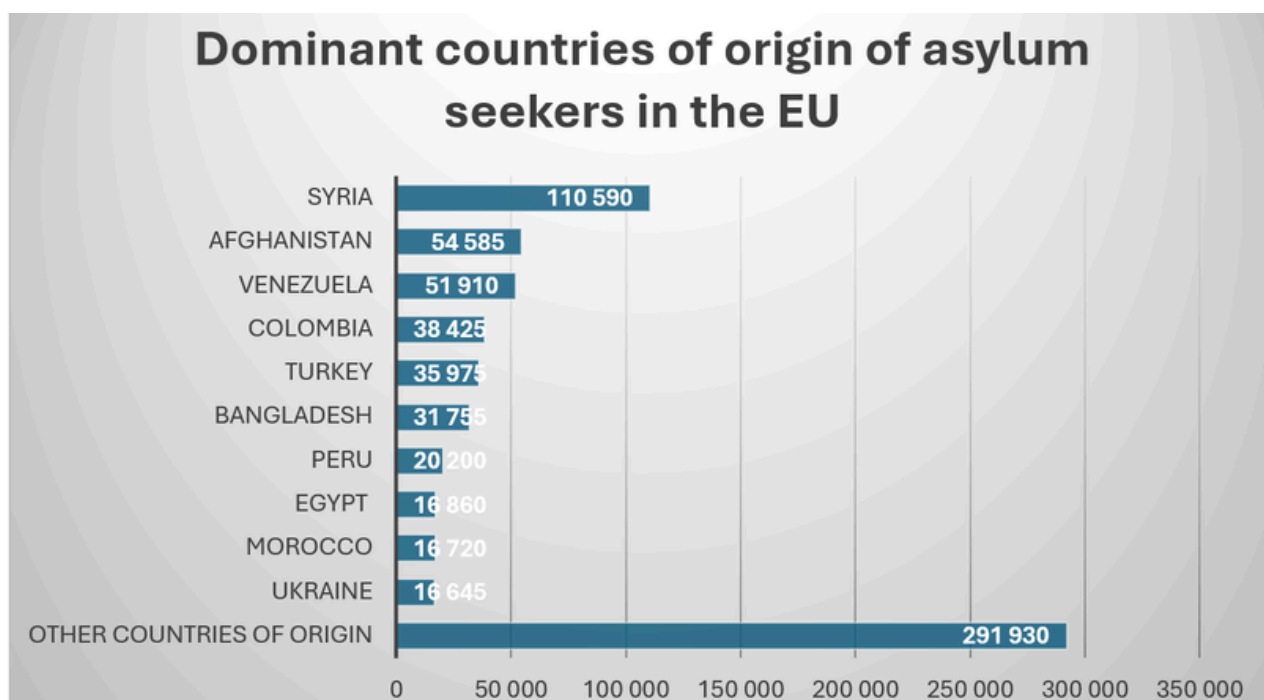


Figure 2. EU dominant countries of origin of asylum seekers by 1 October 2024.



Annex No. 4. LRC Collected Data

Figure 1. LRC Collected Data on Asylum Applications Registered in 2024.

Note: This table includes only those foreigners whose asylum application registration circumstances fall into specific categories: arrived via BCP, arrived irregularly, or transferred under the Dublin III Regulation.

Initial SBGS reports on asylum seekers and their countries of origin in 2024						
Irregular arrivals			Arrivals via BCPs			Transferred under the Dublin III Regulation
Across the external border with Belarus	Across the external border with Russian Federation	Across the borders with other EU countries (including transit)	External border with Belarus	External border with Russian Federation	International Airports	
BLR – 37 CUB – 7 RUS – 1 PSE – 1	RUS – 2	PAK – 6 AFG – 4 GMB – 1 IND – 1 LBY – 1 SEN – 1 SYR – 1	CUB – 11 IRQ – 5 ^[63] TJK – 4 UZB – 4	BLR – 6	UKR – 1 IRN – 1 ^[64] CMR – 2 ^[65]	IRQ – 19 UZB – 13 AZE – 5 RUS – 5 UKR – 4 BLR – 4 TJK – 3 TUR – 3 CMR – 2 SOM – 2 BGD – 1 COD – 1 EGY – 1 IND – 1 KAZ – 1 SYR – 1 AFG – 1 ZAF – 1 PAK – 1
46	2	15	24	6	4	70
63			30			
			34			
TOTAL			167			

Country names are displayed using three-letter codes in accordance with the International Organization for Standardization ISO 3166 standard (ISO 3166-1 alpha-3): AFG – Afghanistan, AZE – Azerbaijan, BGD – Bangladesh, BLR – Belarus, CMR – Cameroon, COD – Democratic Republic of the Congo, CUB – Cuba, EGY – Egypt, GMB – Gambia, IND – India, IRQ – Iraq, IRN – Iran, KAZ – Kazakhstan, LBY – Libya, PAK – Pakistan, PSE – State of Palestine, RUS – Russian Federation, SEN – Senegal, SYR – Syria, SOM – Somalia, TJK – Tajikistan, TUR – Turkey, UKR – Ukraine, UZB – Uzbekistan, ZAF – South Africa.

[63] A family of 5 Iraqi nationals arrived at the BCP and submitted asylum applications, however, ultimately the applications were not registered after it was determined that the individuals were already in the asylum procedure.

[64] An Iranian national arrived through Vilnius Airport due to health reasons after an emergency landing of a plane traveling on a different route (<https://www.vz.lt/transportas-logistika/2024/05/25/vilniuje-leidosi-lektuvas-skrendantis-i-maskva>), however, the application for asylum was registered not at the Vilnius Airport BCP, but later, when the person was in another place of temporary accommodation.

[65] Cameroonian nationals arrived through Vilnius Airport, but their asylum applications were accepted and registered not at the Vilnius Airport BCP, but at another SBGS accommodation / detention facility.

Highlighting asylum applications registered at SBGS border units (FDs, FSs, and BCPs), the most notifications in 2024 were received from Vilnius FD Pūškai FS[66] (19 notifications / cases, 31 asylum seekers), Vilnius FD Padvarionys FS Medininkai BCP (5 notifications / cases, 20 asylum seekers), Varėna FD A. Barauskas FS (5 notifications / cases, 6 asylum seekers), Pagėgiai FD Kybartai FS[67] (5 notifications / cases, 6 asylum seekers). Notable also is the Vilnius FD Vilnius Airport FS. This SBGS unit also submitted a significant number of notifications (11), but all except one concerned asylum seekers transferred to Lithuania under the Dublin III Regulation. In such cases, asylum applications were usually registered at the SBGS FRC, while Vilnius Airport PU officers were only providing primary information and transferred foreigners to the FRC for further procedures.

According to LRC data, the fewest asylum applications were registered by SBGS in June (8), December (9), April, September, and October (10 each), and the most – in March (34), February (22), and November (21).

Figure 2. LRC Collected Data on 2024 Asylum Applications Registered by SBGS (regardless of submission circumstances).

Asylum seekers registered by the SBGS in 2024 by month, gender, as well as age and vulnerability category							
Month	By gender		Children (among them)		Unaccompanied or separated children (among them)		TOTAL
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
January	12	6	2	2	0	0	18
February	16	6	2	1	0	0	22
March	20	14	3	4	0	0	34
April	10	0	0	0	0	0	10
May	13	1	2	0	1	0	14
June	7	1	0	0	0	0	8
July	13	6	5	1	1	0	19
August	16	4	1	2	0	0	20
September	8	2	0	0	0	0	10
October	6	4	0	0	0	0	10
November	17	4	0	1	0	0	21
December	7	3	1	2	0	0	10
TOTAL	145	51	16	13	2	0	196
	196		29		2		

[66] After irregular border crossings in the territory of operation of Pūškai FS, asylum seekers were usually transferred for temporary accommodation to Švenčionys FS (Vilnius FD), and there were also cases when asylum seekers needed to be urgently taken to a medical institution.

[67] Physically, asylum seekers are accommodated in the structural units of Kybartai FS - Kybartai Road or Railway BCPs, but notifications are received from the Kybartai FS duty officer.

Figure 3. Arrival of asylum seekers via international BCPs (excluding airports) in 2024 and comparison with previous years.

Regular arrivals of the asylum seekers via BCPs (external border with Belarus and Russian Federation)					
2022		2023		2024	
Border with Belarus	Border with Russian Federation	Border with Belarus	Border with Russian Federation	Border with Belarus	Border with Russian Federation
RUS – 55 TJK – 21 BLR – 6 UKR ^[68] – 5 AZE – 3	BLR – 24 RUS – 14 UKR ^[69] – 2	TJK – 6 RUS – 1	BLR – 17	CUB – 11 IRQ – 5 ^[70] TJK – 4 UZB – 4	BLR – 6
90	40	7	17	24	6
130		24		30	

Country names in the table are displayed using three-letter codes from the International Organization for Standardization ISO 3166 standard (ISO 3166-1 alpha-3): AZE – Azerbaijan, BLR – Belarus, CUB – Cuba, IRQ – Iraq, RUS – Russian Federation, TJK – Tajikistan, UKR – Ukraine, UZB – Uzbekistan.

[68] Some Ukrainian nationals were not registered as asylum seekers and were granted temporary protection, a status applied by EU member states to persons who arrived from Ukraine after 24/02/2022, when the large-scale military invasion in Ukraine by the Russian Federation began.

[69] The same applies.

[70] A family of 5 Iraqi nationals arrived at the BCP and submitted asylum applications, however, ultimately the applications were not registered after it was determined that the individuals were already in the asylum procedure.

Annex No. 5. Border Monitoring

In 2024, LRC monitors carried out 28 monitoring visits to various SBGS border units and healthcare facilities. In all instances, except one, these locations were visited after LRC monitors were informed of asylum seekers being accommodated / detained at the border units. In one instance, LRC monitors, together with a UNHCR representative, visited Šiauliai FS, where no asylum seekers were present. That visit was conducted considering that, with the onset of the so-called Latvian transit, a significant number of foreigners were being detained in the operational area of the Šiauliai PU and potentially temporarily accommodated / detained in Šiauliai FS premises.

Below is a presentation of the main information recorded during each visit:

- *8 January 2024, Švenčionys FS* / LRC confirmed that asylum seeker was ensured all recommended reception and protection conditions. Notably, the asylum seeker had crossed the state border irregularly in another FS's area. Since that FS lacked facilities suited for accommodating asylum seekers, a good practice was applied by transferring asylum seeker to Švenčionys FS for accommodation.
- *25 January 2024, Lavoriškės BCP* / LRC confirmed that asylum seekers (a woman and a minor child) were ensured the recommended reception and protection conditions. During the visit, asylum seeker emphasized that SBGS officers treated them kindly and politely. This was the first and only recorded case in 2024 where asylum seekers were immediately directed to Naujininkai RRC for accommodation rather than to Pabradė FRC.
- *26 January 2024, Švenčionys FS* / LRC visited a family of five asylum seekers (parents and three minor children). Asylum seekers had crossed the state border irregularly in another FS's territory. They indicated that during their interaction with SBGS officers, they treated them politely, gave chocolate to the children, seated everyone in the vehicle to warm up, and offered to call EMS. After a few hours, they were transferred to Švenčionys FS, where, considering the family size, two asylum-seeker rooms were offered, though the asylum seekers declined. In response, a folding baby crib was brought into one room. Additional chocolate was included in the food packages for the children. All recommended reception and protection conditions were ensured.
- *5 February 2024, Kybartai Road BCP*[71] Monitoring visit revealed the following shortcomings in reception conditions: (1) When the asylum seeker asked to go outside for fresh air, SBGS officers said the weather was bad and did not allow; (2) when applicant asked to open a window, SBGS officers said windows were locked and opening them would trigger the alarm, so airing out the room was not possible. Despite this, the asylum seeker was offered to be taken to the store, which would have provided a minimal chance to go outside, but the applicant declined the offer.
- *19 February 2024, Lavoriškės BCP* / Asylum seeker and her minor son were accommodated. It was confirmed that the recommended reception and protection conditions were ensured. This was the final LRC visit to Lavoriškės BCP, which was closed as of 1 March 2024.
- *18 March 2024, Švenčionys FS* / It was confirmed that asylum seeker was ensured reception and protection conditions that met recommended standards, with no issues noted.

[71] After LRC monitor went to Kybartai Road BCP, SBGS officers informed that asylum seeker had already left border unit and was at the Kybartai Railway Station, waiting for a train to Vilnius. For this reason, monitor did not have the opportunity to physically visit the premises of the Kybartai Road BCP and visually assess the reception conditions. The assessment of reception and protection conditions was carried out based on the information provided by asylum seeker. The interview with the asylum seeker took place at the Kybartai Railway Station.

- *25 March 2024, Medininkai BCP* / At the time of LRC monitoring visit, a group of seven people was accommodated, two separate families: (1) a pregnant woman with her partner and his cousin; (2) a woman with her minor daughter, the woman's husband, and cousin. Three issues were noted: (1) Asylum seekers stated that upon entering Lithuanian territory, their internet no longer worked, and they only received Lithuanian SIM cards two days later, limiting their ability to contact the outside world. (2) Though information posters were displayed in shared spaces, they were effectively inaccessible since asylum seekers were locked in their rooms. No such information was present in the rooms. (3) While locked in, asylum seekers could not communicate with each other (except those housed together or in connected rooms) and attempts to contact BCP staff were not always effective. Also noted was the need to ensure family unity, for instance, a woman and her daughter were in one room, while the woman's partner (the girl's stepfather) was in another. The girl was monitored to be frustrated due to separation from her stepfather.
- *8 April 2024, Viešvilė FS* / It was monitored that the asylum seeker was temporarily accommodated in a temporary detention room. Basic needs were met: bed, bedding, towels, food, sanitary facilities with warm water (shared hygiene supplies available, no individual package issued). Considering the challenging arrival conditions, SBGS officers arranged new clothing. Food was heated; tea, coffee, and sweets were offered. However, missing amenities in the detention room included: (1) extra furniture (table, chair, closet for personal items)[72]; (2) a way to cover light from the window[73]; (3) ability to move freely within the building or perimeter, including time outside[74].
- *16 April 2024, Bardinaĩ FS* / When LRC monitor arrived at the border unit, he was informed that the applicant had withdrawn asylum application and was no longer an asylum seeker at the time of the visit, therefore LRC monitor was not permitted to speak with the foreigner. However, LRC monitor was allowed to visit the room at Bardinaĩ FS designated for accommodating asylum seekers, where the asylum seeker had been temporarily accommodated (after the status changed, he was transferred to another room). The room contained all necessary furniture, accessible information materials, accommodation suitable for minors (e.g., a baby crib is available), and more.
- *17 April 2024, Šiauliai FS and Zokniai Airport BCP* / During LRC monitoring visit, there were no asylum seekers at the border unit, so only the material reception conditions were assessed. In general, material conditions can be ensured; rooms intended for asylum seekers are suitably equipped. The only drawback noted was a lack of a window in Zokniai Airport BCP room. Šiauliai FS premises allow accommodation for four people (two double rooms); two related individuals or one single person can be accommodated at Zokniai Airport BCP. SBGS officers indicated they were not aware of any cases where the Zokniai Airport BCP asylum seeker rooms were used in practice.
- *23 April 2024, Kaunas Airport BCP* / At the time of LRC monitoring, a foreigner apprehended in Kaunas city and who had submitted an asylum application was temporarily accommodated. According to LRC data, the last time an asylum application was accepted at Kaunas Airport BCP was on May 2021. During the LRC visit, it was monitored that the distributed information materials at Kaunas Airport BCP were outdated, and informational LRC posters were not available. Additionally, the room where the asylum seeker was housed lacked a window, had no access to an electrical socket (SBGS officers later provided power using an extension cord), and had no table. The asylum seeker was not allowed to use a shower, was not issued hygiene supplies, and was not allowed to spend time outdoors.

[72] (1) EUAA Guidelines on Reception Conditions: Performance Standards and Indicators, Standard 5 Indicator 5.3: <https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Guidance-on-ReceptionConditions-LT.pdf> and (2) Order of the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania on the Approval of the Description of the Conditions and Procedure for the Temporary Accommodation of Foreigners at Border Checkpoints and Structural Units of the State Border Guard Service under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, Chapter II, Point 6.4: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/caf7f150135a11e6a23dfca0984f2ff9/asr>

[73] *Ibid.* (1), Standard 9, Indicator 9.3.

[74] *Ibid.* (2), Section III, Paragraph 13.

- *13 May 2024, Švenčionys FS* / No discrepancies with recommended standards were monitored during LRC visit. The only recommendation made after the visit was related to an incident where an SBGS officer entered the asylum seeker's room without permission while the person was lying in bed.
- *30 May 2024, Druskininkai FS* / During LRC monitors' visit, asylum seekers were housed in container units. Since a group of four asylum seekers had arrived (a mother with her son and two men not related to them or to each other), they were housed in two separate containers (mother and child in one, two men in the other) in consideration of protection concerns. Armed SBGS officers were stationed outside the container 24/7 with a service vehicle. Druskininkai FS representatives stated that a protective fence would be built around the containers so that SBGS officers would no longer need to guard the area. Asylum seekers reported that before the LRC monitors' visit, they were locked inside the containers and had to knock on the door or call out through the window to be heard and let out by the officers. Druskininkai FS representatives stated that once foreigners request asylum, they are not locked inside; confinement only applies to foreigners unlawfully present in the country. Asylum seekers were not allowed to use their own phones but were permitted to use the LRC phone available at the border unit.
- *20 June 2024, Švenčionys FS* / During LRC monitor's visit, no discrepancies with the standards for reception conditions were noted. A commendable practice was monitored, whereby the asylum seeker was given the opportunity to wash clothes that had become dirty during the journey.
- *23 July 2024, Medininkai BCP* / During LRC monitoring, no discrepancies were noted with the recommended reception conditions. The only recommendation made following the visit was related to the food products issued and the limited ability of foreigners to understand the labels on food packaging as well as the possibility to shop additionally.
- *30 July 2024, Medininkai BCP* / A family of four was temporarily accommodated. Two family members required urgent medical assistance upon arrival in Lithuania. After crossing the border, all family members were immediately transported to a hospital. During LRC monitoring, all asylum seekers were returned to Medininkai BCP. One asylum seeker underwent surgery, and another had a broken arm put in a cast. Both were prescribed medication by doctors, and one was assigned a special diet. During the LRC visit, SBGS representatives indicated they could not provide the necessary medications and special food and requested that LRC assist in meeting these needs. LRC contacted a relative of the foreigners residing in Lithuania at the time and arranged for them to help meet those needs. Other reception conditions at Medininkai BCP were ensured in line with the recommended standards.
- *2 August 2024, Kapčiamiestis FS* / During LRC monitoring visit, it was recorded that asylum seeker was accommodated in a temporary detention room lacking sufficient furniture (no table or chair), the window could not be covered, asylum seeker was not offered a shower, and clean bedding and towels were not provided. No opportunity to leave the room or go outside for fresh air was provided, in fact – minimum reception standards were not ensured. After detention, asylum seeker's phone was taken but he was allowed to send a message to his wife beforehand.
- *15 August 2024, A. Barauskas FS* / During LRC monitoring visit, no discrepancies with the recommended standards were monitored. Commendably, the asylum seeker was offered laundry detergent and access to a washing machine, offered to go to the local store, and allowed to walk freely outdoors in the fenced territory surrounding the building.

- *21 August 2024, Vilnius Airport FS* / During LRC monitoring visit, it was noted that compared to 2023 visit, material reception conditions had improved: (1) an air conditioner remote control was available in the room (during the 2023 visit it was noted that air conditioner could not be used due to the lack of a remote); (2) a kettle was available (previously unavailable). As usual, it was noted that Vilnius Airport FS is not fully suitable for accommodating asylum seekers, as the room does not have a window. It was also noted that relevant information, LRC leaflets, and posters were not accessible to asylum seeker. Additionally, food provided in cans required a special opener, meaning the asylum seeker had to ask officers every time to open food. Asylum seeker was not issued personal hygiene items; some previously used supplies were available in the bathroom.
- *26 August 2024, Medininkai BCP* / During LRC monitoring visit, no discrepancies with the recommended material reception condition standards were noted. The only problematic area identified was communication with asylum seekers (communication could only occur in their native language, which possibly caused an information gap). Asylum seekers were not informed about the ability to call EMS, to shop additionally, or about their rights and obligations.
- *20 September 2024, A. Barauskas FS* / During LRC monitoring visit, two asylum seekers (a man and a woman) were accommodated who were not related by family or other ties. A. Barauskas FS staff identified that, and asylum seekers were placed in separate rooms. Since A. Barauskas FS has only one room officially designated for accommodating asylum seekers, the woman was housed in an officer rest room. A good practice was also monitored: when asylum seekers had torn clothing from crossing the border, SBGS provided them with replacement clothes. Although asylum seekers were not allowed to use their phones, they were temporarily returned so the asylum seekers could contact their relatives.
- *1 October 2024, Kybartai Road BCP* / During LRC monitoring, it was noted that asylum seekers were provided with the recommended reception conditions. Asylum seekers were allowed outside, and windows could be opened in the room -addressing deficiencies observed earlier in the year. The only remaining issue was outdated LRC leaflets, though updated LRC posters with contact information were available in the room and hallway. It is commendable that asylum seekers were offered shopping in a local store accompanied by SBGS officers.
- *4 November 2024, Kapčiamiestis FS* / During the LRC visit, no discrepancies with recommended standards were noted, and no recommendations were made afterward. A commendable practice was noted: clean clothing was provided to asylum seeker, and he was offered to wash dirty clothes. Although the asylum seeker's personal phone was taken, SBGS officers made efforts to ensure the person could contact family members, which was ultimately successful.
- *5 December 2024, A. Barauskas FS* / During LRC monitoring visit, no significant discrepancies with reception standards were noted. The only point of concern was that while crossing the border, the asylum seeker had severely scratched himself on razor wire (concertina), which also tore and dirtied his clothing. Although medical help was offered (and refused by the asylum seeker), replacement clothing was not provided, and SBGS officers did not contact LRC or other NGOs to secure clothing. Therefore, the asylum seeker remained in severely torn and dirty clothing while at the border unit.



**Lietuvos
Raudonasis
Kryžius**



Konstitucijos pr. 7A
09307 Vilnius
+370 659 71 598
info@redcross.lt

