

LITHUANIA

IFRC Integration and Inclusion Framework

ORIENTATION LITHUANIA RED CROSS

A key element of the Integration and Inclusion Framework's Socio-Cultural pillar, Information and Orientation activities help people equip themselves with the knowledge and tools necessary to access services and support in their new communities.

Understanding rights and entitlements such as healthcare, schooling and social benefits, along with obligations and responsibilities, awareness of social norms and customs, legal advice, and how to access local services such as public transport, are crucial in enabling people to navigate their new environment, establish themselves and their families, and integrate into new and often very different societies and cultures.

Summary

The Lithuanian Red Cross (LRC) has developed a seven-part orientation course for new arrivals to the country covering information about healthcare, education, employment, legal rights and obligations, Lithuanian history and identity, holidays and traditions, and preparedness for emergency situations.

Delivered online, enabling almost unlimited numbers of people to attend regardless of where they are in the country, each session is presented by a relevant specialist or professional ensuring in-depth and up-to-date information is shared, with time set aside for open questions and answers. Sessions are supported by interpreters and cultural mediators to ensure an accessible and open environment, while the Society also organises additional sessions both in-person and online for more in-depth information on specific topics including legal tax requirements, financial management, and mental health support.

With almost 1,000 people attending the course in less than a year, its popularity – along with that of Lithuanian Red Cross' supplementary sessions and events – is more than proving its worth.



Orientation for Integration

Arriving in a new country for the first time can be overwhelming for anybody, but even more so for people who may have fled conflict or persecution, with little idea of how their lives will be in the

long term. From navigating public transport to registering children in school or accessing healthcare, tasks can feel alien and complex. Newcomers may have little knowledge of their rights, the systems they must navigate, or the cultural norms of their new home.

The Lithuanian Red Cross (LRC) has long recognised that providing refugees and asylum seekers with clear, accessible information is essential, as Jurgita Jagminaitė, Head of the Lithuanian Red Cross Integration Programme, explains: "We've worked with the government on refugee integration for years and we have established a relationship with the authorities and relevant departments," she says. "Often the Lithuanian migration authorities direct people to us when they are registering. Our teams help them settle and complete the necessary documentation, and after that they join our orientation sessions

A Holistic Approach

The orientation programme – delivered under the 'Supporting the integration of asylum seekers, refugees and displaced persons in Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania' programme, funded by the State Secretariat for Migration of Switzerland (SEM) – is just one part of a

TETIANA

Tetiana left Kyiv with her youngest son when the international armed conflict in Ukraine escalated in 2022. With her eldest son already studying in Vilnius, Lithuania was the obvious place to head for.

"The courses and seminars are the things that really helped me start to settle and meet new people. They helped me feel part of a community again, part of society. It's reassuring to be with people who have had, and are going through, similar experiences, and to see you are not alone.

When I had to enrol my son in school, sessions on the education system, showed which website to use, how to register, and how to complete the forms, so I could do it all from home, otherwise I would have been running all over the city to schools and government offices, so that was really helpful.

Our participation in shaping activities has been very important, it helps us not only to feel valued, that people care about what we think, but also that we are active in some way, not just taking support but contributing as well. The main thing in Lithuanian Red Cross is the people and their approach to working with us. We can really feel that they care about us, and that is such an important feeling."

broader integration strategy, says Jurgita: "Our approach is holistic—from consultations to case management, to orientation sessions, to workshops, and even excursions and special events. Orientation is an important part of that model."

None of these activities stands alone: each connects participants to a wider network of assistance, including language classes, psychosocial services, and community events. This model ensures participants have access to a broad range of support, while also creating opportunities for social interaction and community building.

By the end of July 2025, after the formal seven-session Orientation course had been running for just under a year, almost 1,000 people had taken part, a testament to both the demand for and effectiveness of the approach.

The programme's success has put LRC in a great position to continue orientation support into the future. "This year, the government has adopted a national cultural orientation course, which we contributed to the creation of. It will be implemented through municipalities," Jurgita says. "They are looking for partners to implement the courses, so hopefully we'll be part of that."

Accessible to All

Accessibility has been a guiding principle from the start, with most orientation seminars held online, making it easier for people across Lithuania – including those in rural areas – to participate. “They’re accessible not only to people in the cities but also in the regions, and there is no limit to the number of people that join – we can have up to 200 or 300 people attending each one,” says Jurgita.

The LRC also recognises the value of in-person sessions for certain activities - for example, when Ukrainians were required to apply online to extend their documentation.

“We held practical workshops where our team helped people, especially older people, fill in those applications in person,” Jurgita says. “We do our best to adapt how we work to fit what people need.” As Aleh, a refugee from Belarus puts it: “It is important to have those live, in person meetings, but both online and offline add something, and they have been organized so they really complement each other very well.”

This approach – combining the reach of online sessions with the personal connection of face-to-face activities – helps make sure everybody can access what they need.



Evolution Through Feedback

The seven-session orientation course was developed gradually, drawn together from existing seminars by listening to participants and adapting to their needs and preferences. Šeida Kauzonė, held the role of Community Engagement Coordinator during the development of the course: “We had been preparing the various elements for a while, but it changed a lot in 2024 when we consolidated the seminars into a

TIP



Effectively promoting activities is key to attracting participants. Different cultures and nationalities may prefer different channels. Word-of-mouth recommendations from community members can be highly effective.

single coherent course, with the seven topics we have today,” she says. “It took time – we started small, waited to get feedback, thought about what should change or make better, and formed it into what we have now.”

Feedback was central to the process with participants encouraged to share their experiences, both during sessions and afterwards: “From the beginning, we always included some form of feedback,” says Šeida. “We would talk to participants after sessions to get their opinions and advice. In the online sessions people could leave comments and additional questions in the chat box. Now we have a standard form for feedback that we use in other activities too. We also ask questions before the course starts to understand people’s needs, and whether we need to adapt the sessions before we begin.”

As Tetiana, a refugee from Ukraine, explains: “It’s obvious the content is adapted based on our ideas and feedback: during one seminar there were a lot of questions about pensions, retirement plans and so on, and the next seminar was dedicated totally to this area, for seniors and their finance questions.”

SVIATLANA

Originally from Belarus, Sviatlana came to Lithuania with her husband and then-9-year-old son in 2022. It was while waiting for a decision on their refugee status that they joined the orientation events

“We joined the language clubs, then some workshops, and informational events – I just tried to participate in as many activities as I could. After one Red Cross seminar about rental support, I followed the instructions and I was able to apply online by myself, I didn’t even have to go to the municipality office.

The healthcare and emergency preparedness sessions were also very important for me as a mother, but the cultural and historical sessions are almost as important. During the Independence Day celebrations bonfires are lit along the main street. The first time I saw it, I was a little bit scared, but now I understand the history and tradition behind it and I can join in.

I’m volunteering for the Red Cross now, and I filmed the picnic we had in the park for Refugee Day to put on their social media. I want to be useful – I want to help other people the way our family was helped, and when I volunteer, I feel like I belong to a whole bigger community.”

ALEH

For 25 years Aleh was a TV presenter. Now, after coming to Lithuania as a refugee, he has a new job in logistics and volunteers with the Red Cross in his spare time.

“The seminars from the Lithuanian Red Cross covered so much: Lithuanian culture, history and identity, the tax system, driving and how to get a license, about social security services, about the medical system, about Lithuanian language exams, everything.

I access some support with rent and bills, which I heard about through the Red Cross seminars. Now I have a driving license, I have a place to live, and I have a job, and the Red Cross has helped with all of these, so when I say ‘thank you’ to the Red Cross I am serious, I am not just being polite.

The seminars, on taxation and Social Security really motivated me to go self-employed, and the cultural seminars have helped me to understand Lithuanian identity and the shared values that Lithuanians and Belarussians, like myself, have.

I have realized that it’s not only the people who attend these sessions that benefit from them – well-informed citizens who are registered in government systems, who understand the Lithuanian way of life, and who are able to find work and pay taxes, they are a benefit to the entire country.”

TIP



Participants themselves are a fantastic resource, not just as sources of feedback to inform adaption of activities, but the huge depth of lived and professional experiences mean they have relevant practical, emotional and linguistic skills to directly support activities and events.

This continuous loop of consultation and improvement has helped ensure activities remain relevant and responsive to participants’ changing needs.

Diverse Communities

Lithuania’s refugee population is diverse, with participants coming from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, and more. Recognising this, the LRC has worked to adapt its orientation materials for different groups.

Drawing on her fluency in Persian, Šeida played a key role ensuring sessions met the needs of Afghan and Iranian participants: “The materials are primarily in Russian and Ukrainian, but we have materials prepared and ready to go in English, Arabic, Persian, and also volunteers available for Kurdish, Turkish, Spanish, and sign language,” she explains.

And tailoring goes beyond just translation, with people from different communities also having different priorities and challenges, different levels of cultural familiarity with Lithuania, and different preferences for when seminars are convenient to attend. “Different audiences need different information, and have different priorities,” Šeida says. “They might prefer different ways of presenting, so it can be a challenge, but it’s also fun to solve by talking to people and adapting the content.”

It’s something that has not gone unnoticed: “Some sessions are adapted for different priority groups, like for women or teenagers,” says Sviatlana from Belarus. “There’s a new seminar called ‘How to start a new life in a new country after 45’ and I’m very interested in joining that.”

Breaking Down Barriers

For many new arrivals, engaging with government institutions can be intimidating. Past experiences of persecution, discrimination, or corruption may create fear and mistrust.

“We are trying to show that governmental institutions should be our friends,” Šeida explains. “A lot of people come to us with the idea that governmental offices are bad, that nobody speaks their language, they imagine the staff are all impatient and will shout at them. But we’re trying to show that they are professionals, a lot do speak English at least, and they do want to help. They are the gateway to services and we shouldn’t be scared of them.”

By inviting representatives from municipal offices, employment agencies, and healthcare providers to present during orientation sessions, LRC hopes that in addition to being a useful source of information, it will help participants feel more comfortable approaching them later in ‘real life’.



Cultural Mediators

At the heart of LRC's orientation work are cultural mediators like Volha Faley. Originally from Belarus, Volha arrived in Lithuania as a refugee.

"I came to Lithuania in 2020 together with my son," she says. "Before I left, I had a good job, my family, my friends, a good social life. But when I arrived here, I had nothing. I didn't know anybody. I had my backpack and my son, that was it." Over time, Volha became an informal resource for other new arrivals, sharing practical tips and emotional support. When she joined LRC as a cultural mediator, she brought with her a wealth of lived experience.

"I have the experience of being a refugee – I'm still a refugee – which is important for understanding and connecting with people," she says. "I also have marketing and communications experience, organisational and logistics skills, and I like people. All these things fitted perfectly for my role here."

Cultural mediators like Volha are essential, ensuring that activities are relevant, culturally appropriate, accessible, interesting, and genuinely meet participants' needs.

Spreading the Word

The most well-designed events can still only be effective if people actually attend them. Outreach has been a significant challenge, especially for non-Russian-speaking groups, Šeida says: "I often struggled to get non-Russian speakers to attend events," she admits. "I used to email a lot of people to let them know about upcoming sessions, and it really wouldn't work. What we found was if you

TIP



Listening to participants and potential future participants, including through feedback, enables activities to be tailored more effectively for different groups. Depending on the nationalities and languages spoken, developing separate sessions may be the most effective way to ensure people are supported with content that is most relevant and useful to them.

make a call and invite them directly, that was much more effective. People just needed a personal invite. It takes more time than email, but it works much better."

Volha's experiences also emphasise the importance of getting people to attend their first session: "It doesn't matter how good your event is," she says. "If people don't know about it, they can't join it. Once they do come, and see that it is good, then they start sharing with their friends and in their networks and it becomes like a snowball. But you do have to get people to come that first time."

For Ukrainians, Telegram groups have proven particularly popular, with other nationalities preferring WhatsApp or direct personal outreach, but word-of-mouth within communities is seen as the most effective channel, with participants becoming informal ambassadors for the programme.



TIP



Developing and maintaining a close relationship with relevant authorities and partner agencies, including talking regularly with counterparts, helps ensure coordinated support with fewer gaps, less duplication, and efficient referral.

Pathways to Volunteering

Orientation sessions are not just about receiving information—they also provide an opportunity for participants to share their own knowledge and experiences.

“After almost every event, people come to us and ask about volunteering for the Red Cross,” Volha says. “They become part of the network that we can draw on—not just for volunteering but also to present sessions themselves, because they have experiences and skills they can pass on. It’s really like magic.”

As Sviatlana says: “I want to be useful – I want to help other people the way our family was helped, and when I volunteer, I feel like I belong to a whole bigger community.”

New volunteers are an invaluable resource for the LRC, bringing cultural knowledge, perspectives and languages, while the volunteers themselves report increased confidence, wider social networks and a sense of purpose and wellbeing.

Challenges

Despite their successes, the orientation activities have faced challenges. Securing sustainable funding is a constant issue, creating uncertainty and limiting long-term planning.

Reaching diverse audiences is another issue.. Ensuring materials are available in different languages, that sessions genuinely meet people’s needs, and are promoted through the right channels can be hard work.

Balancing online and in-person formats also requires careful planning. Online sessions allow for scale, but some participants—especially older individuals or those with limited digital literacy—need face-to-face support.

LYUDMYLA

Lyudmyla came to Lithuania together with her husband in 2023 seeking safety from the international armed conflict in Ukraine.

“When we first arrived it was very difficult. We felt lost, stressed, isolated; it was difficult to start anything new. The orientation sessions helped me meet new people and make new friends, and that gave me new energy.

It gave us confidence to start living our lives – now we know where to go for what, who to call, what questions to ask, what to do.

The biggest impact was how it made us feel. Before, there was so much uncertainty, so many unknown things about life here, so much anxiety, but now I feel more confident, less overwhelmed. I have a job, I am learning the language, and I feel I can live my life here, that it is not such an overwhelming thing to consider. Life can’t be put on hold indefinitely, we need to keep moving forward.

I helped organise some online seminars with the Red Cross – about financial literacy, investments, insurance and pensions. I’m not a formal Red Cross volunteer, but it’s the area I am now working in and I realised it could be important for others arriving here. Somebody helped me earlier, now I can help somebody else, it’s like a circle.”

Finally, the constantly changing policy environment means content must be regularly updated. “Policies, laws, and services change all the time,” Šeida says. “We need to make sure our information is accurate, so we review and update materials continuously.”

Impact

The orientation course saw almost 1,000 participants in its first year, supporting people to gain confidence, find work, learn the language, enrol their children in school, and begin to build lives in their new country. “The aim is for people to be informed, independent, and motivated—to feel they are included, part of a community, and part of Lithuanian society,” says Jurgita.

HIGHLIGHTS

Staff, volunteers and session participants all pointed to the mix of practical and cultural information as a strength of the orientation course, and stressed that enabling familiarity with Lithuania's history, traditions and contemporary cultural context was crucial in supporting integration, alongside more-obviously practical information such as how to access education or healthcare.

The orientation course's seven sessions link to other additional activities – such as psychosocial seminars, language classes and other workshops – acting as a gateway to comprehensive support available through the Red Cross and others.

While offering practical information, the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) value of the orientation sessions – particularly those held in-person – was widely praised and something organisers paid attention to in planning their events.

As well as linking to other activities, the orientation sessions also provided a pathway for participants to volunteer, a next step that people felt supported their self-confidence, independence, and a sense they could contribute to helping others.

Contacts and Links

To learn more about the Lithuanian Red Cross orientation and integration activities, contact Jurgita Jagminaitė at jurgita.jagminaitė@redcross.lt or visit [Integration Programme – Lithuanian Red Cross](#).

Lithuanian Red Cross

Integration Programme



Contact the IFRC's Regional Migration, Protection and Accountability Lead for Europe and Central Asia Raquel Fernandez Gibaja at raquel.gibaja@ifrc.org or learn more at the following IFRC webpages:

IFRC Contacts

Integration and Inclusion Framework



Community Engagement Hub



The IFRC Integration and Inclusion Framework is a practical tool to help National Societies plan, deliver, and monitor activities supporting the integration and inclusion of people who have migrated.

Rooted in humanitarian principles, the Framework focuses on addressing barriers and tackling vulnerabilities, drawing on the experience and expertise of the global Red Cross Red Crescent network to support activities that foster dignity, safety, and social cohesion.

This case study is one in a series of ten, illustrating the key elements set out under the Framework's four pillars with examples from National Societies across the IFRC Region of Europe.

Social Cultural Integration and Inclusion

Orientation and Information – *Lithuania*
Language Knowledge – *Bulgaria*
Social Connections – *Denmark*

Socio-Economic Integration and Inclusion

Employment – *Latvia*
Housing – *North Macedonia*
Education – *Hungary*

Wellbeing and Protection

Health – *Montenegro*
MHPSS – *Romania*
Protection – *Spain*
Meaningful Participation – *Norway*



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