



LITHUANIA

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL
REVIEW ON THE
IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE 2030 AGENDA
FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT

2023



OPENING STATEMENT



Simonas Gentvilas, the Minister of Environment, 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simonas Gentvilas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lithuania has committed itself to achieving 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by supporting the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). This second Lithuanian Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (VNR) is a reflection not only of what we have achieved but also of the challenges we face. Now, as we are halfway through the 2030 Agenda, it is crucial to be objective with ourselves and our international partners.

In society, as in the world, we are interdependent, just as the success of one SDG is closely and inextricably linked to the success of another SDG. If we are seeking to achieve global coherence, the key is to be in coordination and help each other. This has become particularly clear in the context of geopolitical events: the coronavirus pandemic, Russia's brutal and unjustified war against Ukraine, and the energy crisis.

Lithuania expresses its solidarity with the people of Ukraine and pledges to provide the necessary economic, humanitarian, and social assistance to Ukraine as needed.

Over the past year, Lithuania has implemented significant changes in its strategic management and planning system. The country's strategic objectives for progress in the environmental, economic, social, and security fields over the next decade are directly linked to the implementation of the SDGs. It is a reflection of Lithuania's commitment to the SDGs, which has remained relevant in the face of crises. Lithuania's economic recovery and resilience plan, "Next Generation Lithuania", is not only helping the economy to recover, but is also contributing to green and digital transformation, which gives confidence that the country will succeed in achieving a sustainable future. As a fossil fuel-independent country, Lithuania's green transformation does not risk losing jobs but rather promises to create new ones - cleaner ones and focused on sustainable national growth.

Despite the negative consequences of the geopolitical context, progress is visible for most of the SDGs in Lithuania. Nevertheless, for long-term, holistic, and accelerated changes it is a necessity to have the focus and cooperation of all stakeholders. With each step, we need to increase the circle of committed partners. In decision-making, we need to work together in unity, involving the public, science, and business participation.

Lithuania's second VNR is the result of an open and inclusive process. I acknowledge all contributors for their valuable input and insights. Together, we have not only assessed the current situation but also identified the changes needed for more effective implementation of the SDGs. I anticipate that this assessment will become an urge for real change.

We make decisions every day that have an impact - on the environment, on social space, and on the economy. It is we who choose how to behave and how to react to a world that is warming and becoming more and more wasteful. I believe that the choice is clear for all of us - we must act now to ensure well-being in every sense of the word for our children and future generations.



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STRUCTURE OF THE VNR



SUMMARY

This section is a brief overview of the VNR.



INTRODUCTION

This section presents the relevance of the VNR, its main objectives and Lithuania's position in the international Sustainable Development Index.



PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE VNR

This section outlines how the VNR was prepared.



NATIONAL LEGAL REGULATION AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SDGs

This section showcases the national legal and regulatory framework and main institutional mechanisms in Lithuania for the implementation of Agenda 2030 and its SDGs as well as presents the most important changes of strategic planning and management system that ensured SDG links with key national strategic planning documents.



PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT

This section highlights the partnerships that have been established to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the country, as well as the involvement of non-governmental organisations and the importance of engaging all groups of society.



ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS

This part presents the holistic approach of economic, social and environmental aspects, as well as the principles of Sustainable Development and their implementation in Lithuania.



IMPLEMENTATION OF 2030 AGENDA IN LITHUANIA

This section presents the implementation of all 17 SDGs in a coherent manner. The first page of each SDG identifies the key challenges in achieving the Goal and presents the overall progress of the targets in terms of indicators. The following pages describe the relevance of the Goal in Lithuania, progress in the international context, the national strategic agenda, an analysis of progress during the assessment period, conclusions and possible next steps to accelerate the progress.

The relevant section can be conveniently accessed by clicking on the colored rectangles on the left-hand side of the table of contents (applicable to this and other pages).



CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

This section presents the main conclusions based on the data-driven analysis and provides suggestions for the next steps that are required to speed up the effective implementation of the Agenda at the national level.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDG)



SDG 1
END POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE



SDG 2
END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE



SDG 3
ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES



SDG 4
ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL



SDG 5
ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS



SDG 6
ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL



SDG 7
ENSURE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND MODERN ENERGY



SDG 8
PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL



SDG 9
BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION AND FOSTER INNOVATION



SDG 10
REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES



SDG 11
MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE



SDG 12
ENSURE SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION PATTERNS



SDG 13
TAKE URGENT ACTION TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS



SDG 14
CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEAS AND MARINE RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



SDG 15
PROTECT, RESTORE AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE USE OF TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS, SUSTAINABLY MANAGE FORESTS, COMBAT DESERTIFICATION, AND HALT AND REVERSE LAND DEGRADATION AND HALT BIODIVERSITY LOSS



SDG 16
PROMOTE PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL AND BUILD EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS



SDG 17
STRENGTHEN THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALIZE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSAP	Baltic Sea Action Plan
CAP	European Union's Common Agricultural Policy
CAP SP 2023-2027	2023-2027 Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan
CFP	European Union's Common Fisheries Policy
CoE	Council of Europe
COVID-19	COVID-19 pandemic
DCHA fund	Development cooperation and humanitarian aid fund
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EUROSTAT	The statistical office of the European Union.
GASFFS	Ground automatic system for forest fire surveillance
GDP	Gross domestic product
GHG	Greenhouse gases
GNI	Gross national income
Government	The Government of the Republic of Lithuania
GPP	Green public procurement
HELCOM	The Helsinki Commission
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011)
IT	Information technology
LiJOT	Lithuanian Youth Council
Lithuania 2030	Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030"
LSAT	Lower Secondary Achievement Test
ME	Matriculation examinations
NCCMA	National Climate Change Management Agenda of Lithuania
NCSD	National Commission for the Sustainable Development
NECAP	National Energy and Climate Action Plan of the Republic of Lithuania for 2021-2030
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training

NEIS	The National Energy Independence Strategy
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
NPP	National Progress Plan for 2021-2030
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
R&D	Research, experimental development and innovation
RES	Renewable energy sources
SD	Sustainable development
SDG	Sustainable development goal
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WHO	World Health Organization

SUMMARY

Lithuania's second voluntary national review (VNR) assesses the country's progress in implementing the United Nations General Assembly resolution "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (2030 Agenda). The VNR evaluates the country's progress between 2018 and 2023, presents emerging challenges and new initiatives to accelerate the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as provides insights, examples of good practices and recommendations from governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The success of the 2030 Agenda and the implementation of the SDG principles are closely linked to the political focus and continued allocation of financial interventions that create positive change. The country's systemic challenges, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's brutal and unjustified war against Ukraine and other socio-economic crises pose challenges to the continued successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Lithuania strongly condemns Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, supported by Belarus, as a violation of international law and calls for accountability for the crime of aggression, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and commits itself to provide Ukraine with the necessary economic, humanitarian and social assistance as long as it is required.

NATIONAL LEGAL REGULATION FOR THE 2030 AGENDA

Over the past few years, Lithuania has implemented important changes in its strategic management system, which have had an impact on the national legal regulation and relevance of the SDGs: A new model of strategic governance has been established in the country, with the introduction of an overarching national strategic document – the National Progress Plan (NPP) for 2021-2030 – which is seen as a real basis for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Lithuania.

It should be noted that **although the national legal regulation of the 2030 Agenda creates the right conditions for the consistent implementation of the SDGs, the relevance of the implementation process** – inter-institutional cooperation, public information, evaluation of progress – is episodic, so it is important to pay more attention to the involvement of citizens. The successful implementation of the SDGs is inextricably linked to the consistent mobilisation and cooperation of all the institutions concerned.

PROGRESS TOWARDS THE 2030 AGENDA

When assessing the individual SDGs, it is important to note that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is not uniform. There are several reasons for this: the effectiveness of long-term interventions, the societal and political focus on the

challenges related to the specific SDGs, the strong cooperation between institutions and social organisations in individual areas of sustainable development (SD).

The health and well-being of the country's population remains good according to general trends, but it is important to keep in mind long-term health policy challenges, such as underfunding of public health, lack of human resources and an ageing population, both in Lithuania and in the European Union (EU) (SDG 3). While the number of people who are undernourished or food insecure in Lithuania remains relatively low, the country is experiencing a rapid increase in food prices, which is particularly acute for those on low incomes, the unemployed or underemployed and the retired, and it is therefore essential to ensure food security for these vulnerable groups and to reduce income inequalities among the population (SDG 2). In order to achieve quality education at all levels, it is noted that the Lithuanian education sector still lacks an inclusive learning environment, which makes it difficult to reduce the achievement gap between learners, to strengthen learners' general skills, to promote the use of innovation and technology in everyday educational activities and to strengthen the lifelong learning (SDG 4).

It should be noted that income disparities between social groups and between regions remain a major challenge for the country (SDG 10). It is therefore necessary to strengthen inter-institutional work and to continue to focus on reducing the level of poverty in the country, especially among people with disabilities and the elderly, and on strengthening the situation of disadvantaged people in the country (SDG 1). Equal opportunities and equal pay for equal work, as well as reducing long-term unemployment, are also important for reducing income inequality (SDG 8). It is noteworthy that the country still has an unequal gender distribution in the labour market, at the highest levels of business, industry and services (SDG 5).

Sustainable economic growth is inextricably linked to the growth of the circular economy, the introduction of innovation and the adaptation of appropriate infrastructure. Lithuania is witnessing a significant increase in demand for products and services based on circular economy principles, as well as the development of green public procurement (GPP). However, the low level of circularity of material cycles requires a focus on the introduction of new technologies and digital solutions in production processes (SDG 12). Although innovation is encouraged in various industrial sectors, the country does not fully exploit the great potential of research and experimental development (R&D) to generate real economic benefits. However, the infrastructure used is increasingly adapted to the needs of both businesses and residents, with municipalities developing sustainable mobility plans and promoting alternatives to sustainable mobility (SDG 9). In order to achieve the inclusiveness, sustainability and safety of cities and settlements, Lithuania is strengthening public services and access to them according to the place of residence, and implementing changes in the strategic agenda of spatial planning (SDG 11). Efforts are also continuing to ensure the availability of drinking water and sanitation services to the largest possible population (SDG 6).

HUMANITARIAN AND ECONOMIC AID INITIATIVES ARE BEING ORGANISED IN THE WAKE OF RUSSIA'S MILITARY AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE, WITH STRONG POLITICAL AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

Lithuania notices positive trends in increasing the forest cover and the area of protected natural areas in the country (SDG 15). The country has a strong focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) towards climate neutrality by 2050 and educating the public on climate change mitigation (SDG 13). Increasing the share of renewable energy sources in the transition to the use of energy from renewable sources (RES) and ensuring energy security are actively promoted in Lithuania (SDG 7). The protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, as well as the prevention and mitigation of marine pollution and acidification of the oceans are pursued with a view to the conservation and sustainable use of marine and aquatic resources (SDG 14).

Lithuania consistently implements continuous and effective development cooperation activities aimed at contributing to the implementation of the SDGs in partner countries, promoting world peace, economic growth and social stability, reducing disparities between developed and developing countries, and integrating developing countries into the global economy (SDG 17). However, the reduction of all forms of crime remains an important target, with a particular focus on education and preventive measures to reduce manifestations of violence against children. It is also important to ensure the state's preparedness for crisis situations, while learning from COVID-19. The absence of this preparedness can also contribute to increasing inequalities in times of crisis (SDG 16).

Lithuania's commitment to implement SDGs remains relevant mission in the face of crises. Following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, humanitarian and economic assistance initiatives are being organised in the country with strong political and public support; during natural emergencies, the state provides humanitarian assistance to other states. During COVID-19, Lithuania shared vaccines internationally with other countries, and the Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan "Next Generation Lithuania" will contribute to the country's economic recovery by prioritising green and digital transformation.



Source: J. Stacevičius/LRT



Source: A. Kokorevas, Pexels



Source: J. Stacevičius/LRT



INTRODUCTION



The 2030 Agenda is a long-term plan for sustainable development, with specific goals and targets for developing and developed countries in all dimensions of the SDGs: Economic, Social and Environmental. The 2030 Agenda sets out 17 SDGs, along with 169 targets and monitoring and review mechanisms.

In order to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Lithuania is committed to achieving all 17 SDGs, but the country's strategic documents differentiate between priority national goals that will receive special attention, taking into account Lithuania's national interests, specificity, and regional relevance of the goals. In 2016, the National Commission for Sustainable Development (NCS) identified the following priority goals, which have remained unchanged to date: SDGs 1, 3, 7, 10, 12, and 13. SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, and 17 will be prioritised at the UN High Level Political Forum in 2023. Against this background, **this VNR pays special attention to Lithuania's national priorities for the SDGs, as well as to the additional SDG 17, which is currently of particular importance to the world and to Lithuania due to the political context of the war in Ukraine initiated by Russia.**

The review and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda is envisaged at the global, regional, and national levels. The UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development has the important role of conducting a regular review of the 2030 Agenda, with voluntary national review by States. In 2018, Lithuania prepared and submitted its first VNR on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Lithuania, detailing the country's contribution to the goals. This VNR, which will be presented in 2023, is the second time that the UN High-Level Political Forum will analyse Lithuania's progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for the period 2018-2023.

The main objectives of the VNR are:

- To analyse the actions and economic, social and environmental processes of state institutions in 2018-2023, that have contributed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Lithuania;
- To analyse the sustainable development indicators and the main policies that have been implemented, in order to identify trends, achievements and challenges in the implementation of each of the 17 SDGs;
- To provide suggestions that will help adjust Lithuania's sustainable development policy to implement 2030 Agenda.

In connection with the mid-term implementation of 2030 Agenda in 2023, and although Lithuania's progress in certain areas has been noticeable, COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have had a particularly negative impact on the implementation of the SDGs related to social and economic aspects. Therefore, this VNR aims not only to assess the country's progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda, but also to accelerate progress towards the timely implementation of international commitments.

It can be noted that awareness of the importance of sustainable development is growing in Lithuania: SDG issues are increasingly mentioned in both institutional and public discourses. This has been significantly influenced by Lithuania's changed strategic management system (discussed in more detail in the following subsections). The NPP, which is the main strategic document of the country and identifies the main changes planned by the state to ensure the country's progress over the next decade, enshrines Lithuania's ambition to consistently implement the SDGs, thus improving the country's position in the Sustainable Development Index: that of the 36th place occupied in 2020, Lithuania would rise to the top 20 countries in 2030. This has not yet been achieved: In the Sustainable Development Index, which looks at sustainable development indicators and their progress, Lithuania is ranked 39th (out of 163 countries) in 2022. According to the data of this index, Lithuania has reached and achieved one SDG – goal 15. Other goals face challenges: for 4 SDGs (SDG 1, SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 11), the goals can be achieved through small changes in policies and/or interventions, while for the remaining SDGs significant efforts are needed.

It should be noted that progress on the SDGs also varies: for 4 goals (SDG 6, SDG 8, SDG 15, SDG 16) there is consistent progress; for 7 goals (SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 7, SDG 9, SDG 11) there is moderate progress, but sufficient progress towards achieving the goal. For the remaining SDGs, progress is stagnant or negative according to the Sustainable Development Index. Notably, progress is not homogenous for all goals. Information on all SDGs is presented in Figure 1.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA, BASED ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDEX



FIGURE 1. IMPLEMENTATION OF 2030 AGENDA, BASED ON sustainable development INDEX (2022)
Source: Sustainable Development Index, 2022.

Thus, as can be seen in the figure above, progress on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs varies between the specific SDGs.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda varies between countries, and each country's actions can have a positive or negative impact on the ability of other countries to achieve the SDGs. The presented Sustainable Development Index provides a Spillover Score, which evaluates three dimensions: (1) environmental and social impacts on trade, (2) economic and financial impacts and (3) security impacts. A higher score means that a country has more positive and less negative impacts on other countries. For Lithuania, the position is rated as average (58.4 out of 100), but it should be noted that only 5 of the 14 indicators measuring progress in this index have been updated for 2022, while the rest remain unchanged from 2018. Although the result of this index reflects that Lithuania's position in the Spillover Score is average, the index data should be interpreted carefully.



FIGURE 2. SPILLOVER SCORE IN LITHUANIA AND OECD COUNTRIES
Source: Sustainable Development Index, 2023.

It should be noted that the Sustainable Development Index has several shortcomings as an international tool for assessing countries' progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

Firstly, a country's efforts to improve the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are not enough to rank among the top performers in the Sustainable Development Index. The Sustainable Development Index scores are not only awarded on the basis of progress achieved, but are also unevenly distributed across the different number of countries participating. For example, in 2018–2022, the assessment of Lithuania's situation in relation to the implementation of SDG 17 by other countries shows a decline in Lithuania's position from the 36th to the 39th place. However, in 2018, Lithuania ranked 36th out of 156 countries with a score of 72.9. In 2022, Lithuania improved its score by 2.5 points compared to 2018, reaching 75.4 points, but its position is lower than in 2018 – 39th out of 163 countries (see Table 1).

YEAR	COUNTRY'S POSITION	COUNTRY'S TOTAL POINT	AVERAGE SCORE OF THE REGION*
2018	36/156	72.9	69.5
2019	32/162	75.1	77.7
2020	36/166	75.0	77.3
2021	31/165	76.7	77.2
2022	39/163	75.4	77.2

TABLE 1. LITHUANIA'S POSITION IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDEX (2018–2022)
Source: Sustainable Development Index, 2018–2022.

* In accordance to this Sustainable Development Index, until 2018, Lithuania was a part of Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, and since 2019, the country is part for the OECD region.

Secondly, the calculation of this Sustainable Development Index uses both official statistics (e.g. EUROSTAT) and informal statistics (e.g. other previous surveys, population surveys based on different methodologies, etc.) to measure progress on specific indicators. Although most of the data used are official statistics, the use of informal statistics does not ensure an adequate assessment of the annual progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda or to adequately replicate the evaluations carried out.

Thirdly, the calculation of the Sustainable Development Index does not take into account all the indicators applicable to the country in order to assess the progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda in the case of specific targets. For example, for SDG 15, the Sustainable Development Index provides data on the average size of protected terrestrial and freshwater areas important for biodiversity. On the other hand, Lithuania's overall SDG progress statistics only reflect the area of protected areas in relation to the area of the country. The magnitude of these indicators varies considerably, which means that in one case the indicator is being successfully implemented, while in the other case progress is average.

It should be noted that the use of this Sustainable Development index and the interpretation of the data contained therein are not entirely accurate and need to be carefully evaluated in future assessments of the country's progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the strategic goals of the NPP.



PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE VNR

In preparing the VNR on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Ministry of Environment (MoE), as the main institution responsible for the implementation of sustainable development policy in Lithuania, established the Monitoring Working Group responsible for monitoring and approving the VNR, which included representatives of the Government Chancellery, most ministries, various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (such as youth organisation, environmental NGOs, NGOs active in the field of sustainable development), municipalities, scientific institutions, business. The MoE has also engaged external experts (BGI Consulting). The joint work of the members of the Monitoring Working Group and the external experts enabled the VNR to be produced in an unbiased manner, with objective conclusions and recommendations, while also involving key stakeholders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The main data sources of this VNR are the country's strategic documents, SDG indicators published by the State Data Agency of Lithuania (State Data Agency), previous evaluations, studies, analyses, as well as assessments and positions provided by NGOs, opinions on specific SDG implementation issues, semi-structured interviews with the ministries implementing the SDGs and representatives of NGOs. In order to provide a detailed assessment of the country's progress, the Statistical Annex "National Indicators for Sustainable Development Goals" was prepared. This Annex also provides a detailed overview of the (in)progress of the SDG indicators. The VNR was prepared in accordance with the National Voluntary Reporting Manual, the UN Secretary-General's guidelines, the decisions of the NCSD, the 2018 VNR on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Lithuania, other countries' VNR and best practices for their preparation.

This VNR is divided into several main sections, including the national legal framework for the SDGs, institutional mechanisms for the implementation, partnerships and cooperation in implementing the 2030 Agenda. It also provides an overview of the economic, social, and environmental aspects of implementing the SDGs in Lithuania.

The VNR focuses on the review of all SDGs, in particular Lithuania's national SDG priorities. The sub-sections of each of the SDGs presented here outline the significance of each goal for Lithuania and the country's position at the international level, as well as how the provisions of a particular goal are reflected in the country's strategic agenda. Based on the indicators of the SDG, an analysis of the progress (or the lack of it) of the SDG is presented, interventions applied, emerging challenges, and possible actions in order to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Lithuania are indicated. At the end of the VNR, conclusions and suggestions are summarised for improving the implementation of the SDGs in Lithuania.



PROCESS OF THE VNR



Establishment of a Monitoring Working Group on the preparation, monitoring and validation of the VNR

44% of the members of the Working Group represent the NGO sector and other stakeholders

Engagement of external experts to prepare the VNR

The start of external experts to draft the VNR (August, 2022)

Preparation of the VNR with the involvement of all stakeholders

8 rounds of discussion for the preparation of VNR by the Monitoring Working Group while preparing the VNR

Approval of the prepared VNR by the Monitoring Working Group

Presentation of the approved VNR to the Government and Members of Parliament

Presentation of the VNR at the UN High-Level Political Forum (July 17-20, 2023)

Public presentation of the VNR

NATIONAL LEGAL REGULATION, INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SDGS

NATIONAL AND LEGAL REGULATION FOR THE SDGS

In 2018-2022, the significant changes to the strategic governance framework have been implemented, affecting the national legal regulation and relevance of the SDGs. In 2020, the Law on Strategic Management was adopted, and in 2021, the Law on Strategic Management was improved, establishing a new model of strategic management in the Lithuanian public sector, combining the formation and implementation of strategic goals with the planning and management of budget appropriations.

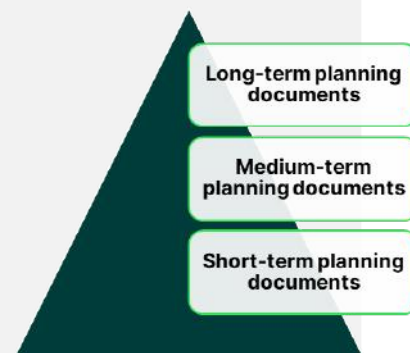
In 2020, an overarching national strategic document – the NPP – was adopted, outlining the key changes planned for Lithuania over the next decade to ensure progress in social, economic, environmental and security areas. This document is seen as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the new strategic management framework, replacing all existing strategies and programmes that were not covered by financial resources until 2020. It is this document that has become the real basis for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Lithuania.

Each of the NPP's strategic goals contributes to at least two of the SDGs, and the implementation of the strategic objectives must ensure coherence between social, economic and environmental dimensions. To achieve this, the NPP sets out three horizontal principles – sustainable development (SD), innovation/creativity and equal opportunities for all. They aim to shape the values that are important for the progress of society in a consistent and comprehensive way and to promote the desired changes in attitudes and behaviour.

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE COUNTRY'S STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT UNTIL 2021

The strategic planning framework is not integral: there was no systematic approach to planning for change, extensive documentation, a lack of coherence between documents, and an inadequate framework for medium-term budgeting.

The SDGs are not integrated into the country's strategic agenda.



A FRAMEWORK FOR THE COUNTRY'S STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT SINCE 2021

An integrated and coherent strategic planning system: reduced number of planning documents, created more efficient planning and monitoring system based on results-based management principles, and strengthened the links between strategic management and the public budgeting systems.

2030 Agenda has been integrated into national documents at strategic level.



THE CHANGES TO THE STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK HAVE CREATED THE RIGHT CONDITIONS FOR A BETTER IMPLEMENTATION AND INTEGRATION OF SDGS INTO PUBLIC POLICY DECISIONS

These principles apply to all the strategic goals and their progress targets as well as must be taken into account when preparing and implementing national development programmes and specific progress measures. In order to achieve the goals of the strategic objectives, ministries prepare development programmes according to their specific areas of government, which formulate specific measures to advance public policy.

Implementation of progress measures under the national development programmes also contribute to the implementation and progress of specific SDGs. The implementation of NPP targets contributes to the progress of SDGs in different ways, but it has highlighted, that none of the NPP targets can adversely affect the horizontal principle SD of the country. To ensure the implementation of each horizontal principle, Horizontal Principle Coordinators have been

appointed to systematically coordinate the inclusion of the Horizontal Principles in national development programmes and progress measures as well as monitor progress indicators for the implementation of the Horizontal Principles, provide expert support to other ministries, and promote inter-institutional cooperation on the implementation of the Horizontal Principles in order to foster behavioural and attitudinal changes in public sector institutions. The MoE is responsible for ensuring the implementation of the horizontal principle of sustainable development. It is foreseen, that since 2023, the Horizontal Principles Coordinators will prepare annual reports on the implementation of the Horizontal Principles, which will form an integral part of the annual report on the implementation of the NPP and contribute to assessing progress on the 2030 Agenda.

Notably, the changes to the strategic governance framework have created the right conditions for better implementation and integration of the SDGs into public policy decisions, with the 2030 Agenda being integrated into the national agenda and the formulation of concrete measures.

NPP INTERFACES WITH SDGS

NPP STRATEGIC GOAL	SDGS
1. TO MOVE TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BASED ON SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, HIGH-TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION, AND TO ENHANCE THE COUNTRY'S INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS	
2. INCREASE THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING AND INCLUSION OF THE POPULATION, STRENGTHEN HEALTH AND IMPROVE LITHUANIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION	
3. INCREASE THE INCLUSIVENESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATION TO MEET INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETAL NEEDS	
4. STRENGTHEN NATIONAL AND CIVIC IDENTITY, CULTURAL PENETRATION AND CREATIVITY IN SOCIETY	
5. IMPROVE TRANSPORT, ENERGY AND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY	
6. ENSURE GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES, PROTECT BIODIVERSITY, MITIGATE LITHUANIA'S IMPACT ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND BUILD RESILIENCE	
7. TO DEVELOP LITHUANIA'S TERRITORY IN A SUSTAINABLE AND BALANCED WAY AND TO REDUCE REGIONAL EXCLUSION	
8. INCREASE THE EFFICIENCY OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM AND PUBLIC GOVERNANCE	
9. STRENGTHEN LITHUANIA'S INFLUENCE IN THE WORLD AND RELATIONS WITH THE DIASPORA	
10. STRENGTHEN NATIONAL SECURITY	

TABLE 2. NPPS' INTERFACE WITH THE SDGS.
Source: NPP Annex 3, 2021.

INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SDGs

The primary responsibility for implementing the SDGs lies with the national executive. In the case of Lithuania, executive power is exercised by the Government. In Lithuania, all ministries are responsible for the implementation of individual SDGs at national level according to their competences. The MoE is the main coordinating authority, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates the implementation of the 2030 Agenda from a development cooperation perspective. The role of the State Data Agency, which coordinates the development and publication of statistical indicators needed to monitor the implementation of 2030 Agenda, is also important. It should be noted that, at the initiative of the State Data Agency, a new [interactive SDGs indicators portal](#) has been developed in Lithuania. This portal is available to the public and is convenient to use. For example, it allows to effectively track and evaluate progress on specific SDG and selected indicators (i.e. how many indicators are being selected, prepared (or not prepared) as well as how many are not applicable to the country), SDG infographics are presented. Data on SDGs and their indicators are updated twice a year and published openly.

The SDGs are closely interlinked, which requires the mobilisation and cooperation of all the institutions concerned. For many years, the NCSO was the main inter-institutional body for strengthening cooperation between public administrations in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. However, the Commission has not been active since 2017. Although the MoE has organised initiatives to strengthen and optimise the implementation of sustainable development policies and to intensify institutional cooperation, there is still no effective and efficient inter-institutional coordination mechanism for sustainable development in Lithuania, and the involvement of stakeholders is fragmented.

While the legal framework and the strategic planning framework provide the right conditions for the implementation of the SDGs, there is a lack of more practical tools and ways to assess the coherence and added value of existing interventions or specific public policies for the implementation of the SDGs. According to both public authorities and NGOs, a more frequent discussion on progress of the SDGs would strengthen inter-institutional cooperation, create the right conditions for reviewing the appropriateness and effectiveness of sustainable development interventions, and purposefully involve community organisations and the country's population in sustainable development implementation processes.

REGULAR AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION THROUGH A PROACTIVE APPROACH AND AN UPDATED DISCUSSION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA WOULD HELP TO ENSURE COHERENT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SDG'S

Discussing sustainable development issues and regularly raising sustainable development priorities on the political agenda would contribute to faster and more coherent implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in Lithuania. This could be done by re-establishing the currently defunct NCSO, which used to perform this function, or by transferring additional sustainable development coordination functions to an already existing high-level structure, such as the State Progress Council. The latter option would be preferable, as it would not expand the bureaucratic apparatus of the State, the functions assigned to it would be in line with the primary purpose of the Council, and, as foreseen in the country's strategic documents, the sustainable development would be linked to the ideas of the future development of the state and the society, the progress of the state and its realisation. However, the State Progress Council lacks NGO representatives, and if such a decision were to be taken, additional involvement of representatives of interested NGOs and community-based organisations related to the implementation of the SDGs would be necessary.

In order to ensure that the relevance of the 2030 Agenda is consistent, the creation of a network of sustainable development coordinators could be initiated. This network could include representatives of all ministries, other relevant institutions, municipalities, communities, NGOs, academia, business, who would assess the relevance and added value of interventions or specific policies for the implementation of the SDGs, and make proposals and recommendations for future actions.

Such a renewed institutional mechanism for the implementation of the SDGs would help to ensure the relevance of the 2030 Agenda on the political agenda, a strategic approach and regular inter-institutional cooperation for the implementation of the SDGs.

THE UNIQUENESS OF LITHUANIA

Globally oriented and open-minded, Lithuania seeks partnerships with the world in business, culture, science, and international cooperation. Our innovation successfully combines community spirit and masterful improvisation.

In Lithuania, companies and research institutions, renowned for their receptivity to the latest scientific discoveries, are editing genes, improving financial tools, and developing advanced lasers. Meanwhile, in the cultural sphere, world-class opera singers, Venice Biennale laureates, and Venice Film Festival winners are celebrated.

Our country is encouraging closer links between start-ups and the public sector. These links help to achieve remarkable and sometimes unexpected results. In the field of international relations, Lithuania's mission is perceived as a commitment to defend freedom and democracy, both in the region and worldwide. Lithuania is a trusted partner for EU and NATO members and a herald of freedom for Eastern Partnership countries.



PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT

PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA

The implementation and positive developments of each SDG are relevant to the success of the other goals, and the strong linkages create a need for joint mobilisation and cooperation between the institutions concerned. The involvement of different representatives from government, business, various civil society organisations and society in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda creates the conditions for both planning and implementing appropriate measures to achieve the SDGs. Also, it accedes to meeting the needs of different social groups, in this way also contributing to the SDG principle of “leaving no one behind”. Consistent collaboration also has a hand in the implementation of consistent and positive changes.

As mentioned above, the MoE is proposing initiatives to optimise the implementation of sustainable development policy and to strengthen inter-institutional cooperation. Notably, other public authorities also contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. For example, in the Parliament, before adopting legislation, it is assessed whether the specific legislation is in line with the law and legislative principles, and whether it is in line with strategic-level governance documents. Although indirect it is a contribution to the implementation of SDGs. Following the presentation of Lithuania's first VRN at the UN High-Level Political Forum in 2018, the Seimas adopted a resolution promoting public participation in decision-making as a horizontal priority for the implementation of the country's strategic goals. It should be noted that some of the provisions of the resolution have been implemented (e.g., the integration of SDGs into long-term and medium-term (up to 2030) public policy strategy documents, the synergy of these documents). The resolution also encouraged to legitimize that, when allocating funding, the first focus would be on the implementation of long-term SDGs. However, the changed strategic management system did not implement these changes - preference was given to national strategic documents. In order to ensure greater accountability for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the resolution proposed that the SDG indicators and their analysis would be included in the Government's annual activity report, but this change was also not implemented and it was decided to monitor the implementation of the SDGs through the annual NPP reports. In addition to reporting on progress towards the specific goals of the NPPs, these reports also will have a section on the implementation of the Horizontal Principles through the NPP Horizontal Principle indicators, one of which (the sustainable development index) covers progress towards achieving all the SDGs. The first annual NPP report should be published in 2023.

In the Seimas elections held in 2020, political parties also tried to reflect the 2030 Agenda in their election manifestos, but fragmentation is also noticeable in this area. It should be cognizant that at the national level, public authorities are making efforts to involve the social partners – commissions and committees (e.g. the Seimas Commission on Energy and Sustainable Development) to . Also, ministerial working groups and other (in)formal groups are being formed at both the

parliamentary and executive levels of the Seimas with the seek to invite interested parties to the stages of decision making. However, it is noteworthy that formal and informal forms of cooperation are used to address a specific issue rather than to cooperate in a coherent way in specific areas.

Meanwhile, at the municipal level, there are often individual initiatives aimed at educating the public about the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the importance of its goals: for example, the Environmental Education Programme 2021-2027 prepared by Kaunas District takes into account the 2030 Agenda. This programme aims to develop a responsible attitude of society towards the environment, to inform about the state of the environment of the residential area, to give residents the freedom to make decisions related to environmental protection, and to involve districts and their communities in ongoing environmental programmes and actions. On the initiative of the municipalities or civil organisations operating in them, they participate in international projects aimed at familiarising cities with the methodology for implementing the SDGs at the local level. Individual international events are also organised for the transmission of experience in the implementation of the SDGs, for example, the Association of Local Authorities of Lithuania implemented the project “Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the Local Level”: Transferring the Experience of Lithuanian and European Municipalities to Municipalities in Moldova, Sakartvelo and Ukraine. In particular, much of the dissemination of information on the SDGs is done on the initiative of NGOs and the private sector, with a view to sharing and adopting good practices in coordinating the SDGs.




It can be seen that there is still no effective and efficient inter-institutional coordination mechanism for SDGs at national level, and that the involvement of stakeholders at both regional and national level in the planning, monitoring and reporting phases of SDG implementation is fragmented. At the municipal level, there are no groups responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in municipalities, and the potential to involve civil society, experts and NGOs is not used. Against this background, the further implementation of 2030 Agenda proposes to strengthen the inter-institutional coordination mechanism and ensure a coherent partnership between the public sector, business, civil society and experts, as well as to contribute to the regular monitoring of SDG implementation. It is also proposed to promote international cooperation and the learning and sharing of best practices between countries. It should be noted that in order to increase the involvement of members of society, there is a need for coherent rather than individual initiatives, coordinated efforts to inform the Lithuania's society about the 2030 Agenda, as well as on local and global partnership for its implementation.

Fragmentation can also be seen in activities focused on informing the public about the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. There is no national coordination of the promotion of the SDGs and no publicity plan to ensure targeted public information involving public authorities and other stakeholders. According to the survey, only one in five people in Lithuania have heard of the SDGs or are very familiar with them. It is noteworthy that in 2021 the proportion of the population who know what 2030 Agenda or SDGs has decreased compared to 2019. Those who are able to identify SDGs are usually 18-25 years old, representatives of the highest education and highest income groups. It should be noted that globally, awareness of the SDGs or the 2030 Agenda is three times higher, reaching 74%.



FIGURE 4. THE VISIBILITY OF THE 2030 AGENDA IN LITHUANIA AND WORLDWIDE. DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS TO THE QUESTION "DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE 17 UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (2030 AGENDA) ARE?"
Source: National Audit Office, Development Cooperation Platform, 2021.

LEGEND:

-  Yes, I know
-  Yes, I have heard about it
-  No, I do not know

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the individual themes of 2030 Agenda are relevant to society. For example, according to the Eurobarometer (2022), 74% of the population indicated that they felt threatened by climate change (EU average: 81%). Initiatives by NGOs, businesses and citizens in Lithuania to contribute to the SDGs show that the public is becoming increasingly involved in the 2030 Agenda. However, in order for the initiatives being developed to be sustainable, it is essential to have the support of the state and consistent public awareness of the 2030 Agenda, the opportunities to contribute to its implementation and progress.

NGO ENGAGEMENT

The contribution of NGOs to public education and participation in the implementation of the SDGs is particularly important. In most cases, NGO representatives are involved in various national, regional or local formal or informal groups where decisions and actions related to the SDGs are taken. Moreover, NGOs also carry out individual projects aimed at spreading the message about the implementation of the SDGs to the Lithuanian public, contributing to public education and creating a dialogue between NGOs and decision-makers.

Furthermore, the involvement of NGOs in the 2030 Agenda is promoted in different formats. For example, in 2023 to support NGO activities related to climate policy development and public awareness on climate change, the MoE has earmarked €0.5 million. The Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Lithuania regularly implements support programmes to strengthen the country's sustainability and to educate young people about the SDGs.

It is also important to mention the involvement of NGOs in the transfer and exchange of experience at the international level. In most cases, individual NGOs operating in Lithuanian municipalities take the opportunity to establish partnerships with NGOs of local interest in other countries. Such collaborative initiatives allow for the formation of new communities that exchange good practices between different countries and ultimately adapt ideas for the implementation of the SDGs in Lithuania.



FIGURE 5. THE ONLY DEBATE FESTIVAL IN LITHUANIA "BÜTENT!". A PUBLIC DEBATE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SDG.
Source: D. Žvirblis, 2022.



FIGURE 6. IN 2021, SWEDBANK IMPLEMENTED THE "17" PROJECT IN LITHUANIA, WHICH SET UP FACILITIES IN VILNIUS TO LEARN ABOUT ALL 17 SDGs.
Source: Swedbank, 2021.



Source: Sarah Chai, Pexels.

A good example of NGO cooperation is the NGO "Circular Economy", which was established to promote zero waste production and lifestyles, along with the principles of the circular economy among business and public authorities. The organisation works actively with municipalities and the MoE to share its knowledge and the experience of European environmental NGO networks.

In cooperation with Tauragė municipality and based on the good practices of Italian municipalities, "Circular Economy" promotes the possibility for the inhabitants of this municipality to compost all their food and kitchen waste at home. Using its best practices and expertise, the NGO has developed recommendations and suggestions on how the municipality can achieve better management of food and kitchen waste. The municipality, in turn, created conditions for residents with individual waste collection containers to save money by throwing away less mixed waste. Households in multi-apartment buildings are to be provided with identification cards from 2023 onwards for those who use underground collection containers for mixed municipal and bio-waste for waste separation. Each use would be assigned to a specific household. The quality control of sorting and the savings opportunities offered to households that sort well could contribute to better sorting and a reduction in mixed municipal waste, and encourage other municipalities to innovatively incentivise residents to contribute to waste sorting.

ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA

Between 2018 and 2023, there has been an increase in the active participation of youth representatives in various international processes related to the SDGs, by preparing and/or contributing to formal or informal formats of national, regional or local importance.

In the advocacy dimension, important documents have been adopted to support the development of youth policies in the context of the SDGs. For example, the Council of Lithuanian Youth Organisations (LiJOT) – the largest umbrella NGO in Lithuania, uniting 68 youth and youth-working organisations – adopted a position on the implementation of the SDGs until 2030, which aims to underpin youth policy and encourage the State of Lithuania to undertake the implementation of these goals in all areas. SDG-related resolutions were adopted on ensuring the rights of young people (with a view to an inclusive society), and increasing progress towards individual SDG.

LiJOT implements the UN Youth Delegate Programme in Lithuania by contributing to the implementation of the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, the dissemination of information on the SDGs among young people and the effective representation of young people in international formats. The Lithuanian UN Youth Delegate shares the experience gained with young people and youth and youth-related organisations across Lithuania. In this way, young people are introduced to the SDGs as well as to the organisation and policy-making of the UN. Such a model of youth representation in Lithuania enables the implementation of Lithuania's horizontal foreign policy, which includes youth representation at the international level. It is expected that the purposeful and active involvement of young people, after the official approval of the UN Youth Delegate Programme in Lithuania, will ensure an even broader involvement of young people in solving, publicising and updating SDG issues. However, it should be noted that the consistent and high-quality implementation of this programme requires the provision of financial support instruments and the strengthening of inter-institutional cooperation.

During the evaluation period, there was also an increase in youth-led awareness-raising activities on the implementation of the SDGs through dialogue between NGOs, young people and decision-makers. An example of this is the communication campaign launched in the summer of 2022 to introduce the SDGs to young people. Exchange and communication projects have been implemented, drawing on good practices from the Nordic countries: "Boosting 2030 Agenda with Lithuanian Summer Festival and Communication" (2019), which implemented a debate on the SDGs at the summer youth festival "Dalinkis vasara 2019"; international sustainable development Workshop in Vilnius; the Conscious Generation social media campaign and the "ReGeneration 2030 Summit Vilnius" (2020) project, which organised a high-level remote summit and broadcast in Vilnius.



Source: LiJOT, 2019.



ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS

The 2030 Agenda clearly identifies the need for a holistic approach across the three key dimensions – economic, social and environmental – as these dimensions of development are interlinked. SDG 17 and various forms of cooperation ensure that each SDG contributes to a specific dimension (see Figure 7). In parallel, there is a strong emphasis on policy coherence between the SDGs, with an emphasis on synergies between the SDGs, ensuring that interventions in one SDG contribute to a positive impact in the other, or at least do not have a negative impact on its implementation. However, synergies can also be applied from the opposite perspective: failure to achieve targets and lack of progress in one SDG leads to situations where progress in the other SDGs will be lower.

In Lithuania, the sustainable development are increasingly understood and used as a tool for achieving economic prosperity, social justice, and a healthy environment. To ensure coherence and integration in these areas, the country has developed an institutional framework and a strategic planning framework based on the principles of SD. All state institutions are guided by overarching strategies, in particular the NPP and the Lithuanian Progress Strategy Lithuania 2030 (Lithuania 2030), when drafting strategic documents in their respective fields. Specifically, the links between the NPP and the SDGs are shown in Table 2; The key progress areas of Lithuania 2030 – Smart Society, Smart Economy, Smart Governance – also include all SDGs. Linking strategic documents in this way ensures coherence between different policy areas and integrated problem solving.

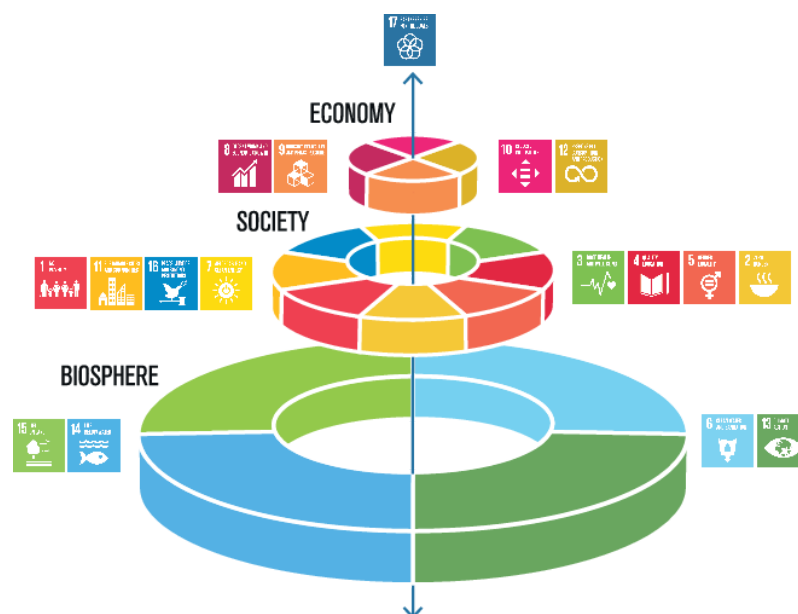


FIGURE 7. COMPATIBILITY OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS WITH THE SDG's.
Source: Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University CC BY-ND 3.0.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES



PRINCIPLE NO 1. HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

The 2030 Agenda also enshrines a vision of sustainable development based on international human rights and freedoms standards, with a strong focus on equality and non-discrimination, encompassing not only economic and social rights, but also political, civil and cultural rights. At the same time, it sets out the principles of sustainable development (universal values) that empower members of society to become active implementers of the 2030 Agenda and contribute to creating positive change. It should be noted that these principles are embedded to go beyond abstract economic, social and environmental provisions to address all forms of discrimination and other causes of inequality, which often become the basis for poverty, exclusion and conflict. Integrating the principles of sustainable development into the implementation of the SDGs itself also helps countries to work together and meet their international commitments.

When analysing the implementation of the sustainable development principles in Lithuania in 2018-2023, it should be emphasised that the role of the principles in the life of the country is often underestimated or ignored. In particular, universal values such as human rights are at greater risk in the face of crisis situations (the war in Ukraine, COVID-19, the global energy crisis, the migrant crisis, etc.), and not only in everyday situations, but also in the long term. It is also noticeable that certain issues are not analysed from a human rights and protection of freedoms perspective, as well as are not recognised as human rights (e.g. freedom of expression, protection of personal data and the right to be forgotten) until personal and/or individual experience. Furthermore, the country does not consistently report on the implementation of these sustainable development principles; therefore, in order to strengthen the implementation of the sustainable development principles in Lithuania, it is important both to ensure that the public is informed about the importance of these principles and to promote regular monitoring of the principles.

In the context of the implementation of the “Human rights-based approach” to sustainable development principles in Lithuania, it can be observed that progress in the field of human rights has been mixed. The country shows positive trends in the areas of reproductive rights and sexual development, gender equality; a decrease in the number of unjustified arrests as a measure of pre-trial detention, a criminalised act of persecution which mainly affects persons who have suffered domestic violence, and the abolition of compulsory mediation in civil cases where domestic violence is recorded. However, ratification of the EC Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) is still pending, and there is still room for strengthening the rights and protection of the LGBTQ+ community.

Aspects of strengthening the protection of human rights and freedoms can be observed both internally and by external experts and international organisations. In January 2022, the UN Human Rights Council, as part of the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), have assessed how human rights that are guaranteed by UN law are being guaranteed and how received and accepted recommendations from the second cycle of the UPR (2016) has been implemented in Lithuania. During the evaluation, after the presentation of the country report by the delegation, the UN Member States provided recommendations to Lithuania. 232 recommendations were received, of which 214 were accepted. It should be noted that all recommendations related to the reduction of various forms of discrimination, ensuring gender equality, rights of children and persons with disabilities, increasing women's participation in political and public life, and ensuring equal pay for equal work for men and women, as well as recommendations related to Roma rights, improving prison conditions, guaranteeing migrants' rights, protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ people, adopting the Partnership and National Minorities Acts, improving the effectiveness of the prevention and prosecution of hate crimes and trafficking in human beings, stepping up the fight against domestic violence and ratifying the Istanbul Convention were accepted and Lithuania committed to implement them. In July 2022, the 50th session of the UN Human Rights Council, when adopting the report on the third cycle of Lithuania's UPR highlighted the importance of implementing current recommendations and human rights-based approach in the public sector.



PRINCIPLE NO 2. LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

European countries measure progress on the “Leave No One Behind” principle against an international index that measures inequality along four dimensions: poverty, the availability and quality of services provided to the population, gender inequality and income inequality. A higher score means that fewer people are left behind. In 2022, Lithuania scored 68 out of 100, ranking 25th out of 34 countries (compared to an EU average of 74.9).

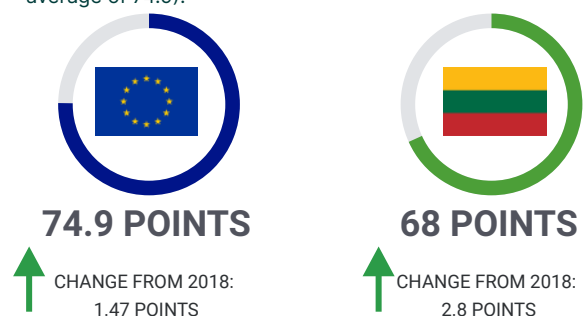


FIGURE 8: PROGRESS ON THE 'LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND' PRINCIPLE 2018-2022 IN LITHUANIA AND THE EU27

SOURCE: EUROPE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2022, 2023

At national level, two indicators have been chosen to monitor progress in implementing the horizontal principle of “equal opportunities for all” enshrined in the NPP: the gender equality index and the quality of life index for people with disabilities. The latter measures the totality of areas that are important for the quality of life of people with disabilities – meeting the needs of people with disabilities, accessibility of the physical and information environment, employment of people with disabilities in cultural and sports activities, and protection of the rights of people with disabilities and their social participation. The growth dynamics of this index has been insignificant since 2018, increasing from 49.26 points in 2018 to 52.44 points in 2022. It should be noted that the Strategic Agenda sets a target of 55 points in 2025 and 60 points in 2030. In order to fulfill this strategic goal, it is necessary to continue paying attention to practical interventions that help implement the principle of “Equal opportunities for all”.

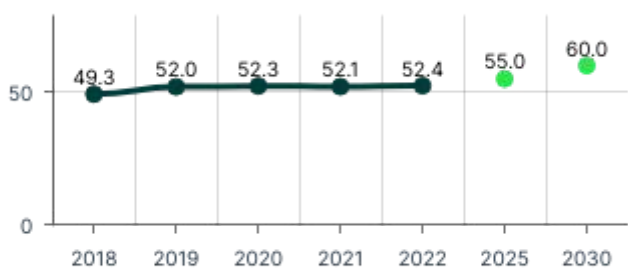


FIGURE 9. PROGRESS IN THE QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE PERIOD 2018-2030 IN THE LITHUANIA
Source: Department of Disability Affairs under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2023.



PRINCIPAL NO 3. GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

The implementation of the principle of “Gender equality and women's empowerment”, i.e. de facto gender equality, is still a challenge in many areas of life. Achieving this requires the active contribution of both genders and the horizontal integration of a gender perspective in all policy areas: this will be achieved both through legislation and through an institutional mechanisms.

To monitor progress on the principle of “Gender equality and the empowerment of women”, the Gender Equality Index mentioned above can be used to assess the gender equality situation in the EU as a whole and in each Member State. The Index is calculated by scoring a country on a scale of 1 to 100, measuring six key areas of life: Work, Money, Knowledge, Time, Power, Health, and also Violence and Intersecting inequalities. Lithuania ranks 20th out of 26 EU countries in the Gender Equality Index, with a score of 60.6 out of 100 in 2022. It scores 8.0 points below the EU average.

Since 2019, Lithuania's score has increased the most compared to other Member States (+2.2 points), and the country has maintained its 20th place. The main factors leading to a higher score in Lithuania are improvements in the areas of power and knowledge. Improvements in power and knowledge are the main factors behind the Index's higher value. Without this progress, the index would have moved downwards due to the negative impact of COVID-19 on gender equality.

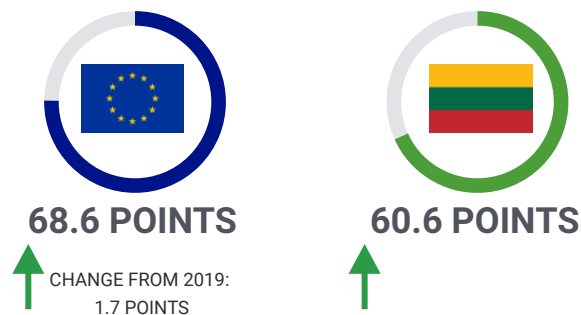


FIGURE 10. PROGRESS OF THE GENDER EQUALITY INDEX 2019-2022 IN THE EU AND IN LITHUANIA
Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023.

In the Gender Equality Index, Lithuania ranks highest (11th in the EU) in the area of **work**, with a score of 73.9. However, the score in the area of work has decreased by 0.3 points since 2019. Since 2019, the country's position has improved in **knowledge** (+ 1.5 points) and **power** (+ 6.1 points), where Lithuania ranks 18th. Gender inequality remains pronounced in the area of **money** (+70.4 points), where the country's ranking remains stubbornly low (24th among EU Member States), and progress in this area has stagnated (only +0.5 points since 2019). Although Lithuania's highest score is in **health** (82.7 points), it still ranks low among EU Member States (24th). In order to improve the situation at national level, the Action Plan on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2023-2025 was adopted in 2023, aiming to increase equality between women and men and improve the situation of women and girls in vulnerable groups.

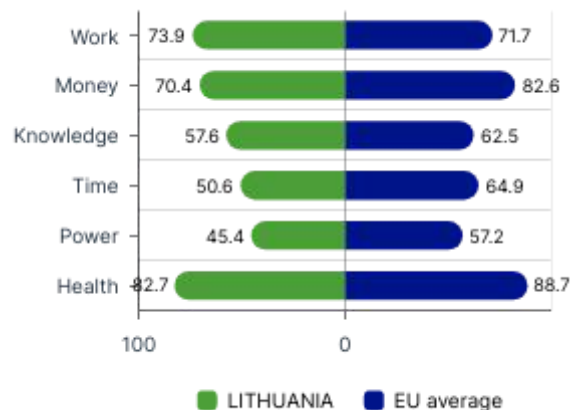


FIGURE 11. PROGRESS OF THE GENDER EQUALITY INDEX 2019-2022 IN THE EU AND IN LITHUANIA
Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023.

In conclusion, the implementation of the sustainable development principles in Lithuania faces a number of challenges that prevent the consistent achievement of the set objectives. Although it can be noted that in some areas Lithuania is making better progress than the EU average, this is not enough to place Lithuania in a high position in the overall EU context. It is important to take a holistic view of developments in the country in terms of human rights, equal opportunities and gender equality and women's empowerment.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA IN LITHUANIA



1 NO POVERTY



SDG 1. END POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Strengthening the situation of disadvantaged people, with a special focus on children
- Reducing social stigma and making information more accessible
- Reducing income inequality
- Further reducing poverty levels, especially among people with disabilities and older people

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

1.1. The share of people living below the international poverty line in Lithuania has been steadily decreasing since 2018 (0.98% in 2018 and 0.23% in 2021).

1.2. The at-risk-of-poverty rate in Lithuania is falling (22.9% in 2018 and 20% in 2021). However, the highest rates remain for people with disabilities and those aged 65 and over (respectively, 32.7% and 35.9% in 2021). The proportion of people living in overcrowded conditions has also increased in recent years (from 22.8% in 2018 to 23.7% in 2021).

1.3. The share of the unemployed people receiving unemployment cash benefits has increased (from 25.9% in 2014 to 37.7% in 2020). *The other national monitoring indicators for this objective have not been updated since 2018.*

1.4. COVID-19 had a negative impact on the country's health system, increasing the proportion of the population that did not receive medical advice or treatment when needed (from 3.1% in 2018 to 4.1% in 2021).

1.5. The use of funds for emergency management increased during the pandemic. The number of deaths from COVID-19 between 2020 and 2021 was 9,284.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 1 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

The first SDG is a priority goal to combat problem of poverty and social exclusion, especially among the elderly, single people and people with disabilities, which Lithuania continues to address through long-term and highly targeted measures. In implementing this SDG, Lithuania intends both to reduce poverty among the population (by ensuring prevention, empowering the population and increasing employment) and to help the population at risk of poverty (by increasing their income, providing social assistance).

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

In terms of poverty reduction at EU level, Lithuania has made significant progress since 2018: the share of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion has fallen from 28.5% in 2018 to 23.4% in 2021 (i.e. a decrease of 5.1 percentage points) and this is the most successful change over this period for the whole of the EU. At EU level, the overall share of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion remains stable at 21.7% between 2018 and 2021.

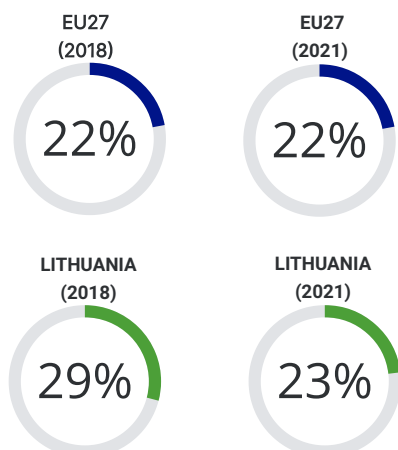


FIGURE 12. SHARE OF THE POPULATION (%) AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION
Source: EUROSTAT, 2023.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

While Lithuania has made significant progress in reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion, it remains above the EU average.

Reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion is one of the main priorities of Lithuanian social policy and one of the goals of the state, pursued through various strategic documents. In particular, it implements [Lithuania 2030](#), which aims, among other goals, to reduce social exclusion by developing and implementing national poverty reduction programmes. Poverty eradication is also the focus of the 18th Government Programme, which aims to reduce income inequality and poverty through appropriate comprehensive fiscal and financial measures and by increasing spending on social protection, especially for those with the lowest benefits. Poverty is at the heart of the [2021-2030 Development Framework for Reducing Income Inequalities](#). The programme aims to address the challenges of poverty among people of retirement age, as well as people with disabilities, lone parents and people in employment.

Poverty and income inequality are identified as major social problems in Lithuania in the NPP, whose strategic goal 2 is to increase the social well-being and inclusion of the population, and this NPP goal is linked to the Lithuanian 2030 and the first SDG.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

Under SDG 1, Lithuania aims to reduce the at-risk-of-poverty rate (the share of the population living below 60% of the median income level). and there is noticeable progress in this area since 2018 – the at-risk-of-poverty rate decreased from 22.9% to 20% between 2018 and 2021. Although the change is greater in rural areas (the at-risk-of-poverty rate in rural areas decreases from 31.3% to 25.4% between 2018 and 2021), the at-risk-of-poverty rate in urban areas also decreased during this period (from 18.8% to 17.4%).

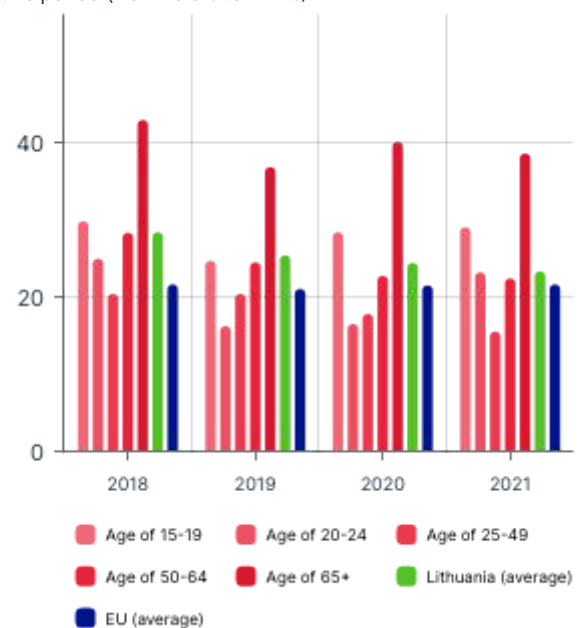


FIGURE 13. SHARE OF THE LITHUANIAN POPULATION AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION (%), BY AGE GROUP, 2018-2021, COMPARED TO THE EU (27) AVERAGE.
Source: EUROSTAT, 2023.

The level of risk of poverty is one of the components of the poverty risk or social exclusion indicator. As shown in Figure 13, those aged 65 and over have been at the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion throughout the period under analysis - the measures taken have been effective, but current challenges are hampering the effectiveness of existing measures. It should be noted that while progress is being made, disparities between Lithuania and the EU remain: in 2018, 28.5% of people living at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Lithuania and 21.7% in the EU; in 2021, 23.4% and 21.7% respectively.

The positive developments presented above have been influenced by the measures included in the strategic action plans of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL) 2018-2020 and [subsequent](#), which provided support for the social integration of people with disabilities, sought to integrate people at social risk and social exclusion into the labour market, and applied various support methods, such as

cash social assistance (whose expenditure in 2019, compared to 2018, increased by more than 37.7% (from €362.55 million to €499.42 million), child benefits, which contributed to the reduction of child poverty, as well as state aid for the provision of housing, social assistance for schoolchildren, support offered by the state to the most disadvantaged and even to the country's middle-income population, who benefit from compensation for the heating costs of their homes. Another important tool in the fight against poverty is the single person's allowance, which is received by more than 220 thousand inhabitants in Lithuania.

Since 2018, Lithuania has made a number of changes to reduce poverty. As of 2018, the basic amounts (basic social benefit, state-supported income, social assistance pension base, target compensation base) that affect the amount of social benefits was linked to the amount of the Minimum Consumption Needs BASKET. This has ensured a steady increase in the base rates, irrespective of political decisions. From 2019, a basic package of family services has been adopted, consisting of 14 basic services for family members of different ages, to be provided by and accessible to all Lithuanian municipalities on their territory. Part of the earned income is no longer taken into account in the entitlement to social benefits for the poorest – these changes are aimed at reducing the risk of poverty among the working population. With the introduction of COVID-19, the share of non-deductible income has been increased and it has been decided not to test individuals' assets, thus allowing a larger share of the population to access benefits. In 2021, in order to address the problem of poverty among the elderly, amendments to the Law on Social Insurance Pensions were adopted, which ensure a faster increase (indexation) of social insurance pensions and the basic part will no longer be reduced for persons who have taken early retirement. In 2023, the Employment Enhancement Programme, which will be implemented in all municipalities, will come into full effect and will provide certain individuals with a case manager service, offering individual support (counselling) to help them enter the labour market. In order to reduce the bureaucratic burden, it is possible to apply for compensation for heating, hot water and drinking water costs only once during the cold season (the same benefit no longer needs to be applied for every three months). In order to reduce poverty among people with disabilities in Lithuania, attention is paid not only to increasing social benefits, but also to integrating people with disabilities of working age (there are about 150 thousand of them in the country) into the labour market: In 2023, amendments to legal acts proposed by the MSSL adopted by the Parliament, based on the good practices of Western countries, came into force, which create more opportunities for people with disabilities to actively participate in the labour market, and for employers – to provide the necessary assistance in employing them or maintaining the job after an employee has acquired a disability. People with disabilities benefit from preventive measures such as post-employment support, assistance in adapting the workplace and working environment, and the support of a work assistant. These changes aim to focus more on the employment of people with disabilities in open labour markets rather than in social enterprises, which do not necessarily address poverty.

Lithuania has made progress in reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion in recent years, the risk of poverty among the population aged 65 and over remains a significant problem – 35.9% of this group were at risk of poverty in 2021. It is also important to continue to address the at-risk-of-poverty rate among children, as although the share of children aged 17 years at risk of poverty decreased by 6.7 percentage points between 2018 and 2021, it still stood at 17.2%.

Since 2021, there has also been an increase in the number of people living in overcrowded housing, and although this indicator has been decreasing since 2017, the proportion of this population increased slightly in 2021 compared to 2018 (by 0.9%). This increase is partly due to the rapid rise in rents during and after the pandemic, as well as the growing number of migrants, which reached almost 29 thousand in 2018 and 44.9 thousand in 2021.

In terms of progress on the SDG 1 indicators, the biggest problem is the number of people who did not receive medical advice or treatment when they needed it. The proportion of this population has increased since 2017, especially in 2021. This may be mainly due to COVID-19 and its administrative measures, which have made access to medical advice and services more difficult.

In order to achieve SDG 1, social partners and NGOs are also involved in Lithuania. NGOs, municipal service departments and institutions can also provide social services, while the MSSL also publishes special public tenders for NGOs. Consultations have been held with representatives of certain NGOs in connection with decisions to change existing benefits or introduce new ones, such as the planning of a universal child allowance, and with the National Network of Anti-Poverty Organisations, whose representatives have taken part in meetings on the design, scope and other issues of support. Further work is being done to find ways of involving civil society more closely in the work of the State and the delivery of public services.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

It is difficult to assess the impact of global challenges (such as the war in Ukraine, rising prices, etc.) on the achievement of this SDG. In order to limit the impact of these crises on poverty growth, packages of different measures were implemented, including lump sum payments, increases in the base and other services to residents and businesses have been developed. For example, in order to control the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, benefits were provided to residents and businesses to maintain employment, while Ukrainian children who fled the war to Lithuania received the same benefits as Lithuanian children (all beneficiaries of temporary protection in the country receive the same social services and benefits as Lithuanian residents).

Reducing social stigma is also a challenge for SDG 1 and further poverty prevention. People in Lithuania are still often reluctant to ask for the social services or support to which they are entitled. To better inform the public, a website (<http://kasmanpriklauso.lt/>) has been set up to provide information on compensation and other support to which people are entitled. More and more personalised support is being offered to meet people's individual needs. It is also important to point out that poverty is not a question of one institution, but an expression of solidarity in society, which is why it is necessary to continue to promote social dialogue, to increase accountability for undeclared work and any form of exploitation at work, and to raise the issue of profit sharing between workers and employers. Government efforts through intervention do not always achieve results because society

itself is not always willing to share. In this case, a very important part of public education is to educate the population so that they do not become completely dependent on support systems, but at the same time are able to accept the assistance offered to them.

Some of the above-mentioned anti-poverty measures had their greatest impact in the first years of their implementation (thus potentially contributing significantly to the positive development of the indicators), but additional funding is needed for these measures to continue to be effective.

It is important to note that Lithuania allocated 16.3% of its gross domestic product (GDP) to social protection in 2020, while the EU average was 21.8%. This suggests that greater public investment in poverty reduction could be considered. The EC's State of Lithuania 2022 report and recommendations highlight the benefits of increasing public sector wages, pensions and other benefits for poverty reduction in Lithuania, but this requires ensuring stable sources of revenue – the planned review of the tax system could help to ensure continued funding of existing measures and help to address income inequality.

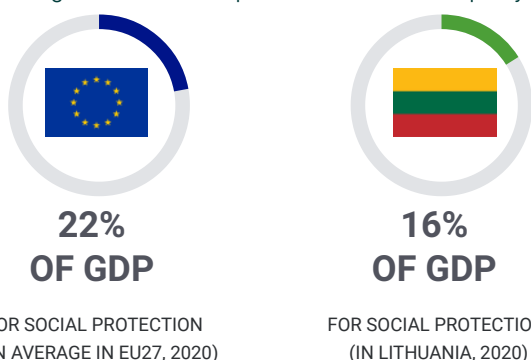


FIGURE 14. SHARE OF THE LITHUANIAN POPULATION AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION (%), BY AGE GROUP, 2018-2021, COMPARED TO THE EU (27) AVERAGE. Source: EUROSTAT, 2023

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Overall, Lithuania's progress towards SDG 1 can be assessed as moderate. While positive progress has been made in recent years in reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion, important challenges remain: Strengthening the situation of disadvantaged people, with a particular focus on children; Reducing stigma and improving access to information; Reducing income inequality; Further reducing poverty levels, especially among people with disabilities and the elderly.

Addressing these challenges requires a more comprehensive approach to poverty reduction that goes beyond financial and fiscal measures. It is also important to ensure that the implementation of anti-poverty measures is more targeted, individualised and effective. In order to ensure a consistent implementation of this SDG, it is also necessary to ensure that the country's monitoring indicators are regularly updated. For example, six out of seven indicators of SDG 1.3 target "Implement nationally adequate social protection systems and measures for all, including minimum thresholds, covering a significant proportion of the poorest and most vulnerable by 2030" have not been updated since 2016/2018. In order to reduce poverty in Lithuania, it is important to further strengthen the country's social security system and the situation of socially vulnerable people, paying particular attention to people with disabilities and the elderly, as well as to reduce income inequality in the country. It is also important to maintain educational measures that help to reduce social stigma and to develop information on available services.

GOOD PRACTICE

In order to reduce poverty, social exclusion and inequality between different groups of society and the resulting problems, MSSL has developed a tool to monitor the effectiveness of social assistance in Lithuanian municipalities. The tool aims to contribute to the poverty reduction goals in Lithuania, the implementation of the EU Social Pillar and other strategies to reduce poverty and social exclusion; to develop a vision of an effective social support system, to create positive incentives for municipalities to improve the provision of support, to share experiences, to learn from good examples and to have a tool for monitoring the effectiveness of the social support provided by municipalities, for comparison between municipalities by their groups and on a national level.

The monitoring of the effectiveness of social assistance is carried out by selecting the main indicators of the social assistance system in the areas of poverty reduction, assistance and prevention and combining them into a common index. Each area is in turn composed of 1-4 dimensions: the poverty reduction area includes one poverty reduction dimension. The prevention domain comprises the dimensions of social protection resources and environmental indicators relevant to the functioning of the social assistance system. The assistance domain covers the dimensions of cash assistance, services, employment and housing. The indicators in the area of assistance are directly focused on the provision of assistance to the needy population. This approach essentially compares municipalities with each other and aims to minimise the gap between municipalities. As the outcome of social assistance can be determined by different external factors, municipalities are grouped by county, by level of urbanisation, and municipalities with similar labour market and demographic characteristics are compared.



Source: Pirella



SDG 2. END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Ensuring sustainability in agriculture and fisheries
- Ensuring the production and consumption of organic and fair trade products
- Ensuring adequate nutrition for all citizens

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

2.1. The proportion of the population in Lithuania that is undernourished or severely food insecure remains relatively low (1.9% in 2020, compared to 1.1% in 2018), but with rapidly rising food prices, this indicator could change negatively in the future.

2.2. In 2021, 0.6% of children under 5 (attending educational institution) had short stature, 1.8% were underweight and 2% overweight; In 2019, 41.4% of the Lithuanian population had a healthy body mass index, 37.9% were overweight and 18.9% were obese. Fruit and vegetable consumption has not changed significantly since 2018.

2.3. Lithuania's gross agricultural production is growing steadily (at current prices – €2.358 billion in 2018 and €3.073 billion in 2021) and productivity in the agricultural sector (value added per hour actually worked in agriculture, forestry and fisheries was €6.8 in 2018 and €12.7 in 2021). However, Lithuania is still below the EU average.

2.4. While the share of organic area is increasing (from 8.1% in 2018 to 8.9% in 2021), however, GHG emissions from the agricultural sector are still increasing (the change in GHG emissions compared to 2005 emissions has increased from 4.4% in 2018 to 7.9% in 2021), mainly due to the use of mineral fertilisers (according to EUROSTAT, their use increased from 159 433 t in 2018 to 185 779 t in 2020)

2.5. As the genetic resources of animal species protected for food and agriculture are increasing in Lithuania, the proportion of native species threatened with extinction is also increasing.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 2 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

SDG 2 is important for Lithuania's agriculture and fisheries sectors, as well as for public health and stability, and are reflected in various Lithuanian strategic documents and government policies. In implementing this SDG, Lithuania aims to ensure adequate and healthy nutrition, quality food and self-sufficiency of the population, develop sustainable agriculture, food and fisheries sectors, while increasing the productivity and added value of these sectors. This SDG is also of particular importance for Lithuania in the fight against climate change and its consequences.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Between 2018 and 2021, the country's agricultural productivity has made relatively strong progress, the Lithuanian index of income from agricultural production resources per relative worker increased by up to 85%, which was the fastest growth in the EU. Thus, Lithuania's agricultural productivity has made relatively significant progress since 2018. Despite this achievement, Lithuania's agricultural production income per notional worker in 2021 remained among the lowest in the EU, behind only Croatia, Poland, Slovenia and Romania, and almost twice as low as the EU average.



FIGURE 15 AGRICULTURAL INPUT INCOME PER RELATIVE WORKER, 2018-2021 (EUR, CHAIN-LINKED VOLUMES COMPARED TO 2010)
Source: EUROSTAT, 2023

STRATEGIC AGENDA

Lithuania's objective to strengthen Lithuania's agricultural capacities and implement SDG 2 is enshrined in the NPP, which focuses on increasing the productivity of Lithuania's food sector and developing shorter food supply chains closer to the final consumer, enabling agricultural producers to participate in processing and marketing their products themselves. It also aims to promote sustainable, environmentally friendly agriculture, develop local food supply and systems, increase demand for organic, higher quality products, protect and halt the loss of biodiversity and reduce the negative environmental impacts of the crop and livestock sectors. These NPP objectives are implemented through the Development Programme for Agriculture and Food, Rural Development and Fisheries for 2022-2030, which aims to address the challenges of improving the competitiveness of Lithuanian agriculture, food and fisheries sectors, increasing added value, using advanced technologies, digitalisation, automation and innovation, and accelerating the application of sustainable practices.

The objectives of the Development Programme "Increasing value added and competitiveness in agriculture, food and fisheries sectors" and "Increasing the supply of local food products and developing an efficient system of short supply chains" are directly related to SDG 2. The Comprehensive Plan for the territory of the Republic of Lithuania also contributes to the achievement of this SDG by giving priority to sustainable agriculture through the development of organic farms, mixed farming and organic food production, as well as by focusing on bringing food supply chains closer to the end consumer, increasing the practical application of scientific innovation in agriculture, and moving towards sustainable, innovative agriculture that does not have a negative impact on the environment. The Strategic Action Plan of the Ministry of Agriculture for 2021-2023 also provides measures for ensuring the long-term competitive and sustainable development of agriculture, food sectors and rural areas, creating favourable conditions for the competitiveness and development of the fisheries sector, the conservation of fish stocks and their sustainable use. The Ministry of Health's Strategic Action Plan 2021-2023 places a strong emphasis on promoting healthy nutrition and aims to increase the population's consumption of fruit and vegetables. The strategic objective of the Strategic Plan of the MoE for 2021-2023 "To ensure the adequate quality of the environment for the population of Lithuania, to preserve biodiversity and the distinctive character of the landscape" seeks to continue research, monitoring, protection and restoration of protected species, natural habitats and landscape, and ensure the prevention of pollution caused by agricultural enterprises. Other strategic goal "Ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources and their further enhancement" also aims to protect and restore threatened populations of protected species in the wild.

The National Climate Change Management Agenda (NCCMA), coordinated by the MoE, sets a mitigation target for the agricultural sector of at least 11% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030 compared to 2005, to be achieved through the following measures: by introducing innovative technologies, developing sustainable agriculture, increasing value added in all sectors of agriculture, ensuring the economical, cost-effective and environmentally friendly use of fertilisers, and reducing the use of synthetic nitrogen fertilisers in agriculture by at least 15% compared to 2020. The NCCMA also aims to promote innovative, pollution-reducing animal husbandry technologies and practices, digitalisation and productivity research. It is foreseen to increase the area under organic farming, promote the use of scientifically proven safe alternatives to protect crops from pests and diseases by reducing the use of chemical pesticides and expanding integrated pest management, shorten the food supply chain by bringing it closer to the consumer, promote agriculture in urbanised areas to reduce the food miles, and eliminate the use of fossil fuels in the agricultural sector by 2040.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

As part of SDG 2, Lithuania also contributes to the preservation of the gene pool. According to the Lithuanian Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020 measures, since 2015 farmers, who committed to keeping endangered Lithuanian old-breed animals and poultry, were supported.

In 2021, a review of the selective nucleus of rare breeds of farm animals in Lithuania were launched together with researchers by deciding how many of the old Lithuanian breeds should be kept in private breeding nuclei and how many of them should be kept separately in state-controlled breeding nuclei.

Progress towards SDG 2 is also supported by the implementation of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which contributes significantly to the development of the Lithuanian agriculture and food sector. Approximately €3 billion has been allocated for direct payments in Lithuania for the period 2014-2020. The budget of the Lithuanian Rural Development Programme for 2014-2020 was €2.1 billion (of which €1.663 billion were EU funds). Direct payments are granted to farmers for the declared area of agricultural land, crops and livestock in order to maintain incomes, preserve the environment and ensure the long-term economic viability of farms, making it less dependent on fluctuations in the prices of agricultural products. There are also measures to support investment in agricultural holdings, the development of agriculture and forestry, the implementation of projects related to investment in the processing and marketing of agricultural products, and important support for young farmers and small farms.

Lithuania is also developing fisheries through EU investment in line with the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), which aims to ensure the recovery of fish stocks to sustainable levels, prevent unsustainable fishing, provide economic, social and employment benefits and contribute to food security. The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) participates in the formulation of the CFP, organises, coordinates and supervises its implementation, conducts fisheries surveys in marine waters and monitors the exploitation of fish stocks in marine waters. For each financial programming period, a European Fisheries Fund is adopted to finance the promotion of sustainable fisheries and the recovery and conservation of aquatic biological resources, the promotion of sustainable aquaculture activities and the processing and marketing of fisheries and aquaculture products, the creation of conditions for a sustainable blue economy in coastal, island and inland areas, the promotion of the development of fishing and aquaculture communities and the strengthening and safeguarding of international governance of the oceans.

Approximately 3,000 farmers in Lithuania receive support for organic farming and fruit, berry and vegetable growing under the National Food Quality System. With a focus on environmental protection and sustainable development, nearly 50,000 farmers have been supported annually since 2015 (approximately 35,000 in 2022). Their activities are related to the promotion of environmentally friendly farming systems in areas facing natural or other specific constraints (ANCs). The new financial period 2023-2027, with the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (CAP SP 2023-2027), implements the new "green architecture" of the CAP, with ecological systems (ecoschemes) as one of its elements.

Ecoschemes aim to halt soil degradation and improve soil fertility, conserve and improve water quality, reduce GHG and ammonia emissions, use plant protection products, organic and mineral fertilisers in a sustainable and less intensive way, protect biodiversity, preserve landscapes, improve animal welfare and combat antimicrobial resistance. In total, Lithuania's 31% of the CAP SP 2023-2027 funds will be allocated to environmental and climate-related measures and ecoschemes, and a more targeted distribution of support will be ensured, in particular for small and medium-sized family farms.

Redistribution of direct support will be mandatory and at least 10% of direct payments will have to be redistributed to small farms. At least 3% of the Lithuania's CAP SP 2023-2027 budget will be allocated to young farmers. For the first time, CAP includes social clauses – CAP support will only be granted to beneficiaries who comply with the requirements of European social and labour legislation. The new CAP will enter into force in 2023 and will remain in force until the end of 2027. The goals of the new CAP will be implemented through the Lithuanian Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Rural Development 2023-2027.

Lithuania is also involving various social partners in the implementation of SDG 2, focusing on public awareness raising and education, promotion of sustainable agriculture and fishing, production and consumption of organic products, and improving participation in decision-making. In order to ensure the exchange of experiences and good practices, the Lithuanian Rural Network platform brings together state and local government institutions, bodies, and public legal entities involved in rural development processes related to agriculture, food, forestry sectors, and rural development. For the CAP period 2023-2027, the aim is to integrate agricultural knowledge and innovation measures into a single "Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System" (AKIS), which will be dedicated to the development of knowledge and innovation in the sector and will achieve the cross-cutting goal of modernising the sector through the creation and sharing of knowledge, innovation and digitisation in agriculture and rural areas, as set out in the CAP strategic plan for the new period, as well as through the promotion and application of knowledge in the field. This system is designed to involve farmers, advisors, research and study institutions, farmers' organisations, various public authorities, networks and the media in order to provide them with continuous access to the latest knowledge needed to solve the problems facing agriculture, as well as to innovate and increase the competitiveness of agriculture.

Lithuania's main agricultural products are cereals, milk and dairy products, eggs, meat and potatoes. In general, the production of these products exceeds domestic consumption. The market for vegetables, fruit and berries follows the opposite trend, as they are insufficient to meet domestic needs due to seasonality and climatic variations. The small size of the domestic market and the relatively higher supply than demand means that Lithuanian agri-food products are export-oriented. According to the State Data Agency, Lithuania exported €6,042 million worth of agricultural and food products in 2021, 0.6% less than in 2020, and imported €4,604.4 million, 8.6% more than in 2020. The positive balance of trade in agricultural and food products in 2021 is €1,437.6 million. Exports of agricultural and food products accounted for 17.5% of the country's total merchandise exports, 3.7 percentage points less than in 2020. In the same year, imports of these products accounted for 12.2% of total imports, a decrease of 2.3 percentage points compared to the previous year.

Key monitoring indicators for Lithuania in SDG 2 relate to sustainable agriculture. Although the share of organic farms in the total area of agricultural land used in Lithuania increased slightly between 2018 and 2021 (from 8.1% to 8.9%), however, over a similar period (2018-2020), the change in GHG emissions from the agricultural sector compared to 2005 emissions increased by 3.5 percentage points (from 4.4% in 2018 to 7.9% in 2020). This could be partly due to increasing agricultural production, as gross agricultural output at current prices also increased between 2018 and 2021 (€2,358 million in 2018, €3,073 million in 2021). However, the main source of GHG emissions growth in this period is the use of mineral fertilisers. In order to reduce GHG emissions and increase the

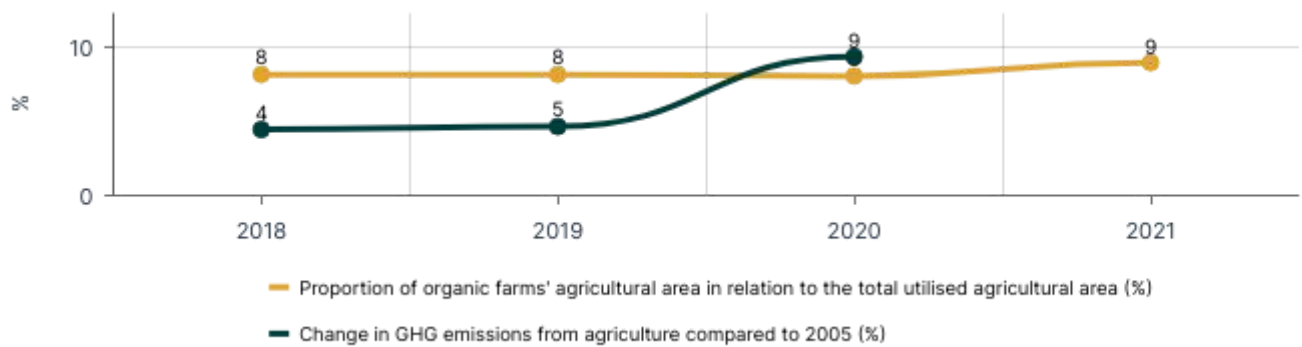


FIGURE 16. CHANGES IN THE SHARE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND UNDER ORGANIC FARMING AND IN EMISSIONS FROM THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN LITHUANIA, 2018-2021.
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

absorption potential of the agricultural sector, the Lithuania's CAP SP 2023-2027 includes a number of measures to promote a more sustainable use of mineral fertilisers, the conservation of organic soils, the maintenance of grasslands and the modernisation of the livestock sector. In the context of climate change, agriculture is an important sector, not only because of its role in reducing GHG emissions, but also because of its potential to absorb CO₂ in soils and biomass. In recent years, the accumulation of carbon in soils has increased with the growth of no-till technologies: in 2020, 244 000 ha and in 2021, 445 000 ha was under no-till cultivation.

It is important to note that the proportion of threatened native animal species (breeds) increased between 2018 and 2021, with the proportion of threatened horses breeds increased from 26.89% to 31.22% and the proportion of cattle breeds increased from 0.59% to 0.68%.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

The main challenges affecting the achievement of SDG 2 are global – climate change, loss of biodiversity and the spread of animal and human diseases. One of the biggest challenges today is Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, which is restricting and forcing changes in both export and import markets and posing problems for food security. Also relevant is the increase in energy prices, which poses challenges for both businesses and consumers, and also complicates the transformation of the agricultural and fisheries sectors. Making the transition to greener, more sustainable agricultural and fisheries practices while facing these challenges is more difficult as it becomes too expensive. On the other hand, CAP subsidies help to absorb increases in food prices, and various complementary initiatives are being developed to combat food price inflation. For example, in 2018 the MoA created an information system to compare the prices of daily groceries shopping cart in different stores, thus ensuring transparency in the market and informing market players on current market prices, thus promoting competition. However, a broader inter-institutional and cross-border effort is needed to address these challenges. For example, by promoting investments that secure renewable energy supplies, reduce dependence on fossil fuels and support the development of the circular economy and the bio-economy.

The challenge remains how to communicate the benefits of environmental protection and sustainability to the public and actors in the agriculture and fisheries sectors (including businesses). To address this issue, it is important to develop awareness among sector actors that sustainability is

compatible with productivity and to consider further education programmes for both sector actors and the public. It is important to note that there is also a lack of institutional understanding of the importance and impact of food security on other government and societal activities. It is important to work towards sustainable production at the EU level, which would further motivate a switch towards organic production (as the market would no longer be flooded with cheaper products) and increase farmers' confidence in the institutions. This requires more education, trust building and additional regulatory measures.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Lithuania's progress on SDG 2 from 2018 onwards can be assessed as moderate. While the CAP period 2023-2027 is shaping up with developments in knowledge and innovation in the sector and the implementation of additional sustainability measures, with a significant increase in the share of organic land and in the productivity of the agricultural sector, a number of key challenges remain to accelerate progress towards this SDG.

Lithuania's agricultural productivity still lags behind the EU average, and the increase of energy prices poses additional challenges to the agriculture, food and fisheries sectors and complicates the green transformation of these sectors. Global issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and the spread of animal and human diseases, as well as Russian military aggression against Ukraine, are also having a major impact. Another major challenge is the indifference of actors in the agricultural and fisheries sectors, as well as to the benefits of environmental protection and sustainability.

Thus, in order to achieve further progress in the implementation of SDG 2, it is necessary to take into account the rapid increase in food prices observed in recent years. It is particularly relevant for those who have lower income or do not work, as well as persons of retirement age. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure the ability of these most vulnerable groups to provide themselves with food, reducing income inequality among the population or, in certain cases, providing food directly. Sustainability in the agriculture, food and fisheries sectors is essential to ensure food security and the resilience of food systems. It is particularly important to reduce GHG emissions and increase energy efficiency, while supporting the growth of Lithuania's agricultural productivity. Finally, it is important to ensure the production and consumption of organic products, as well as to further educate the public and the agricultural, food and fisheries sectors in the areas of sustainability and innovation.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



SDG 3. ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Ageing population
- Rising health care costs, underfunding of the health sector
- Shortage of human resources in the health sector
- Rapid and effective management of emerging crises

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

3.1. In Lithuania, no deaths due to pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum conditions were recorded by 2020 – the target is considered achieved.

3.2. Lithuania maintains low mortality rates for newborns and children under 5 years of age (respectively, 2.2% in 2018, 2.1% in 2021, and 0.8% in 2018, 0.7% in 2021).

3.3. Prevention and treatment measures and restrictions during COVID-19 have contributed to reducing the incidence of communicable diseases: The number of newly diagnosed HIV-positive people has fallen from 5.7 in 2018 to 3.9% in 2021, the incidence of tuberculosis has also decreased (32.9% in 2018 and 19.6% in 2021), malaria (0.2% in 2018, 0.1% in 2021), hepatitis B (0.5% in 2018, 0.3% in 2021).

3.4. However, the pandemic has contributed to an increase in premature mortality from some non-communicable diseases: Mortality from diseases of the circulatory system has increased (782.5 in 2018 and 820.3 in 2021 per 100 000 inhabitants), diabetes mellitus (18.8 in 2018 and 25.4 in 2021 per 100 000 inhabitants). It should be noted that mortality due to malignant neoplasms reduced (286.6 in 2018, 275.9 in 2021 per 100 000 inhabitants), respiratory diseases (49.6 in 2018 and 37.9 in 2021 per 100 000 inhabitants) and suicides (24.4 in 2018, 20.2 cases per 100 000 inhabitants).

3.5. The measures taken to control and prevent alcohol consumption are insufficient: Consumption of legal alcoholic beverages has increased (11.2 litres of absolute alcohol per person aged 15 and over in 2018 and 12.1 litres in 2021).

3.6. Although road accidents caused by intoxicated persons remain a problem (in 2018, there were 344 road accidents caused by intoxicated persons, in 2021 – 333), the overall road mortality in the country is decreasing (in 2018 – 8, in 2021 6.6 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants).

(continued on the next page)

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



SDG 3. ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET (continued):

3.7. The number of under-age giving births in the country is falling (11.2 live births per 1 000 women aged 15-19 in 2018 and 6.6 in 2021). However, there is still a need to focus more on reproductive health education.

3.8. The country's public health coverage index is improving (67 in 2017 and 70 in 2019).

3.9. Deaths due to accidental poisoning are decreasing in Lithuania – 3.6 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants in 2018 and 2 in 2021. However, deaths from diarrhea, intestinal worms and diseases caused by malnutrition increased slightly (2.2 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants in 2018 and 2.4 in 2021).

3.a. The measures taken to control and prevent tobacco consumption are insufficient: tobacco products are on the increase (1,164 cigarettes per 100,000 inhabitants in 2018 and 1,233 in 2021), as well as the use of electronic cigarettes.

3.b. The country has seen an increase in total net official development assistance for medical research and basic health services: €5.1 thousand in 2018 and €3.3 million in 2021.

3.c. The number of health workers in the country has changed: a slight decrease in the number of doctors (49 per 10,000 inhabitants in 2018, 46.9 in 2021), an increase in the number of nurses and midwives (in 2018 there were 81.5 per 10 000 inhabitants, in 2021 – 82.1).

3.d. In Lithuania, the average level of application of the 13 International Health Regulations (IHR) has increased (from 82% in 2018 to 85% in 2020).

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 3 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

Promoting public health is both a national priority and a priority of the country's SDGs. This goal aims to strengthen physical and mental health for all age groups, promote healthy lifestyles and ensure quality and accessible health care, while measuring progress includes indicators on morbidity, mortality, lifestyles, preventive measures and access to health care for different groups in society.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

In Lithuania, the health status of the population has been improving steadily for several years: Between 2010 and 2019, life expectancy in Lithuania increased at the fastest rate in the EU (by 2019, life expectancy in Lithuania increased by more than four years, from 72.1 to 76.5 years). However, this improving trend was strongly affected by the impact of COVID-19, with 17% more deaths recorded in 2020 than in 2019, resulting in a reduction in life expectancy of 1.4 years compared to 2019. The pandemic could also slow progress in disease prevention by disrupting the implementation of priority programmes for the early detection of chronic and oncological diseases. In response to the negative impact of COVID-19, the government adopted a [Plan of Measures to Reduce the Economic Incentives and Consequences of the Transmission of the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), which provided the resources needed for the effective functioning of health and public protection systems.

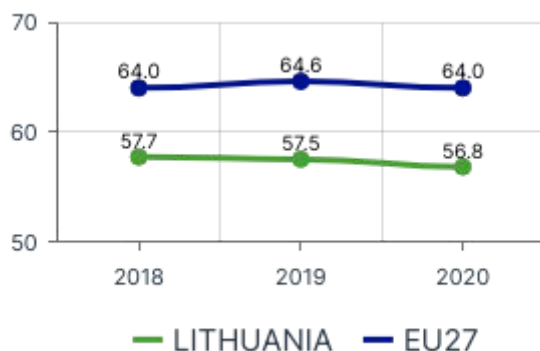


FIGURE 17. HEALTHY LIFE EXPECTANCY IN YEARS IN LITHUANIA AND THE EU, 2018-2020. Source: EUROSTAT, 2023.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

Improving public health and ensuring healthy lifestyles is one of the country's strategic objectives – the NPP sets the goal of reducing the gap in average life expectancy between men and women to 5.2 years by 2030 and increasing the average expected healthy life expectancy to 62.6 years for men and 65 years for women. In addition to the above goal, the plan also aims to strengthen the emotional resilience of society by improving suicide and addiction rates; encourage the population to maintain and improve their health through lifestyle and behaviour change; develop a responsible attitude to health by increasing physical activity and participation in sports activities among children and adults; improve the quality of health services to increase the effectiveness of treatment interventions and improve health outcomes; and reduce avoidable mortality.

It also aims to improve the efficiency and resilience of the health system to shocks: Strengthening the capacity to respond to emerging challenges, restructuring the organisation of ambulance services, improving human resource competencies, restructuring the hospital network by further strengthening primary health care, developing outpatient services and introducing innovative services based on digital health system solutions. It is foreseen to pay special attention to improving the quality of health care services by developing new requirements for the provision of services, improving the system for registering patients for medical consultations, improving the monitoring of the activities of medical institutions and the assessment of the quality of services provided, and modernising the infrastructure of health care services. It should be noted that in Lithuania, health care is financed by the compulsory health insurance fund (PSD), which covers the costs of health care for almost the entire population (around 98%), thus ensuring access to health care for the absolute majority of the population. The planned and implemented health system transformation measures will ensure a more rational use of the PSD fund and increase the coverage of services to the population.

It should be noted that in the [NCCMA](#), in pursuit of SDG 3 progress, it is foreseen to strengthen the system for informing the public about climate change and its threats to human health. The monitoring and forecasting of indicators (pollen in the air, phenological observations, etc.) will be implemented and improved, prevention of diseases that may arise and spread as a result of the effects of climate change will be carried out, the design of infrastructure, residential and non-residential buildings will be based on an assessment of the change in meteorological conditions due to climate change. The NCCMA is anchored in the prevention of heat waves through the development of green infrastructure elements in urbanised areas and the development of inter-agency cooperation.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

Lithuania has already successfully achieved the goal of reducing maternal mortality, and from 2020 the absolute achievement of target 3.1 is recorded (0 deaths per 100,000 live births were recorded, and the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel was 100%). In 2018-2021, the mortality rate of newborns and children under the age of five remains low – throughout the period analysed, the mortality rate of children (0-4 years) is less than 1 case /1,000 inhabitants of the respective age, and of newborns – 3 cases /1,000 live births (0-27 days) (target 3.2). In order to maintain these positive trends, neonatology in Lithuania is being consistently strengthened, which is considered to be a decisive factor when all the necessary assistance for the smallest premature and most difficult newborns is concentrated in several institutions. According to the best practices of foreign countries, regionalised care for mothers and newborns creates positive conditions for better survival rates.

The country attaches great importance to the prevention and treatment of communicable diseases (target 3.3). The epidemiological situation is expected to improve between 2018 and 2021: The number of newly diagnosed HIV-positive people has decreased (from 5.7 new cases in 2018 to 3.9 cases per 100 000 inhabitants in 2021) the incidence of tuberculosis (from 32.9 new cases in 2018 to 19.6 cases per 100 000 inhabitants in 2021), incidence of acute viral hepatitis B (from 0.5 cases per 100 000 population in 2018 to 0.3 cases per 100 000 population in 2021). This has been influenced by the development of low-threshold services for the management of HIV infection, ensuring effective treatment of HIV disease in all persons diagnosed with this infection. An important role in improving the epidemiological situation of tuberculosis is played by the updated tuberculosis treatment algorithms in accordance with the recommendations of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the network of DOTS rooms developed and the social support provided in the whole country. The incidence of hepatitis B has decreased as a result of the country's hepatitis B vaccination policy. COVID-19, which started with partially restricted health services and potentially fewer diagnosed cases, but also with limited contact between members of the public, which partially reduced the risk of infection, is likely to have contributed to the improvement in rates. Although a number of challenges remain in the management of communicable diseases, Lithuania has been able to ensure adequate diagnosis and treatment of imported tropical diseases (e.g. malaria, dengue fever), information, vaccination and chemoprophylaxis for travellers to endemic areas, and chemoprophylaxis for malaria (the number of new cases of malaria has fallen from 0.3 to 0.01 per 100 000 population).

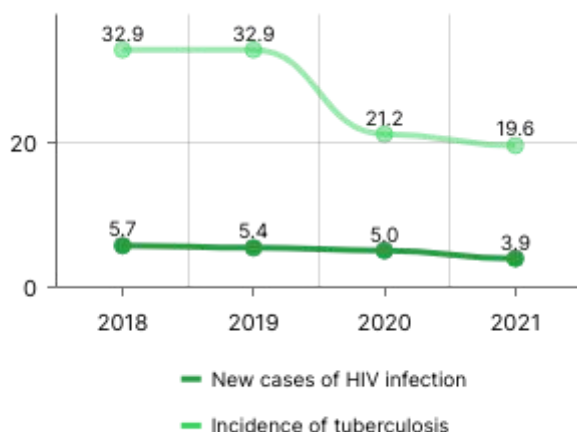


FIGURE 18. INCIDENCE OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES (NUMBER OF CASES PER 100 000 POPULATION).
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

Lithuania is rigorously developing a national immunisation programme, focusing on target groups (target 3.b.1). From 2018, an updated list of vaccines and target risk groups provides the basis for strengthening the prevention of communicable diseases. The vaccination of the population with COVID-19 ensured the wide availability of this vaccine through vaccination centres, pharmacies, as well as mobile teams that carry out vaccinations in non-medical facilities, etc. More than 70% of the population was vaccinated with one of the registered COVID-19 vaccines in the initial programme, and about 30% of the population was vaccinated with a booster dose.

Reducing premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases remains an important goal (target 3.4). It should be noted that the structure of the causes of death of the Lithuanian population is unchanged for many years and there are still three main causes of death: diseases of the circulatory system, malignant tumours and external causes of death. The mortality rate of the population from diseases of the circulatory system remains high and is almost twice as high as the average for EU Member States. In order to reduce the morbidity and premature mortality of the population from diseases of the circulatory system, oncological diseases, etc., projects are actively implemented to encourage residents to adjust their lifestyles by reducing the prevalence of risk factors, to encourage residents to participate in prevention and early diagnosis programmes, to strengthen the development of secondary and/or tertiary level outpatient personal health care services for persons suffering from the aforementioned diseases. The projects implemented also aim to improve the infrastructure necessary for the provision of health services and to improve the qualifications of health professionals. Information campaigns are also carried out to encourage the public to take care of their health, adopt a healthy lifestyle and have regular health checks.

Strengthening mental health and well-being is also important for Lithuania (target 3.4). Progress in the provision of the following services is monitored: from 2020, Lithuania have mobile crisis teams that can arrive on site or provide remote support in the event of a major mental health crisis; the skills and competences of the employees of the municipal health centres are strengthened, and the priorities set for these institutions are aimed at training the residents of the self-governments on the issues of basic suicide prevention. Between 2017 and 2021, 20,177 people were trained to recognise signs of suicide risk, respond appropriately and refer or provide psychological first aid. In 2022, the framework for supporting people at risk of suicide was updated and comprehensive measures is implemented to improve access to support. A public communication campaign on suicide prevention has also been launched to reduce negative public attitudes towards the phenomenon. The country's strategic goal of no more than 17.5 suicides per 100,000 inhabitants in Lithuania in 2025 will be achieved on current trends.

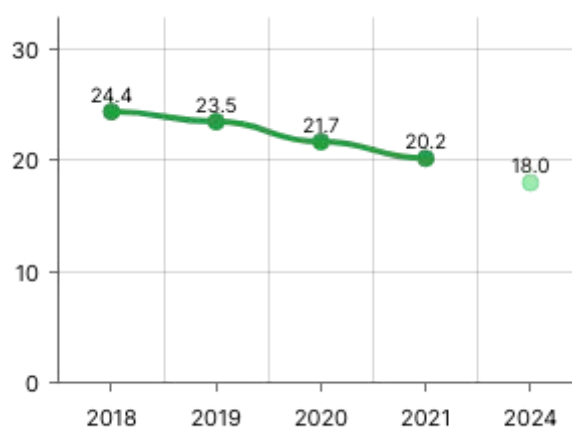


FIGURE 19. SUICIDE MORTALITY IN LITHUANIA, PER 100 000 NUMBER OF DEATHS BY SUICIDE PER 100 INHABITANTS
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

In order to achieve positive changes in the reduction of chronic diseases, the fight against harmful habits is important (targets 3.5 and 3.a). The following WHO-recommended alcohol control measures entered into force in Lithuania in 2018 reducing the hours of sale of alcohol, increasing the age limit for purchasing, consuming and possessing alcoholic beverages by up to 20 years, banning alcohol advertising (by establishing an exhaustive list of information that may be published at points of sale and on retailers' websites), improving the procedure for assessing alcohol consumption habits, and providing and monitoring brief interventions for alcohol users in 2020, which allows for improving the provision of support services for people with harmful alcohol consumption habits. Changes to the legislative framework between 2020 and 2022 have been introduced to strengthen the control and availability of tobacco, tobacco products and related products, and to strengthen the capacity of health professionals to provide tobacco risk assessment and smoking cessation support services, and to increase the supply and availability of smoking cessation support services; The Action Plan to improve the availability and quality of treatment and harm reduction services for addictive disorders 2021-2024 is endorsed. However, these measures are not sufficient and additional attention needs to be paid to the prevention of alcohol and tobacco consumption and to increasing the availability of help for addicts of all ages: This is also justified by the increasing consumption of alcohol by the population since 2019 (11.1 litres of absolute alcohol per inhabitant aged 15 and over in 2019, 12.1 litres in 2021) and the still stable high prevalence of tobacco consumption (1 145 tobacco products per inhabitant aged 15 and over in 2019 (cigarettes), 1 233 in 2021) and the increasing use of electronic cigarettes (especially among young people). Therefore, a number of national and regional measures are planned for the period 2022-2030, financed with EU support, to develop prevention, quality and effectiveness of the use of psychoactive substances.

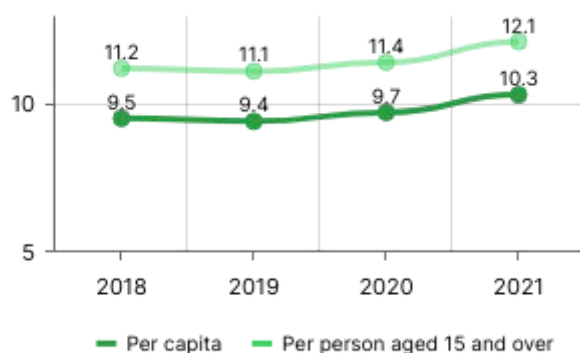


FIGURE 20. ABSOLUTE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION OF THE LITHUANIAN POPULATION. Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

Lithuania also aims to reduce the number of deaths and injuries in road traffic accidents (target 3.6). Since 2018, there has been a decrease in mortality due to injuries caused by road traffic accidents, from 8 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2018 to 6.6 deaths in 2021. This is due to a complex set of measures: both various social advertisements, preventive information, more active police operations, improved road infrastructure, as well as residents' choice to use newer, smarter and safer vehicles. Maintaining such positive trends in the future requires continued joint efforts of all institutions and road users, responsible behaviour, care and respect for each other on the road.

THE AVERAGE CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT INTERNATIONAL HEALTH RULES IS

82% 75%

IN LITHUANIA IN THE EUROPEAN REGION

Lithuania has achieved good results in managing public health emergencies (target 3.d.1). The average rate of implementation of international health rules in Lithuania in 2021 is 82%, compared with 75% for countries in the WHO European Region. The country's strengths include the legal framework, management of health emergencies, food safety and radiation protection, but there is still room for improvement – infection prevention and control and strengthening human resources. The main measures to be applied in 2018-2022 are the preparation of legal acts for the prevention and management of emergencies, risk assessment, preparation of training programmes and training of professionals.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

While the overall trends for the SDG 3 indicators are positive, it is important to remember that Lithuania's health policy faces long-term challenges: Inadequate financing of health care, lack of human resources, ageing population both in Lithuania and in the EU.

The challenge of an ageing population contributes to a higher demand for health services and an increase in health care costs. COVID-19 has contributed to these challenges and has had a significant impact on the achievement of health policy goals. It should be noted that the pandemic has highlighted gaps in the resilience of the health system: The health system needs to be prepared to respond quickly and effectively to emerging crises, to be able to respond rapidly to changes and to manage them effectively, both in terms of assessing the available infrastructure and the competence of professionals. During the pandemic, the health system faced a shortage of specialists and resources, the implementation of early diagnosis and prevention programmes for chronic diseases was disrupted, and 26% of the country's population reported refusing medical care during the pandemic. The impact of the energy crisis is also exceptional, when financial resources that could be used to improve the quality or accessibility of health services have to be allocated to cover the increased prices of energy resources.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Lithuania's progress towards SDG 3 from 2018 can be considered medium and sufficient to achieve the goal. The country is taking action to prevent communicable and non-communicable diseases, control and prevent tobacco and

alcohol use, strengthen the emotional resilience and physical health of the population, and encourage people to maintain and improve their health through lifestyle and behavioural changes.

Actions are also taken to improve the quality and accessibility of health services, with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of interventions and improving outcomes by reducing avoidable mortality.

However, the measures in place in the country are not sufficient to achieve high progress towards the goal, which is hampered by the country's long-term health challenges: Inadequate funding for health care, a shortage of human resources in the health sector and an ageing population, both in Lithuania and in the EU. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to these challenges and had a major impact on the achievement of health policy goals, highlighting gaps in the resilience of the health system.

In the future, in order to achieve the goals set in the country's strategic documents, it will be necessary to increase the sustainability and resilience of the health system to external threats, to strengthen intersectoral cooperation, to improve coordination of the activities of all health system stakeholders, and to implement measures that contribute to a more efficient and rational use of available resources. To strengthen public health, we must continue to focus on increasing the emotional resilience and physical activity of the country's population, and on strengthening primary and preventive health care. Equally important for public health is the need to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on human health, which also requires the successful implementation of other SDGs.

GOOD PRACTICE

In order to improve the management of health threats and risk factors, in 2018-2021 the EU-funded project "Implementation of Health Preservation Measures in Target Areas" (No 08.4.2-ESFA-V-628-01-0001) established and expanded the network of defibrillators and tourniquets was established and expanded in target areas, and more than 6,000 Lithuanian residents were trained in first aid. After the training, the majority of participants who agreed to become emergency responders pledged to provide first aid to a victim in an emergency upon receiving a signal.

To save lives, and with cardiovascular disease the leading cause of death worldwide, first aid and defibrillation must be given as soon as possible. In countries where defibrillation has been achieved within the first 3 minutes of clinical death, the survival rate has increased by 75%, so the establishment and expansion of this network in Lithuania is considered an important step in the healthcare system.



Photo: Darius

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



SDG 4. ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Promoting reading, maths and science performance
- Ensuring an inclusive learning environment at all levels of education
- Ensuring an equal starting position
- Addressing the human resource crisis in education
- Ensuring the use of innovation and technology in educational processes
- Strengthening the life long learning

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

4.1. The country provides free primary, secondary and post-secondary education. The assessment of learning outcomes shows that children and young people continue to have average levels of reading and maths performance, but the achievement gap between pupils from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds is widening.

4.2. Lithuania provides access to pre-primary education. The majority of children participate in early childhood education (the participation rate in organised learning activities one year before the official primary school age was 96.2% in 2018 and 99.6% in 2021).

4.3. The gender gap also extends to education: Women are less likely to drop out of education and are more engaged (the share of women aged 30-34 who have completed tertiary education is 68.2% in 2018 and 70.2% in 2022; 47.5% for men in 2018 and 52% in 2022, respectively).

4.4. The share of young people and adults with information and communication technology skills is increasing in the country. For example, in 2018, 27.5% of persons aged 16-74 have been engaged in activities related to computers and mobile devices in the last 12 months; in 2021, 45% had downloaded or installed software or mobile apps and 39.7% of persons aged 16-74 had changed software, mobile apps or device settings in the last 3 months.

4.5. Long-term initiatives to ensure equal access to education are being implemented, regardless of the socio-economic and cultural environment, which is also helping to reduce the student achievement gap.

(continued on the next page)

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



SDG 4. ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET (continued):

4.6. In 2015, 84.2% of 16-65-year-olds in the country had literacy skills, and 81.2% had numerical skills. The data are provided by the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which is conducted every 10 years.

4.7. While national strategies and both formal and non-formal education programmes address the goal of developing the public skills needed to promote sustainable development, more attention needs to be paid to the implementation of these provisions in the field of education.

4.a. The vast majority of schools have access to electricity and drinking water (100% of schools since 2010), internet (more than 94% of schools since 2018) and computer equipment (more than 86% of schools since 2018).

4.b. The country encourages the entry of students from abroad, applies integration support measures, and grants are awarded. In 2018, the total number of students, coming from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Asia, South and North America, granted a scholarship and a benefit, was 346 students, in 2021 - 345.

4.c. The country does not meet the goal of having at least the minimum qualification requirements for teachers, and the proportion of teachers with a teaching qualification is decreasing (in 2018, the proportion of teachers with a teaching qualification was 70.9% for preschool and pre-primary education teachers, 91.3% for primary education teachers, 94.1% for secondary education teachers); 66.2%, 90.4%, and 94% respectively in 2021) and the number of teachers themselves.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 4 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

Quality education is considered a key national priority. This SDG aims to ensure inclusive, equitable formal and non-formal education, and to provide opportunities for all in the lifelong learning. It should be noted that quality education and skills contribute to the success of other SDGs: It helps to reduce gender and income inequalities, empowers people to lead healthier and more sustainable lives, contributes to building peaceful societies and promotes tolerance.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The quality of education in Lithuania is improving, according to international organisations. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) 2022 Better Life Index gives education a score of 7.7 out of 10 (an improvement of 0.4 points compared to 2019), exceeding the targets set in strategic documents (the target for 2025 is 7.5 points). 94.9% of adults aged 25-64 have completed at least upper secondary education (International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 3-8), which is above the OECD average (79.3%). The quality of the general education system needs to be further strengthened in the future: in 2018, Lithuanian pupils scored an average of 476 points in OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in reading (OECD average - 487), 481 in mathematics (OECD average - 489) and 482 in science (OECD average - 489).

There are also gender disparities in education: for example, in 2021, girls in Grade 4 and Grade 8 had slightly higher reading scores than boys, similar scores in mathematics, and girls in Grade 10 had higher scores in both the Lithuanian language and literature and mathematics.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

As a member of international organisations, Lithuania has not only national but also international commitments to quality education. One of the most important is [Education 2030: The Incheon Declaration and Action Plan for the Implementation of the SDG 4](#), the provisions of which are included in the NPPs and other documents. Also relevant is the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), which sets out 5 key priority areas, including the main objective of this SDG: Improving quality, equity and inclusion in education and training and promoting the lifelong learning. Commitments to improve education are enshrined in the country's main strategic documents – Lithuania 2030, the NPP, the Education Development Programme 2021-2030, the National Education Strategy 2013-2022, the Government programme, the agreement of political parties on Lithuanian education policy (2021-2030) – and cover different areas of education (inclusion and participation, quality of education, relevance to labour market needs, learning environment, financing), levels (all ISCED levels) and elements that are closely interrelated and important for the development of a more advanced education that is better adapted to the needs of individuals and the State.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

The SDG target of increasing children's participation in preschool and pre-primary education is almost achieved, with the participation rate in organised learning activities one year before the official primary school age increasing from 96.2% to 99.6% between 2018 and 2021. (target 4.2.) In particular, the proportion of children enrolled in preschool and pre-primary education programmes, both in rural areas and among socially vulnerable children, increased between 2021 and 2022. The upward trend is expected to continue as pre-school education became compulsory for socially vulnerable children from 1 September 2021 and will be universal for children aged 2 and over from 1 September 2025. In order to ensure early education accessible to all, from 2022 the following activities were carried out in the country to renew the content of pre-school education, improve the qualifications of teachers and provide modern workplaces, as well as to assess the development of the infrastructure used: Lithuanian municipalities plan to create 2,132 new pre-school places for all children aged 2-5.

In relation to target 4.1, children's and young people's reading and maths skills are relatively stable. Until 2018, the performance of Lithuanian learners was stable but below the OECD average in PISA 2018 and improved in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), 2011-2019 and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006, 2011 and 2021. In 2021-2022, several international surveys took place in Lithuania, providing new data on the development and status of learner performance in an international context (PIRLS, PISA, TIMSS, International Civic and Citizenship Education Study). It is striking that national data show progress: Between 2018 and 2021, the number of learners (7.5% and 27.3% respectively) achieving the basic and advanced levels of the National Lower Secondary Achievement Test (LSAT) in the Lithuanian language and literature and mathematics increased, while the number of graduates passing three and more state matriculation examinations (ME) increased by 4.2 percentage points. However, this progress is not satisfactory: The country's 15-year-olds are below the average of OECD countries in the mathematical and natural literacy skills needed to improve reading skills, with 35.4% graduates failing the ME in mathematics in 2022. When analysing educational outcomes, the gap in learner performance remains relevant – the results of students in urban schools are higher than those in rural areas; In reading, the Lithuanian language and literature, girls' scores are higher than boys', and those studying in Lithuanian are higher than those studying in national minority languages. In this context, and in order to strengthen learner mathematical competences, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is developing a plan to strengthen mathematics teaching, digital tools, tasks and teachers' didactic competencies. In order to reduce the gaps in learner performance and to create integral, optimal and quality educational conditions in each municipality, the Millennium Schools' Programme was implemented in Lithuania from 2022, during which the school network is updated, inclusive, STEAM and cultural education is strengthened, the competences of school leaders are strengthened and infrastructure is renewed.

It is noteworthy that Lithuania almost does not face the problem of early school leaving – the absolute majority of young people in the country receive lower secondary education and choose to continue their education, pursue secondary education. In 2022, 4.8% 18-24 year olds did not receive upper secondary education and not continue their education (EU average: 9.6%).

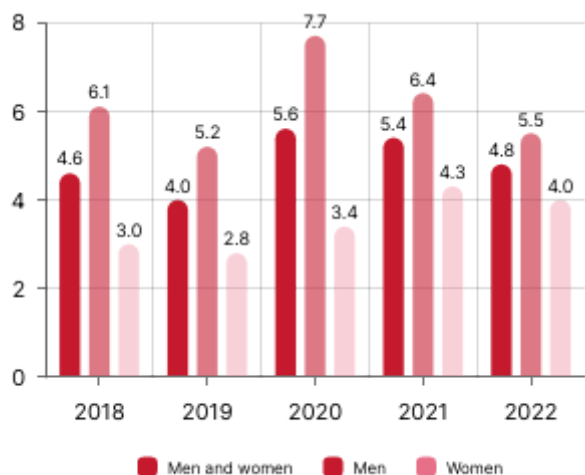


FIGURE 22: PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 18-24 WHO HAVE NOT COMPLETED UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION AND ARE NOT IN EDUCATION, 2018-2022
Source.: State Data Agency, 2023.

Upper secondary education - ISCED levels 3 and 4, i.e. secondary education programmes; vocational training programmes in combination with secondary education programmes, as well as vocational training programmes with a secondary education qualification.

The challenges of gender inequality do not stop at education. For example, when analysing the results of general education, it can be seen that differences in learning outcomes depend on the areas of competence studied. In 2021, 21.5 percentage points more girls than boys in general education reached the basic or higher level in the Lithuanian language and literature in the LSAT (85.9% for girls, 64.4% for boys). Meanwhile, the differences in mathematics learning are smaller. Women are less likely to drop out of education and are more engaged – higher education dominates in the country, while secondary education dominates for men.

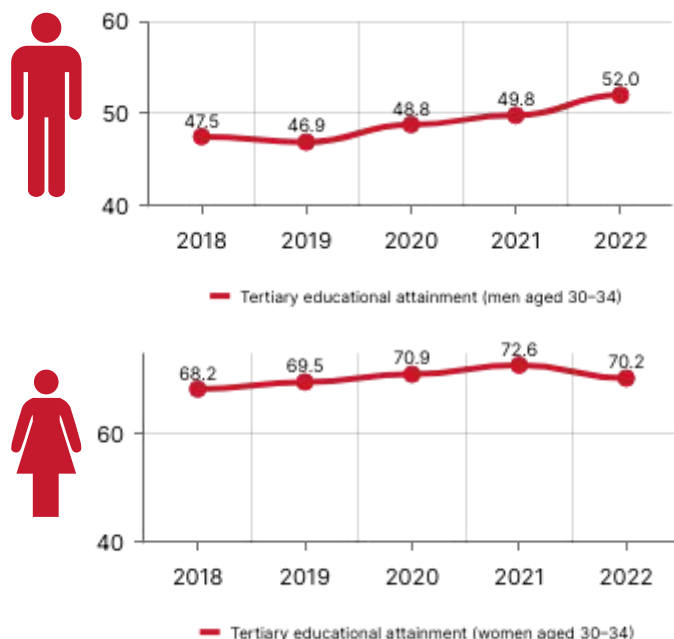


FIGURE 23. TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (AGED 30-34), 2018-2022.
Source.: State Data Agency, 2023.

It should be noted that while target 4.3 aims to ensure equal access to affordable and quality education for all women and men, the indicators chosen reflect more closely the trends of the lifelong learnings. Adult learning remains underdeveloped in Lithuania, although the number of adults aged 25-64 enrolled in formal and non-formal education programmes has increased nationally between 2018 and 2022. In 2018, they accounted for 6.6% of the total population and 8.5% in 2022.

In terms of the share of 30-34 year olds who have completed tertiary education, Lithuania ranks 4th in the EU (Lithuania's value was 61% in 2022, the EU average was 42.8% in 2022). Participation in education and training remains particularly low among older adults (aged 55-74): Their share was only 3.7% in 2022 (EU average: 5% in 2022). Women are more likely than men to participate in adult learning, as are urban dwellers (almost twice as likely as rural dwellers). Developing the lifelong learning opportunities for all aims to strengthen adult learning, career guidance and vocational education with the introduction of a unified the lifelong learning and career planning system in 2022. It is expected that this system, together with the provision of career guidance services, will contribute to the development of career guidance services in Lithuania for both pupils and adults, and will help to increase the participation of disadvantaged groups in society in the lifelong learning. In order to ensure a flexible transition from one level of education to another, one-stop services for the recognition of formal and non-formal and will be provided from 2023.

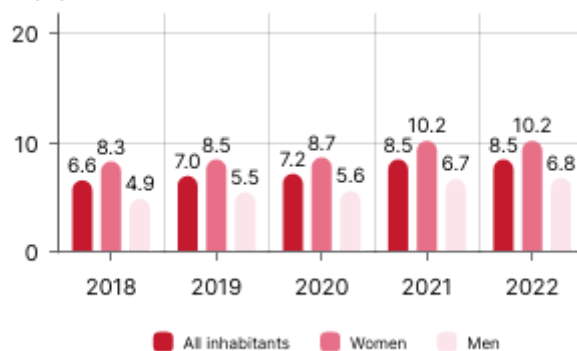


FIGURE 24. CHANGES IN THE SHARE OF 25-64 YEAR-OLDS ENROLLED IN FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES (%) BETWEEN 2018 AND 2021 (4-WEEK ENROLMENT RATE STUDIED).
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

The importance of IT literacy is increasingly emphasised in the country (including in the implementation of Objective 4.4), and it is therefore important that all citizens acquire the ability to adapt to the digitalisation of society. The aim is to ensure that as many Lithuanians as possible have a basic level of computer literacy and that children acquire the basics of digital literacy in pre-school education. The importance of digital literacy has increased dramatically during COVID-19, but educational tools have often been chosen based on the technological readiness of teachers and lecturers, rather than on the benefits and satisfaction of individual learner needs. To strengthen digital literacy in Lithuania, digital transformation of education (EdTech) is being implemented: Innovative educational technologies are being used, a system of incentives and support for the development and testing of digital educational innovations (EdTech Innovation Development and Testing Platform) is being created, and the digital literacy of educational staff is being strengthened.

As part of the COVID-19 training process, new technological solutions are developed and digital resources needed to create the right conditions for distance learning beyond the pandemic. In 2019, 56.2% of Lithuanians aged 16-74 have

reached a basic level of computer literacy. In 2021, 48.8%, according to the new survey methodology. The country's strategic target is 67% in 2025 and 80% in 2030. It is noted that while more than half of the Lithuanian population is confident in their ability to use the latest technologies, citizens feel a lack of skills in using modern technologies, which not only provide new opportunities, but also threaten the digital divide.

The focus is on creating a modern, inclusive, non-discriminatory, non-violent and bullying-free learning environment with high quality and relevant content to achieve higher levels of learner achievement. While target 4.7 can be considered implemented as of 2017 – in Lithuania, global citizenship, sustainable development is included in national policy, Curricula and evaluation – more attention needs to be paid to the implementation of these provisions at all levels of education. It is noted that, for example, in general education programmes, the content of education is often limited only to the traditional perception of the immediate environment and the context of one state, does not correspond to the needs and current issues of modern and future learners, does not strengthen the role of education in the processes of domestic and global SD. Such an approach does not take into account the recommendations of the EU, the UN and its institutions, the OECD, the ETUC for changes in education. The content of education in the context of environmental issues lacks specific references to the climate crisis, the SDGs.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

In the pursuit of quality education at all levels, it is noted that the Lithuanian education sector still lacks an inclusive learning environment, which creates difficulties in reducing the achievement gap between students, strengthening the general skills of students, as well as promoting the use of innovation and technology in everyday educational activities and strengthening the lifelong learning.

There is a continuing need to strengthen students' reading, mathematic and science performance. Quality early childhood education must be available regardless of the SEC status of the child's place of residence and family, so that all children have an equal starting position and opportunity to receive quality education in order to be adequately prepared for primary education. Optimising the school network does not guarantee the availability of non-formal education for children in rural areas. Neither does it ensure that children with individual and special educational needs are catered for, nor the development of an inclusive non-formal education system for children. Although basic needs are met in educational institutions (schools have electricity, drinking water, computers and the internet are used in the vast majority of schools), interactive digital tools are lacking: In 2021, about every second school (47.3%) is equipped with laboratories for STEAM experiments, while there is only

one general education school in the country with a physical environment fully designed for inclusive education (in line with the principles of universal design). There is also the challenge of access to higher education: Higher education is less accessible to children from low-income families, people with special educational needs and people with disabilities.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

In implementing SDG 4, progress is rated as average. The country provides free primary, secondary and post-secondary education for all, access to early childhood education and is implementing strategic changes to improve the quality and accessibility of education, such as long-term initiatives to ensure equal access to education regardless of SEC environment, thus contributing to reducing the achievement gap.

However, the country faces long-term challenges. Lithuania lacks an inclusive learning environment, which makes it difficult to close the achievement gap, strengthen learner skills, promote the use of innovation and technology in everyday educational activities and to strengthen lifelong learning. While educational institutions are equipped with basic technology and equipment, there is a lack of interactive tools and the physical environment of mainstream schools is poorly adapted to inclusive education. There is also a significant shortage of professional educators and teachers in the country.

To ensure continued progress in the implementation of SDG 4, it is necessary to increase the participation of children in quality pre-primary education, to address the individual and special educational needs of children and young people, to ensure the development of an inclusive non-formal education system for children, and to improve the availability and quality of educational support services. In order to strengthen the quality of education and the level of information and communication technologies in society, it is recommended to use more interactive, digital tools in the educational process. In order to ensure the accessibility of higher education, it is recommended to pay more attention to improving the social dimension of Lithuanian higher education by taking measures to increase the accessibility of higher education for people from low socio-economic status groups, people with disabilities and older entrants.

In order to advance SDG 4 and raise public awareness of the SDGs, more attention needs to be paid to raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the application of SDG principles at all levels of education. When implementing educational programmes at all levels, it is recommended to focus the educational and scientific process on interdisciplinary scientific objects, research and studies.

5 GENDER EQUALITY



SDG 5. ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Gender inequalities in the labour market and study choices by gender
- Gender imbalance at the highest levels of business, industry and government
- Sexual and gender-based violence
- Societal stereotypes about women's empowerment and gender equality

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

5.1. Lithuania's legal framework for promoting, implementing and monitoring gender equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex is limited to employment and economic benefits. Further efforts are needed to guarantee these rights in the area of marriage and family law.

5.2. Domestic violence crimes are on the decline (in 2018, these crimes accounted for 17.8% of all recorded crimes and 14.4% in 2022).

5.3. The share of married women under the age of 18 declined steadily in Lithuania (in 2018, 0.4% of women aged 20-24 who were married under the age of 18, and 0.3% in 2021).

5.4. Between 2018 and 2021, the share of the economically inactive population (aged 20-64) who are not working due to caring responsibilities for a child or a person with a disability increases (from 6.8% to 7.5%). According to the European Institute for Gender Equality Gender Equality Index 2019-2021, there is still a significant gap between women and men sharing care responsibilities for relatives.

5.5. In Lithuania, between 2018 and 2021, the share of women in the Seimas (from 22.3% to 28.4%) and municipal councils (from 27.4% to 31%) increased, but the share of women mayors (from 10% to 6.7%) and women in managerial positions (from 39.2% to 37%) decreased.

5.6. The extent to which the country has laws and regulations to ensure full and equal access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and education for women and men aged 15 and over is highest for sexuality education (100%) and lowest for HIV and HPV (80%).

5.a. A slight decrease in the proportion of women managing agricultural land between 2018 and 2021 (from 47% to 46%).

5.c. Since 2010, Lithuania has operated a system for the distribution and monitoring of state funds for gender equality and women's empowerment.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 5 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

SDG 5 is very important for Lithuania, as the identification of women's rights and gender equality issues and their resolution are oriented towards a democratic, just and inclusive society. In pursuing this goal, Lithuania also strives for further progress in the area of gender equality, where there is still a need for improvement: According to the European Institute for Gender Equality's Gender Equality Index, Lithuania is 8 points behind the EU average in 2022 (Lithuania's index score was 60.6 and the EU average was 68.6).

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Looking at one of the key indicators of the SDG 5 monitored by EUROSTAT, the unadjusted gender pay gap, Lithuania made steady progress between 2018 and 2021, with the country's score in 2021 slightly below the EU average (Lithuania: 12%, EU: 12.7%). However, in 2018-2019 Lithuania was 0.4 percentage points better off than the EU average. It also shows that further efforts are needed to ensure gender equality, as progress at EU level is faster than in Lithuania.

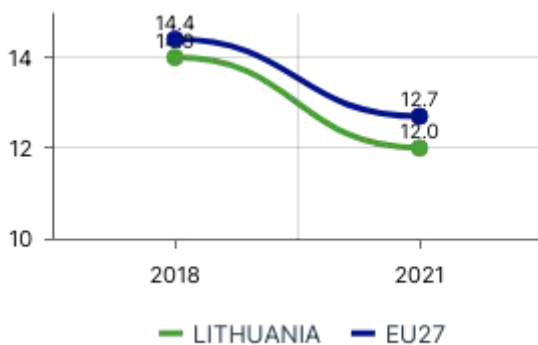


FIGURE 25. COMPARISON OF THE UNADJUSTED GENDER PAY GAP (AS A percentage OF MEN'S AVERAGE GROSS HOURLY EARNINGS) BETWEEN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, 2018-2021.

Source: EUROSTAT, 2023.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

Lithuania pursues gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through a number of strategic documents that go beyond the economic dimension (target 5.1). The goal of ensuring equality between women and men in the labour market and increasing opportunities for reconciling family and professional responsibilities has been an issue in Lithuania for more than a decade. The horizontal principle of "equal opportunities for all" enshrined in the NPP establishes the obligation to take into account the needs of women and men, as well as the needs of other groups that may be subject to discrimination, in the implementation of the NPP's objectives and in the drafting of national development programmes and draft legislation submitted by the Government, and to provide for measures and indicators to implement the principle of equal opportunities.

The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men provides for an implementation mechanism in all areas (employment, education, consumer protection, social protection, etc.) to be ensured by all state and municipal institutions – all legal acts of these institutions must enshrine equal rights for women and men. The Action Plan for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2023-2025, adopted in 2023, aims to create conditions for the implementation of measures in the fields of gender equality, women's education, legal regulation, competencies of public sector employees and volunteers in the field of equal opportunities for women and men.

It is important to note that Lithuania has an independent supervisory body – the Office of the Ombudsperson for Equal Opportunities – which monitors the implementation of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Both the Office of the Ombudsperson for Equal Opportunities and active NGO organisations and the Equal Opportunities Network not only contribute to the development of gender equality in society (e.g. by applying the Equal Opportunities Ordinance), but also participate in the processes of adopting laws on gender equality, drafting strategic documents and implementing measures.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

Lithuanian strategic documents note that insufficient attention is paid to issues such as the high burden of domestic and childcare work on women (target 5.4), the availability of childcare facilities and the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities. The objectives and measures set out in the 18th Government Programme, the MSSL Programme for the Development of an Inclusive Labour Market, the MSSL Programme for the Development of a Strengthened Family Policy are aimed at creating an appropriate, stimulating and family-friendly environment, strengthening equal opportunities for women and men, and developing quality services available to all families raising children.

Increasing the inclusiveness and effectiveness of education aims to overcome the challenges of inclusion, accessibility and equal opportunities in the quality of the education system and to change the stereotyped approach to inequalities in the distribution of the workload of women and men within the family and society. However, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality Gender Equality Index 2019-2021, there is still a significant gap between women and men sharing care responsibilities for relatives in Lithuania. In Lithuania, 79% of women and only 29% of men do housework on a daily basis, while 41% of women take care of relatives on a daily basis (an increase of 4% compared to EU women). Rather than promoting gender equality and the reconciliation of work and family life, the policies implemented so far in relation to the care of a child or of sick, elderly family members or close relatives reinforce the long-term burden on women in the area of childcare (according to the data of 2018, 6.8% of the inactive population is inactive due to caring responsibilities for a child or a person with disabilities, 2021-7.5%), promote the traditional division of labour between women and men and support the male breadwinner and female carer model. The lack of access to childcare services and inadequate service infrastructure for caring for sick, elderly or disabled relatives places a greater burden on women providing care at home, resulting in barriers to their employment, improved job and career opportunities, a narrowing of the pay gap and, in the long term, the entrenchment of gender equality in society.

79% **29%**
of women of men

**perform daily
housework in Lithuania**

Domestic violence is a widespread problem in Lithuania (target 5.2). Since 2018, the decrease in domestic violence crimes has been recorded (in 2018, these crimes accounted for 17.8% of all registered crimes, in 2022 – 14.4%). In addition, a sharp decline in the number of registered adult victims of domestic crimes has been recorded since 2018 (9297 in 2018, 5362 in 2021, 5488 in 2022). Despite the decreasing values of these indicators, there is still a need to improve the prevention of domestic violence and the provision of assistance to victims of violence. In 2021, the State Data Agency conducted a “Statistical survey on the safety of the population” in which 10 000 Lithuanian citizens aged 18-74 were interviewed. According to the survey, one in four (25.2%) women and one in five (20%) men have experienced physical (including threats) or sexual violence by someone. 30.7% of women and 19.5% of men have experienced psychological, physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, 13.6% of women and 19.1% of men have experienced physical or sexual violence by a non-partner, 19.1% of women and 6.6% of men who have ever worked have experienced sexual harassment at work.

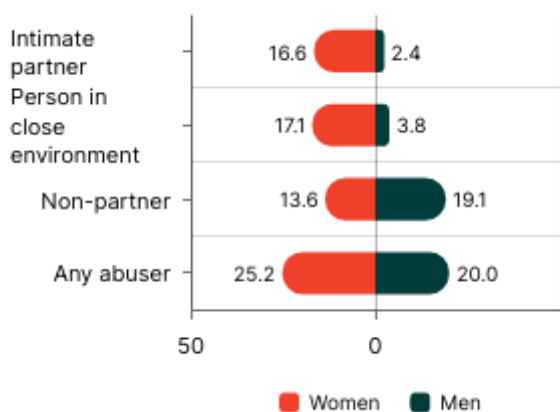


FIGURE 26. PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION EXPERIENCING PHYSICAL (INCLUDING THREATS) OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE, BY SEX AND TYPE OF PERPETRATOR, %.
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

In order to eradicate gender-based violence and to protect and support the victims of such crimes, [the Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Assistance to Victims 2022-2023](#) is being implemented. Amendments to the [Law on Protection against Domestic Violence](#), which will enter into force in 2023, are expected to increase public intolerance of domestic violence, improve the criminogenic situation, reduce the number of crimes against human life and health, strengthen the prevention of such crimes, and reduce the invisibility of domestic violence. The amendments to the law will introduce a new preventive protection measure, the Domestic Violence Protection Order, and will provide rapid protection for people at risk of or experiencing domestic violence, and quality services for these people, provided by accredited specialised comprehensive assistance centres. A Council for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection against Domestic Violence and a Commission for the Prevention of Domestic Violence in each municipality will be in place from 2023. This is expected to improve the quality of assistance to victims of violence. To address sexual harassment, amendments to the Labour Code were implemented in 2022, which prohibit violence and harassment at work and impose corresponding obligations on employers to ensure the prevention of violence and harassment. While progress has been made in implementing legislative reforms on violence and harassment at work, some of the above-mentioned EC recommendations are still outstanding. For example, the Istanbul Convention has still not been ratified. The responsibilities of public authorities, employers and workers should be further defined to enable them to take appropriate action. For example, in 2022, the State Labour Inspectorate established the Prevention of Psychological

Violence at Work Unit, where inspectors register and investigate complaints of psychological violence at work and its manifestations, and are involved in the implementation of supervision policy, drafting recommendations and providing advice to employers and employees, as well as social partners, on issues related to the application of legal acts regulating the application, prevention and investigation of psychological violence at work.

Underage marriages in Lithuania are on the decline (target 5.3). In 2021, there were 27 marriages in the country in which at least one of the spouses was a minor. This is 16 marriages less than in 2018 when there were 43 such marriages. The decline in the number of young marriages is linked to the ageing of the average age of first marriage, and the number of young marriages is likely to continue to decline over time.

The European Social Survey, conducted in 2018-2019, makes it possible to analyse the attitudes of residents of Lithuania and 28 other European countries towards the age at which a person should be considered to have reached maturity and become an adult. In Lithuania, adults are defined as 21 years old, according to the survey, 25 is the most appropriate age to marry and become a parent, and 23 is the earliest age to start living as a couple.

Women's participation in local government and the labour market, in leadership positions and/or seats in national parliaments and local government bodies, was uneven between 2018 and 2021 (target 5.5). The share of women in the Seimas increased by 6.1 percentage points between 2018 and 2021, while the share of women in municipal councils increased by 3.6 percentage points over the same period. However, the share of women in senior and middle management decreased by 0.9 percentage points between 2018 and 2020, to 37.3% in 2020, while the share of female mayors in Lithuania decreased by 3.3 percentage points between 2018 and 2021 (from 10 to 6.7%). The decline in the share of female mayors is not surprising given that male candidates significantly outnumbered female candidates in the 2019 municipal elections – 78.1% of mayoral candidates were male and only 21.9% were female. In the 2019 elections, 29.4% of elected municipal councillors were women, an increase of 4.5 percentage points compared to 24.9% in the 2015 elections. In the period 2018-2021, an increase in the proportion of women in the Seimas is observed, which may be due to the fact that the proportion of women in the Seimas increased in 2016. In the Seimas elections, only 31% of the candidates were women (33.3% in 2020).

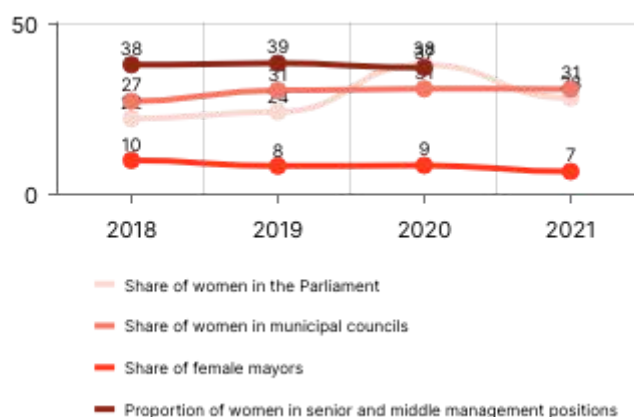


FIGURE 27. CHANGE IN INDICATORS 5.5.1 "SHARE OF SEATS HELD BY WOMEN IN (A) NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS AND (B) LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES" AND 5.5.2 "SHARE OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS" IN LITHUANIA FROM 2018 TO 2021 (%)
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

On the other hand, the decline in the share of female mayors and in the share of women in senior and middle management positions shows that Lithuania needs to change public attitudes to encourage women's participation in the active labour market and in public life. The ability to reconcile family and professional responsibilities in a well-functioning leadership position is a long-term process. However, it is also important to create institutional opportunities for women to seek greater participation in the labour market and society. For example, the Directive on work-life balance between parents and carers was transposed into national law in 2022. These changes promote an appropriate balance between family and professional responsibilities, introducing targeted measures to promote equal opportunities at work, and introducing non-portable parental leave, which will balance the division of family responsibilities between parents and promote the development of the parent-child bond. From 2023, a change in the law came into force, making it compulsory for men to take parental leave as well. The aim of these changes is to strike a balance between different commitments and to involve both sexes more equally. These developments are also in line with the new [EU Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025](#) that an equal sharing of care responsibilities and unpaid work in the home is essential to increase women's participation in decision-making and to improve their access to top jobs, seeking to promote and support reconciliation between work and family.

The need to implement appropriate existing laws and regulations to ensure full and equal access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and education for women and men aged 15 and over is paramount (target 5.6). Since 2016, the Framework Programme for Health and Sexuality Education and Family Preparation has been anchored in sexuality education in Lithuanian schools. The programme aims to help learners acquire a holistic understanding of health and sexuality, develop health-promoting skills and habits, take responsibility for their own health and the health of others, encourage healthy lifestyle choices, and develop the ability to build and maintain harmonious and mature interpersonal relationships. However, for adolescents and young people to have a positive view of sexuality, to understand their own value and the principles of gender equality, they need the right information, not only about sexuality, but also about contraception, its effectiveness and its use. There are no government websites on contraception in the country, there is a lack of reliable and unbiased information on the importance of contraception, therefore the general public's awareness of contraception and protection against unplanned pregnancy is low, various myths, inaccurate and unreliable information about contraceptive measures prevail. Voluntary surgical sterilisation is not legal in Lithuania. According to the Atlas of Contraception 2023, Lithuania is ranked as a country with average contraceptive availability of 50.6%.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

The main challenge to accelerating Lithuania's progress towards SDG 5 is the stereotypes that still prevail in society regarding the division of labour between women and men in the family and society. According to a representative survey conducted by the Centre for Development of Equal Opportunities in 2020, 40% of women and 48% of men still believe that a man's career should be more important than taking care of children. And only 6% of

men and 11% of women agreed that a woman's career should be more important than caring for her children. Achieving gender balance at the highest levels of business and industry, creating institutional opportunities for women to become more involved in the labour market and society, and combining leadership with family responsibilities, also remains a major challenge.

It should be noted that the downward trend in domestic violence does not address the issues of sexual violence and gender-based violence (both workplace harassment): The vast majority of people do not seek help from the authorities or report the violence they have experienced. This is due to mistrust of the people who have experienced violence, of their own self-confidence, of relatives and of institutions.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Progress on SDG 5 has been steady and increasing, but there are still challenges that need to be addressed. The stereotypes about family responsibilities and family preparation are still prevalent in society, in a democratic society there should be more debate. Education is also an important area – although themes of gender equality are established in educational programmes, they are not given sufficient attention at a practical level. Gender equality and non-discrimination should become one of the most important areas for training in the field of education, as well as in other professions that face the problem of gender equality, such as the police. Therefore, in order to make further progress in public education and staff training, the tools developed (e.g. [information website of the Office of the Equality Ombudsperson](#)), require more appropriate strategies related to gender and gender equality, for which competent professionals and research are important.

In order to combat domestic and family violence, it is important to increase the dissemination of information on violence and its prevention: Raising awareness among the public and those working to combat domestic violence of the causes of violence, the peculiarities of the development of this phenomenon and the consequences for society; To ensure coordinated action between authorities in the fight against domestic violence and to promote the recognition of forms of domestic violence. [Amendments](#) to the Law on Protection Against Domestic Violence adopted in 2023, aimed at reducing the invisibility of domestic violence, the availability of voluntary programmes to change violent behaviour implemented by the municipality should change the situation. Lithuania needs to strengthen the capacity to adequately develop strategies related to gender and gender equality and to raise awareness of the issue and its importance beyond specialists in the field, and to disseminate the issue of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls more widely in society through the development of gender studies and scientific research. As there is still a lack of understanding and stereotypes in this area, gender studies can help to break down these barriers.

Although women and men are legally protected, in order to make further progress it is important for Lithuania to acknowledge that there are still problems in this area and to invest in education and changing stereotypes, especially for the younger generations, and in attitudinal change strategies, as it is the most difficult thing to change attitudes in society. It is recommended to pay more attention to the monitoring of this SDG, e.g. through regular surveys for the monitoring of indicator 5.4.1a. Determine the value of the "share of time spent on unpaid domestic work and care by gender and age group", which would help to assess the distribution of time spent on domestic work by men and women and the impact of public policies.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



SDG 6. ENSURE ACCESS TO WATER, SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT AND SANITATION FOR ALL

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Implementation of the coherent development to ensure the availability of drinking water supply and wastewater management services to as large population as possible
- Ensuring conditions for appropriate groundwater and surface water quality
- Ensuring proper treatment of wastewater collected

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

6.1. The country's access to centrally supplied drinking water has improved slightly (82% in 2018 and 83% in 2021). Accelerated progress is hampered by inadequate planning of the deployment of water supply systems and the absence of alternative technical solutions, which may be the main obstacles to achieving the strategic targets (90% by 2030).

6.2. In Lithuania, the proportion of the population using safe sanitation services remains stable (94%). Although the proportion of people living in dwellings without a flush toilet is steadily decreasing (10.6% in 2018, 7.6% in 2020), there are clear disparities between urban and rural dwellers whose dwellings do not have a flush toilet or a bathtub or shower. The proportion of people living in dwellings without a bath or shower is also decreasing (9.9% in 2018, 7.2% in 2020).

6.3. An increase in the proportion of wastewater treated to the required standards is observed (72.5% in 2018, 74.8% in 2020). The country is experiencing an increase in nitrate in groundwater due to agricultural activities (use of fertilisers) (6.8 mg/l in 2018 and 8.3 mg/l in 2021).

6.4. An increase in the water use efficiency indicator is recorded (2018: USD 156.55 /m³, 2019: USD 163.55 /m³), with a decrease in the abstraction of underground fresh drinking water (2018: 10.7%, 2021: 10.3%).

6.5. An increase in the degree of integrated water resources management is recorded (57% in 2017 and 61% in 2020).

6.6. An increase in seasonal water bodies of lakes and rivers in the country is recorded (15.7% in 2018, 23.6% in 2020), as well as in permanent water bodies of lakes and rivers (2.07% in 2018, 2.5% in 2020).

6.a. Lithuania has seen a steady increase in official support to developing countries in the water and sanitation sectors (from €0.2 thousand in 2018 to €35.1 thousand in 2021). It should be noted that this indicator does not include data related to the development of water supply and wastewater services in the country.

6.b. The country consistently supports and strengthens the participation of service users and local communities in the process of improving water management and sanitation.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 6 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

Clean drinking water is vital to people's quality of life. SDG 6 aims to ensure access to quality of drinking water, adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, to improve water quality through integrated water resources management at all levels, and to increase water use efficiency and the conservation of water-related ecosystems.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The analysis of one of the main EUROSTAT indicators of the SDG 6 - the share of people living in housing without a toilet with wastewater - shows stable progress in Lithuania in 2018-2020 (10.6% in 2018 and 7.6% in 2020). However, the EU average is lower at 1.5% in 2020 (1.8% in 2018). The indicator shows that the quality of life of the Lithuanian population is improving, while at the same time indicating that measures taken, especially in rural areas, are insufficient to address the sanitation and hygiene challenges, and that they are not sufficient to reach the EU average.

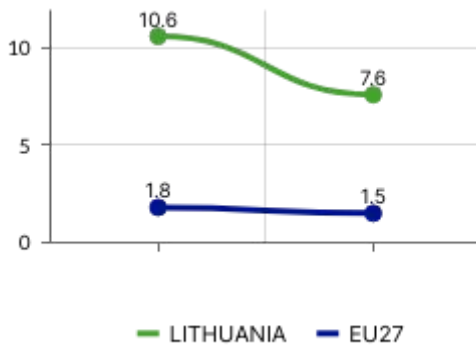


FIGURE 28: PROPORTION OF PEOPLE LIVING IN HOUSING WITHOUT A FLUSH TOILET IN LITHUANIA AND THE EU, 2018-2020
SOURCE: EUROSTAT, 2023

STRATEGIC AGENDA

Ensuring good environmental quality and the use of natural resources is identified in strategic objective 6 of the NPP. This objective covers the challenges of sustainable use of natural resources as well as waste prevention and management, meeting the objectives of the circular economy, reduction of air and water pollution, stability of ecosystems, preservation of biodiversity, and mitigation of and resilience to climate change.

The objectives of this SDG are also reflected in the National Environmental Strategy and in the MoE Environment and Climate Change Management Development Programme 2022-2030, such as the target to reduce the proportion of the population covered by drinking water services to at least 90% of the total population by 2030, and to reduce drinking water losses in networks (the result in 2020 was 25%, the target for 2030 is 18%), and all Lithuanian water bodies are designated as being in good condition in 2030 (53% in 2015; 90% in 2025; 100% in 2030), etc. Notably, an action plan for the implementation of the National Water Development Plan 2022-2027 was approved in 2023, which includes measures to reduce pollution of water bodies, improve wastewater treatment, flood prevention, and sustainable water management.

PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION COVERED BY DRINKING WATER SUPPLY SERVICES COMPARED TO THE TOTAL POPULATION

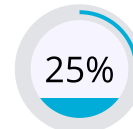


2018-2021

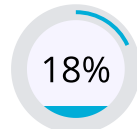


GOAL FOR 2030

DRINKING WATER LOSSES IN NETWORKS

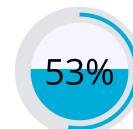


2020



GOAL FOR 2030

WATER BODIES IN LITHUANIA CONSIDERED TO BE IN GOOD STATUS



2015



GOAL FOR 2030

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

In order to ensure access to water (target 6.1), efforts are being made to provide access to drinking water supply services to all Lithuanian citizens. As of 2019, 83% of the total population of Lithuania is provided with centralised drinking water, slightly below the OECD average (84%). This has been achieved through interventions such as promoting the introduction of centralised systems among those with individual water supply and wastewater management facilities and encouraging investments in environmentally advanced technologies. Notably, the measures have also contributed to the conservation and preservation of natural resources and biodiversity. Although the implementation of the above measures is contributing to the achievement of positive results, the slow progress of the indicator indicates that the identified actions may not be sufficient to achieve the country's strategic objectives (86% of the population covered by drinking water services in 2025; 90% of the population covered by drinking water supply services in relation to the total population in 2030) and to meet the target of this SDG. The main reasons for the lack of such action are attributed to inadequate planning for the installation of water supply systems, the lack of alternative technical solutions, the high costs of installing water supply systems in residential areas and the fact that since 2017 all financial resources have been concentrated on addressing the infringement of the Urban Wastewater Directive and connecting the population to the wastewater network. Under the EU Directive on the quality of water intended for human consumption (2020/2184), and in line with the principle of subsidiarity, Member States commit themselves to guaranteeing the right to good quality water and to creating the conditions for accelerating access to water for a larger proportion of the population.

SDG 6 also aims to ensure adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene conditions (target 6.2). The proportion of the population with access to safe sanitation services has remained stable since 2018 (94% in both 2018 and 2020). According to the OECD, regional disparities in the provision of sustainable drinking water and sanitation services persist in the country, with the majority of those without access to these services living in rural areas. The stagnation of the indicator reflects the fact that the measures taken may not be sufficient to achieve the target values of the indicators, and additional interventions are needed to strengthen sanitation and hygiene conditions, especially in less urbanised areas, to increase public awareness on the protection of the environment (water, food, air, soil) from contamination, and the prevention of infections (caused by inadequate sanitation and hygiene conditions).



FIGURE 29. SHARE OF PERSONS LIVING IN DWELLING WITHOUT INDOOR FLUSHING TOILET AND BATH OR SHOWER
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

It should be noted that the proportion of people living in dwellings without a flush toilet or a bath or shower is decreasing nationally (10.6% and 9.9% in 2018 and 7.6% and 7.2% in 2020, respectively). However, regional disparities are noteworthy: according to the data for 2019, the proportion of persons living in dwellings without a flush toilet was 3% in urban areas, 24% in rural areas; without bath or shower - 4% and 21% respectively. The disparities in the number of people receiving drinking water supply and wastewater management services across regions are due to the different capacities of water utilities to develop infrastructure, population density, cost of living, and the high cost of drinking water supply and wastewater management services.

The proportion of wastewater treated to the required standards, which has been decreasing between 2018 and 2020 (72.5% of wastewater treated safely in 2018 and 71.9% in 2020), increases to 74.8% in 2021, which is attributed to a continuously upgraded, well-organised and well-organised centralised network for drinking water supply and municipal wastewater management, and to the regulated management of wastewater. As Lithuania aims to provide 85% of the Lithuanian population with centralised wastewater management services by 2025, it can be argued that the current measures, although driven by actions such as proper coordination of activities, decentralisation of services, are insufficient and additional attention is needed to address these challenges. Another important challenge remains: untreated wastewater (to the required standards). Although such wastewater accounts for up to a quarter of all wastewater, untreated wastewater discharged into the environment becomes one of the main sources of concentrated pollution when it reaches surface waters.

There is also the problem of surface water pollution - not all surface water is treated (to the required standards). The country is characterised by inadequate management of surface wastewater at source, insufficient capacity of surface (storm) wastewater infrastructure in urbanised areas to collect and treat surface wastewater, and poor application of green infrastructure solutions to reduce the volume of surface wastewater generated, reduce the cost of installing surface wastewater management infrastructure, and revitalise the urban and agrarian landscape.

To manage water bodies, Lithuania has identified surface water bodies and groundwater bodies for which the water protection objective is to achieve good status. The 6th WFD also aims to ensure the quality of water (both surface and groundwater) in water bodies (target 6.3). Lithuania's water bodies are assessed as not being in good status. The share of water bodies with good water quality, which has been stable for a long time, has drastically decreased in 2021 (53% in 2015-2019, 38% in 2021) is attributed to several factors. Firstly, the implementation of the updated monitoring programme, which provides more and better data on the status of water bodies. Secondly, the continuing and increasing diffuse pollution, mainly from agricultural activities, with high nitrogen inputs from fertilisation, and concentrated pollution, with organic, biogenic and hazardous substances entering water bodies as wastewater. Groundwater quality depends on the concentration of naturally occurring chemicals (sulphates, chlorides, ammonium, iron, manganese, fluoride, arsenic, etc.) in groundwater, as well as on the increase in improperly managed pollution that enters aquifers and contributes to the increasing concentrations of nitrogen compounds (nitrites, nitrates, ammonium) in groundwater. There is also a risk that other hazardous substances (e.g. pharmaceuticals, microplastics, new generation persistent organic pollutants) may enter drinking water. Since 2015, the country has seen an increase in nitrite in groundwater, peaking at 10.3 mg/l in 2020 and dropping to 8.3 mg/l in 2021. The upward trend in concentrations of nitrogen compounds and other hazardous substances in groundwater is to be avoided by focusing on the prevention of pollution of water bodies and the proper control of diffuse and point sources of pollution.

In order to address the challenge of poor water quality and to meet the country's water protection objectives, several groups of measures can be distinguished: administrative-legal measures applied at national level and engineering measures applied locally. Administrative measures include strengthening the legal framework to prohibit harmful activities to water bodies and to strengthen the liability of operators for harmful impacts on water bodies, the obligation to apply mitigation measures, the introduction of charges for the use of natural resources (specifically water) etc. Engineering measures include the restoration of river channels (renaturalisation), the creation of wetlands, the modernisation of wastewater treatment plants, the improvement of fish migration by removing obstacles or installing fish passes, the installation of sediment traps on fish farms, bio-manipulation (restocking or harvesting of fish), the removal of excess aquatic vegetation, etc. Internationally, Lithuania, together with other HELCOM members, has agreed to develop measures to address the problems of microplastics and urban and storm water runoff into rivers, and to consider cost-effective mitigation measures to reduce legacy and emerging pollutants, including medicines.

In Lithuania, the process of water management and sanitation improvement is centralised and managed at the municipal level, therefore the participation of local communities in the process of water management and sanitation improvement is clearly defined in the different programmes and identified as high in terms of the level of definition of the procedures (target 6.b.). At the international level, Lithuania participates in the development cooperation policies of the EU, the UN, the OECD and other international organisations (target 6.a.), provides multilateral development assistance through mandatory and voluntary contributions and contributions to the European Development Fund, other development cooperation funds and international organisations, and humanitarian aid, thus contributing to the support for the implementation of water and sanitation related activities and programmes.

The country aims to use water efficiently and effectively (target 6.4). As of 2018, groundwater abstraction for fresh drinking water has changed only slightly and accounted for around 10% of total fresh drinking water. It should be noted that in Lithuania, the long-term trends in both groundwater and surface water abstraction and use are showing little change. In the period 2018-2020, 67-69% of total groundwater abstraction in the country was used for domestic and agricultural purposes, 10-14% for industrial purposes, a small share of groundwater was used for agriculture and fisheries (around 3.0%), and around 15-18% of water abstraction was lost due to leaky pipelines. Surface water is mainly used for energy purposes (accounting for about 94-98% of total surface water abstraction), with a further 1-2% for fisheries, industry and a liquefied natural gas terminal. In order to use the available water resources efficiently, it is necessary to ensure adequate water use efficiency, defined as the value added of a given key sector divided by the volume of water used. In 2018 this indicator was at USD 156.55/m³, in 2019 the indicator rises to USD 163.55/m³ and is in a high (8th) position among UN member countries. It also aims at an integrated management of water resources (target 6.5). It should be noted that the level of implementation of integrated water resources management has been increasing during the period under analysis: from 57% in 2017, it rises to 61% in 2020. The share of transboundary river and lake basins in the area covered by existing water cooperation agreements amounts to a quarter, and has remained stable since 2017.

Restoration of aquatic ecosystems (target 6.6) has been monitored since 2018, with a 0.43 percentage point change in permanent water bodies of lakes and rivers from 2018 to 2020 (2.07% in 2018 and 2.5% in 2020). It should be noted that rapid changes in water bodies have a strong negative impact on the river ecosystem (especially on fish), and therefore such a steady increase is considered positive. The change in seasonal water bodies of lakes and rivers is significantly higher, at 7.9 percentage points (15.7% in 2018, 23.6% in 2020), which is attributed to climate change and the recorded increase in precipitation. Notably, climate change is likely to increase the number of storms and intense rainfall events, as well as sea level rise, and may increase the number and risk of flooding. In this context, the country is implementing the Floods Directive: a comprehensive assessment of potential flood risks and a range of mitigation measures has been carried out, and most of the key engineering flood protection measures have been initiated and are being successfully implemented. Thus, while the country is steadily restoring aquatic ecosystems, in the light of climate change and its impacts, it is necessary to continue to pursue the objectives of flood risk management and to continuously assess the changes in aquatic ecosystems.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

In order to make progress on the SDG 6, Lithuania faces particularly important challenges. The country lacks a coherent development of infrastructure for drinking water supply and wastewater management, including effective planning for the installation of water supply systems, and the introduction of alternative technical solutions, which reduces the accessibility of these services to the largest possible number of people.

Pollution remains one of the main factors hindering the achievement of good ecological status for the country's waters. Pollution entering surface water bodies comes from diffuse sources (agriculture, households not connected to centralised wastewater collection systems), point sources (urban sewage treatment plants, storm water outfalls, fish farms, etc.), and can also have a significant impact through secondary pollution (mainly through the release of accumulated bottom sediment). Untreated (to the limit) sewage, pollution from industry, energy and agriculture also reaches groundwater and increases the pollution of groundwater bodies.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Lithuania's progress towards achieving SDG 6 can be assessed as consistent and sufficient to meet the target. The country has 83% access to centrally supplied drinking water, 94% access to safe sanitation and a declining proportion of people living in dwellings without a flush toilet or a bathtub or shower. However, challenges remain: there is a lack of coherent development of drinking water supply and wastewater management infrastructure to ensure that the proportion of the population supplied with centralised drinking water increases steadily and achieves the country's strategic target.

The aim is to use water efficiently and effectively throughout the country and to manage water resources in an integrated manner. It should be noted that the problems of pollution (diffuse, concentrated, secondary pollution) and untreated (up to the prescribed limit) wastewater entering the country's waters persist. Since 2021, the proportion of water bodies with good quality water has declined. Continued administrative, legal and engineering measures are needed to ensure the quality of water bodies (surface and groundwater). In the long term, it is important to focus not only on upgrading surface water infrastructure, especially in urban areas, but also on ensuring that individual wastewater treatment meets the requirements. In this context, there is a need to establish a system for inventorying surface water infrastructure and to create the right conditions for green solutions for surface water management.

It is noteworthy that local communities are actively involved in water management and sanitation improvement processes, and this involvement is assessed as high in terms of the level of definition of procedures. At the international level, Lithuania participates in the development cooperation policies of international organisations. In line with the good practices where local communities are actively involved in water management and sanitation improvement processes, it is recommended that more attention be paid to public awareness raising through local communities on the protection of the environment (water, food, air, soil) from contamination and prevention of infections (spread due to inadequate sanitation and hygiene conditions).

In order to better monitor the progress of SDG 6, it is recommended to adjust the indicator for target 6.a. "Official development assistance for water and sanitation": to capture data reflecting not only the amount of ODA related to water and sanitation, which is part of the government-coordinated expenditure plan, but also to include data related to the development of water supply and wastewater services.

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



SDG 7. ENSURE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND MODERN ENERGY FOR ALL

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Ensuring energy security
- Reducing energy import dependency
- Increasing the share of renewable energy sources in the transition to energy from RES

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

7.1. In Lithuania, access to electricity for all has been guaranteed since 2010 (100%), and the population uses mostly clean fuels and technology (more than 95%).

7.2. The share of energy produced from RES in Lithuania has increased (from 25.5% in 2018 to 28.1% in 2021) compared to gross final energy consumption, but the 2020 goals were not met.

7.3. In the period 2018-2021, Lithuania's energy import dependency decreased slightly but remained significantly high (from 74.1% in 2018 to 73.6% in 2021), gross inland energy consumption also increased (from 7,750.9 to 7,918.7 thous. tonnes of oil equivalent), as well as final energy consumption (from 5,594.5 to 5,725.6 thous. tonnes of oil equivalent) and household final energy consumption per capita (from 0.54 to 0.58 tonnes of oil equivalent).

7.a. In 2021, the country contributed €898.3 thousand to developing countries to support clean energy research and development and renewable energy production, including hybrid systems.

7.b. Electricity production from renewable energy capacity increased from 299.5 to 397 watts per capita in 2018-2021.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 7 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

Lithuania has identified five priority areas for the implementation of the SDGs, including goal 7. This goal focuses on access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy services for all, and aims to increase the share of RES and energy efficiency, as well as to promote cooperation between countries by facilitating access to clean energy research and technology. It is important for Lithuania to have reliable and modern electricity to contribute to the stability of the country's growth and the security of its population.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The transition to a zero-emission economy by the middle of the 21st century is one of the most important long-term goals of the EU. The share of RES in countries' final energy consumption is crucial for achieving the SDG 7. The graph below shows the share of RES in total final energy consumption of Lithuania, EU countries and world countries. In Lithuania, it was almost 8 percentage points above the global average in 2019 and more than 5 percentage points above the EU average in 2020.

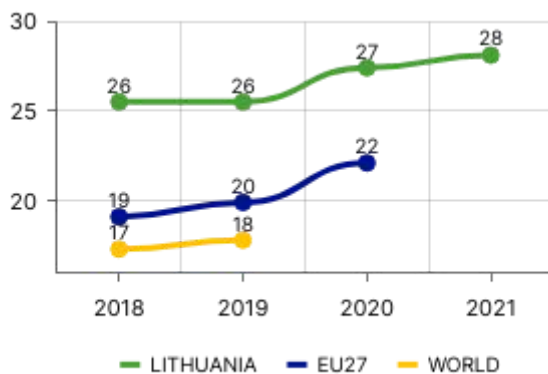


FIGURE 30. PROPORTION OF RENEWABLE RESOURCES IN TOTAL FINAL ENERGY CONSUMPTION IN LITHUANIA, EU27, WORLD (%)
Source: State Data Agency, EUROSTAT, Energy Statistics Pocketbook 2021, 2022.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

The main objectives, directions and goals of Lithuania's energy sector policy up to 2020 and 2030, with a vision up to 2050, are set out in the National Strategy for Energy Independence (NEIS), NCCMA. In accordance with the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy union and Climate Action, Lithuania has prepared National Energy and Climate Action Plan 2021-2030 (NECAP). Integrating the policy elements of energy and climate change management through 5 interlinked policy dimensions: Reduction of dependence on fossil fuels, energy efficiency, energy security, internal energy market and research, innovation and competitiveness. The Energy Development Programme aims to implement progress measures that help strengthen the energy innovation ecosystem, integrate the Lithuanian natural gas market into the EU internal gas market, connect the Lithuanian electricity system to the continental European electricity system for synchronous operation, increase the share of domestic energy production and gross final energy consumption from renewable energy sources, and introduce measures to reduce pollution. Five (namely 1, 2, 5, 6, 9) of the strategic goals of the NPPs have indicators related to the achievement of goal SDG 7.

The 18th Government Programme also focuses and sets goals for building a reliable, sustainable and modern energy system. The implementation of SDG 7 is also a major focus of the Stronger Energy Infrastructure and Green Energy projects, which aim to expand green power generation, promote the development of power generation consumers, and deploy modern balancing capacity.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

Access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services for all in Lithuania (target 7.1) is secured. In this area, support for the highest achieved indicator results has been recorded since 2017 – in Lithuania, access to electricity for all is secured (100%), and the population uses mostly clean fuels and technologies (more than 95%). Due to the consistent development of RES, the share of energy generated by RES in Lithuania's total final energy consumption increased by 2.6 percentage points (from 25.5% to 28.1%) over the period 2018-2021 (target 7.2). However, this growth is not sufficient – the NEIS set a target of 30% for the share of RES in total final energy consumption in 2020.

It is estimated that the slowdown in the growth of the share of RES was mainly influenced by the prolonged construction phases of the Vilnius and Kaunas CHP plants, the share of RES (biomass) in households, which was 38.7 (in 2019), the inefficient and too slow integration of RES in the transport sector, which accounts for only 5% of the total. When assessing the share of RES in the final energy consumption balance of the transport sector, Lithuania is among the EU Member States lagging behind. Based on 2020 data, Lithuania is almost twice as far behind the EU average (10.2%) and has missed its goal (goal for the share of RES in transport -10%). To accelerate this process, the Law on Alternative Fuels was adopted in 2021 and the provisions of Directive 2018/2001 were transposed. For 2030, Lithuania sets the goal that the share of Lithuanian RES in gross final energy consumption would be 45%.

While implementing different measures, the country aims at doubling the energy efficiency indicator (target 7.3). In the period 2018-2021, gross domestic consumption, final energy consumption and final energy consumption in households per capita increased – a negative change in the indicators was recorded during this period. It is important to note that the result of the indicator measuring final energy intensity improved between 2018 and 2021. During this period, the country's energy dependence on imports decreased slightly, but remained significantly high (74.1% in 2018 and 73.6% in 2021.)



31 FIGURE. ENERGY DEPENDENCE IN LITHUANIA, 2018-2021.
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

In order to achieve the improvement of the energy efficiency indicator, it is necessary to ensure the continuation of the measures that have led to the improvement of the result: Encourage the comprehensive renovation of multi-family residential and public buildings (giving priority to the renovation of residential neighbourhoods) and achieve energy savings of 5–6 TWh in renovated multi-family residential and public buildings by 2030 (adding up the energy savings each year), and the rapid development of low energy and energy efficient industries, introduction and purchase of the latest and most environmentally friendly technologies and equipment improvement of energy efficiency in the transport sector, renewing the car fleet, switching to modern and efficient public transport, optimising transport infrastructure and the use of alternative fuels, electrification or the use of alternative fuels.

Lithuania aims to develop infrastructure and modernise technologies to provide modern and sustainable energy services for all (target 7.b). Progress was made in this area between 2018 and 2021: RES electricity generation capacity increased from 299.5 to 397 watts per capita. Wind farms operating in Lithuania, together with individual wind power plants, increase the amount of electricity produced (the amount of energy produced in 2020 accounted for more than 11% of the country's total energy) – together with individual wind power plants, the total installed capacity at the end of 2020 was 534 MW. Installed RES solar power plants generated 128.8 million kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity in 2020, 41.4% more than in 2019. This supports local electricity production and contributes to the achievement of international climate change targets. Strategic documents also emphasise this goal: The NEIS envisages that 45% of the country's electricity will come from RES by 2030, and the 18th Government Programme sets an even more ambitious goal: in 2030, 50% of the country's electricity consumption should come from RES. This goal is to be achieved by accelerating the development of solar and wind power plants, organising transparent, open and non-discriminatory auctions for all RES technologies increasing the share of customers who generate their own electricity (in individual houses and apartment blocks) to 30% of the total number of electricity consumers; continuing to promote the use and modernisation of biofuel combustion plants in the heat sector, assessing the feasibility of using solar photovoltaic and thermal technologies and district heating storage for heat production, in the transport sector, promoting the use of electric vehicles and maintaining the production of biofuels from first generation raw materials and the production and consumption of second generation biofuels.

In 2021, renewable energy accounted for 28.1% of Lithuania's total energy consumption, making RES an important component of the country's energy independence. Lithuania is aiming to increase its share of RES according to international environmental indicators, but given the growing global threats of climate change, pollution, habitat and biodiversity loss, it is important that increasing the use of RES protects and restores nature, whose condition is essential for human well-being.

A good example is the construction of Lithuania's first offshore wind farm in the Baltic Sea, which would significantly increase domestic electricity production from RES, reducing Lithuania's dependence on electricity imports and ensuring low electricity prices for the population. The foundations have been laid for the emergence of a new form of energy – offshore wind – by preparing the necessary legislative framework and tenders for offshore wind farm developers. Two offshore wind farms with a total installed capacity of 1.4 GW are expected to be operational in Lithuania in 2028, providing around half of Lithuania's current electricity demand.

The Breakthrough Package was also approved, which aims to ensure the smooth and rapid development of green energy, reduce bureaucratic obstacles and excessive restrictions on the construction of solar and wind power plants, promote the creation of energy communities and respond to the needs of the population.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

The war launched by Russia in Ukraine in 2022 and the energy crisis mean that Lithuania, which is particularly dependent on energy imports, will have to invest even more in RES. In order to find alternatives to primary energy sources, the only real alternative for Lithuania to increase its energy independence by promoting its own energy with a focus on RES. Effective legislative and executive work, proper legal regulation and sufficient funding are essential for these processes. Positive trends can be seen – in Lithuania, permits for solar power plants are issued within an average of 10 months (Lithuania leads the EU), wind power plants – in 40 months (4th in the EU), while the EU's Renewable Energy Directive specifies a maximum period of 24 months.

The high price of electricity has reduced overall energy consumption, and the growing number of prosumers should continue to reduce it in the future. It is important to note that due to the large increase in demand seeking support for the installation of a solar power plant, the installation of this plant takes much longer due to both increased demand, employment of contractors and disrupted supply chains. This may lead to an increase in the time taken to issue connection conditions. It should be noted that the development of RES poses challenges for the Lithuanian electricity system: with a gradual increase in the share of RES, offshore wind would be the main source of energy generation in 2050, accounting for around 50% of the RES generation mix, with onshore wind and solar accounting for around 30% of demand.

The fundamental disadvantage and difference between RES and traditional fossil fuel generation is that electricity is not generated continuously and capacity cannot be artificially increased or decreased when needed. In this context, additional measures (e.g. regarding storage or other technologies, as well as flexible and conventional harmonisation of electricity generation methods) are needed to balance the electricity system in order to always meet consumers' needs, even at times when RES cannot be used, i.e. when the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Progress on SDG 7 has been steady and increasing. The transition to a zero-emission economy by the middle of the 21st century is one of the most important long-term goals for EU countries. The war in Ukraine launched by Russia in 2022, which also triggered an energy crisis in Europe, further strengthened the importance of energy independence and the transition to renewable energy. In the period 2018–2021, Lithuania increased its electricity generation capacity from RES, and the share of energy generated from RES in Lithuania increased compared to gross final energy consumption. However, the growth is not sufficient in all areas, such as the share of energy from RES in gross final energy consumption, which was not reached by 2020. In Lithuania, the integration of RES in the transport sector is inefficient and slow.

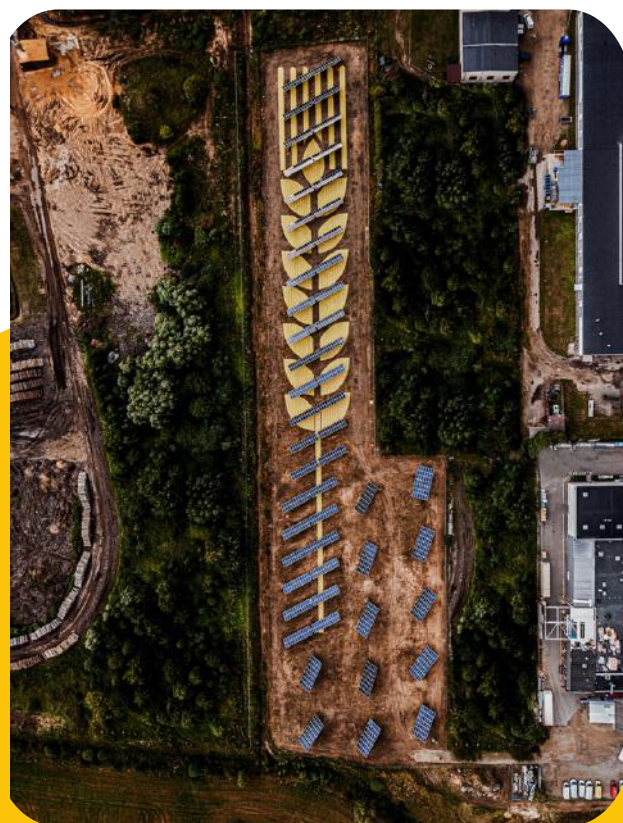
In implementing SDG 7, it is recommended to ensure a smooth and efficient development of green energy, continue integration into European electricity networks, develop RES storage and storage solutions, address energy poverty, and review the legal framework to ensure that excessive restrictions are not imposed. People, industry and businesses should be influenced to switch from fossil fuels to RES and encouraged to improve energy efficiency, adopt and purchase the latest and most environmentally friendly technologies and equipment. It is also especially important not to forget and increase energy efficiency in the transport sector, as well as to promote and inform people about energy-saving techniques and communicate about the use of RES in a sustainable way to avoid damaging the biodiversity.

GOOD PRACTICE

One of the municipalities in Lithuania, Biržai, is equipped with a sustainable 450 kW solar power plant – one of the most modern in Lithuania. The solar power plant, which covers an area of almost two hectares, differs from other power plants in the country in that its solar modules are installed in such a way that they can not only follow the movement of the sun on the horizon – from east to west – but also change their position depending on the height of the sun's rise above the horizon. This helps to maximise the 'capture' and use of solar energy.

Modules that can move according to the position of the sun in the sky are about 35% more efficient than those that do not change their position – according to preliminary estimates, this power plant generates 30% of the company's annual electricity needs.

It is important to note that the artist A. Kišonaitė has incorporated a stylised rye bell between the power plant modules, reflecting the nature of the company's activities. It is worth noting that this idea of sustainability has made it into the Guinness Book of World Records.



Source: BNS, 2020.



Source: Saulės graža.

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



SDG 8. PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Reducing long-term unemployment
- Securing sustainable employment and creating green jobs
- Ensuring equal opportunities and equal pay for equal work
- Increasing the use of innovation and technology in industry

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

8.1. The country aims to maintain per capita economic growth in line with national circumstances: The annual growth rate of real GDP per capita has increased from 5% in 2018 to 5.5% in 2021.

8.2. The country is aiming for higher levels of economic productivity: The annual growth rate of real GDP per person employed has increased from 2.6% in 2018 to 4.7% in 2021.

8.4. The use of non-renewable energy sources continues to increase in industrial and consumer applications (total domestic consumption of materials in the country increased from 49.58 million tonnes in 2018 to 58.1 million tonnes in 2021) and in individual households.

8.5. Before COVID-19, there was an upward trend in employment; Unemployment rose in 2020 and fell in a record time in 2021 (the unemployment rate was 6.1% in 2018, 8.5% in 2020 and 7.1% in 2021). The country's labour market participation gap remains high across regions and social groups, the labour market is not sufficiently inclusive and the gender pay gap persists (the gender pay gap was €14 in 2018 and €12 in 2021).

8.6. GDP growth before the crisis also boosted average wages, but long-term problems such as the problem of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) have not been solved: The proportion of NEETs aged 15-24 was 8% in 2018 and 10.9% in 2021.

8.8. The number of work-related fatalities identified has fluctuated between 2018 and 2021, but the overall trend (except for the period affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020) has remained on an upward trajectory (39 fatalities in 2018 and 48 in 2021).

8.9. COVID-19 has weakened the development of the tourism sector and value added: The share of value added in the tourism sector in GDP has fallen from 2.9% in 2018 to 1.7% in 2021.

8.10. While the number of people with payment accounts in Lithuania has remained stable (9 out of 10 people aged 18 and over have a payment account with a bank or credit union in 2018-2021), the number of ATMs and customer services provided by payment service providers declined (249 per 100,000 adult population in 2018 and 195 in 2021).

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 8 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

In order to compete globally and generate high added value, it is crucial that the economy is able to adapt to global processes and harness the creative potential of society. SDG 8 aims to achieve sustainable economic growth and a high level of economic productivity, while ensuring decent and well-paid working conditions and resource efficiency.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The Lithuanian economy is characterised by openness to other markets – according to the degree of integration with international markets (the value of foreign direct investment into and out of the country as a percentage of GDP), the intensity of Lithuania's integration is higher than the EU average. It should be noted that in 2018, Lithuania had one of the highest participation rates in global value chains (52%) among OECD countries and major OECD partners; The country ranks 15th out of 43 countries in terms of the highest level of engagement. A higher level of Lithuanian involvement indicates that more domestic producers are directly or indirectly (through other exporting companies in the country) linked to companies in other countries through production, sales and purchasing channels.

Thanks to the attraction of foreign investment, the increasing number of foreign companies setting up and operating in Lithuania, the intensive and successful search for trading partners, and the growing awareness and recognition of Lithuanian producers in Europe and elsewhere in the world, Lithuania's involvement in global value chains continues to grow.

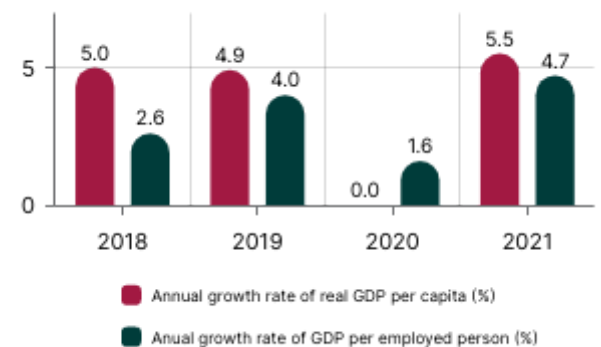
STRATEGIC AGENDA

The country's strategic agenda states that the openness of the economy must be exploited and further increased in order to achieve greater competitive advantage. An open and sustainable economy is to be achieved through the circular and digital transformation of industry. The NPP aims to increase resource productivity, promote circular design and production, the production and use of secondary raw materials, reduce the use of hazardous chemicals, and use digital and innovative solutions that are environmentally friendly and energy efficient; Promote the development, deployment and diffusion of advanced technologies and innovative, durable and recyclable products, encourage innovation in the national economy and the public sector, the development of repair, refurbishment, rental and re-use services and sharing of objects, and conduct active publicity campaigns to promote sustainable consumption habits and attitudes.

Given the country's declining supply of local human resources and the demand for skilled labour, it is important to create favourable conditions for all people of working age to enter the labour market. The NPP emphasises the need to improve the employability of job seekers and the effectiveness and efficiency of the employment support system (target 2.3), promoting corporate responsibility (target 8.8), improving social dialogue and quality in work (target 2.9).

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

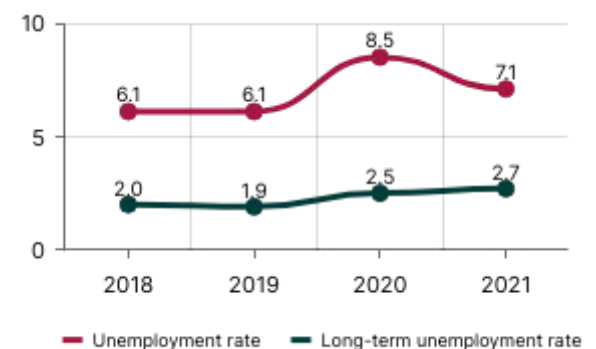
In implementing the SDG 8, efforts are being made in Lithuania to support economic growth per capita, but inflation and factors destabilising the economy (for example, COVID-19,) have led to a drastic slowdown in the annual growth rate of real GDP since 2020, both for the country's population and for the employed (targets 8.1–8.2). The annual growth rate of real GDP per capita was 4.9% in 2019 and 4% per person employed, and 0.2% and 1.5% respectively in 2020. The stimulus measures have brought this rate back to close to pre-pandemic levels by 2021 (annual real GDP growth rate per capita of 4.5%, per person employed of 3.8%).



32 FIGURE. ANNUAL GROWTH RATE OF REAL GDP PER CAPITA AND EMPLOYED PERSON, 2018-2021 (%). Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

An upward trend in employment was observed before COVID-19 (target 8.5). In 2019, the employment rate of 20-64 year olds was 78.2%, which was higher than the EU the goal (75%) and exceeded Lithuania's national target for 2020 (72.8%). The overall unemployment rate was 6.3% in 2019, which was 0.2% lower than in 2018.

The economic impact of COVID-19 pushed unemployment up from 6.3% to 8.5% in 2020 and down to 7.1% in 2021 in record time. However, the problem of long-term unemployment (see figure below) and the share of young people not in employment, education or training increased during COVID-19 (from 8% in 2018 to 10.9% in 2021) and did not recover as quickly after the pandemic (target 8.6). Although the loss of employment for the majority of people is related to changes in the working environment due to COVID-19, it is noteworthy that the problem of shortages of skilled workers and required skills due to insufficient labour market relevance of the education system and low participation in adult learning programmes also remains relevant.



33 FIGURE. UNEMPLOYMENT AND LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN LITHUANIA, 2018-2021 (%). Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

There are significant disparities in labour market participation between regions and social groups, labour market participation is not sufficiently inclusive, with relatively high unemployment rates among vulnerable groups, high numbers of low-skilled or disabled people not in employment or education, and labour market participation is limited by insufficiently favourable conditions for reconciling work and family responsibilities. It is important to note that the youth unemployment rate (15-29 years old) has been increasing since 2018. (7.5% in 2018, 8.7% in 2019, 13.4% in 2020, 10% in 2021). Young people have been identified as one of the groups most affected by the pandemic on the labour market. It should be noted that before the pandemic, the coverage of active labour market policies to help jobseekers improve their employability was declining and participation in adult education programmes was low. In order to help the unemployed return to the labour market as soon as possible, the scope of active labour market policies and other measures aimed at changing and improving the skills of the workforce should be increased. From 2022, the Public Employment Service implements measures to improve the unemployed's chances of finding a job or returning to the labour market, including measures to improve skills, acquire competences and retrain.

The gender pay gap persists in Lithuania, mainly as a result of horizontal and vertical labour market segregation. Inconsistent implementation of SDG 5 and socio-economic factors lead to the predominance of occupational groups classified as 'more women' and 'more men', such as men working mainly in IT, women in education and healthcare. There are also differences in the positions held: 70% of women work as professionals, civil servants and service workers. Among managers at various levels, the majority are men – more than 60%. Women are more likely to take temporary leave from the labour market to bring up children, care for relatives or look after their families, which has an impact on the gradual widening of the pay gap. In many cases, the largest difference in earnings between men and women is due to the raising of young children. However, the gap between men's and women's pensions is narrowing. Between 2015 and 2021, the gap between men's and women's total pensions declined year on year from almost 18.3% to almost 15.4%.

GENDER PAY GAP IN LITHUANIA

IN 2018

€14

IN 2021

€12

Quality working conditions require not only comprehensive measures by the state, but also initiatives by the private sector. In Lithuania, the quality of jobs is strongly influenced by the insufficient level of social dialogue (especially at the employer level) and the low level of understanding of the principles of corporate social responsibility. In 2018-2020, the perception of corporate social responsibility was highly formalised by the requirement to report on corporate social responsibility, but as [studies](#) have shown, the perception of social responsibility was low.

However, from 2020, there is a growing number of initiatives to promote corporate social responsibility, with national support for socially responsible business initiatives. In the future, it will be essential to promote closer cooperation

between industry and academia in order to train highly skilled professionals capable of working with innovative technologies.

Social dialogue is expected to be developed in both the Capital Region and the Central and Western Region with a view to creating quality jobs and increasing the region's competitiveness. It should be noted that the private sector is currently focusing on creating a sustainable and efficient innovation, industry and business ecosystem, promoting closer international and local cooperation and clustering (science, business and government as well as international clustering), commercialising the results of R&D, mobilising private capital in building infrastructure and promoting the supply of and demand for innovation in the public sector, but the initiatives undertaken are not sufficient to make significant progress in achieving the SDGs.

In order to achieve sustainable jobs, it is important to ensure that workers have secure jobs and that their labour rights are protected (target 8.8). The number of unhappy workers detected in the workplace fluctuated between 2018 and 2021, but the overall trend (with the exception of 2020) during the period affected by COVID-19) remains upward: In 2018, the number of employees who lost their ability to work due to accidents at work was 409.2/100,000 employees; 435.8 per 100 000 employees in 2021. As in other EU countries, the sectors most affected are construction, transport, manufacturing and agriculture. In order to ensure the safety of workers, work process inspections (both planned and unplanned) are being prepared, the preparedness of workers is being strengthened and information on the necessary aspects of safe workplaces is being provided.

It should be noted that in order to achieve higher economic growth, the country does not ensure the effective use of global resources in the area of consumption – the growth of the country's economy is not separated from the deterioration of the state of the environment (target 8.4). Domestic consumption of substances (both total and per capita) grows rapidly: from 49.8 million tonnes in 2018 to 58.1 million tonnes in 2021. Domestic consumption of materials per capita also increased: from 17.7 tonnes in 2018 to 20.7 tonnes in 2021. It should also be noted that the productivity of materials (ratio of GDP and domestic consumption of materials) decreases between 2018 and 2021; from 0.92 €/kg in 2018-2019 to 0.79 €/kg in 2021. These indicators call for a stronger focus on the implementation of circular economy principles in all sectors of the economy and on the use of RES resources. It is recommended to promote the substitution of polluting technologies with less polluting ones, apply circular economy principles, apply a wide range of innovative solutions, promote zero and low waste production, reuse and recycle waste, cultivate rational use of resources, secondary and climate-friendly raw materials.

DOMESTIC MATERIAL CONSUMPTION INCREASES

IN 2018

17.7 THOUSAND
TONNES PER
CAPITA



IN 2021

20.7 THOUSAND
TONNES PER
CAPITA

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

In order to compete globally and create high added value, it is particularly important that the country's economy is able to adapt to changing conditions. Pre-crisis GDP growth contributed to an increase in the average wage of the country's population, Lithuania's economic performance during the non-pandemic period increased over the period analysed.

However, long-term problems such as the gender pay gap, long-term unemployment and the NEET situation have not been resolved. Lithuania's industrial sectors still need to increase the use of innovation and cutting-edge technologies to ensure the sustainability of jobs – thus avoiding job losses and promoting the creation of “green” jobs. With the emergence of new technologies and sectors, the creation of sustainable jobs will help protect the environment and mitigate climate change, while ensuring long-term economic growth, employment and competitiveness.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Progress on SDG 8 is assessed as moderate. The country's economy is open to other markets and is seeking to attract foreign investment and increase its integration into international markets. Lithuania aims to sustain economic growth but faces challenges. In particular, the country's inflation and economic destabilising factors such as COVID-19, the war in Ukraine and the energy price crisis are holding back GDP and employment growth.

While measures are in place to reduce unemployment – active labour market policies to help jobseekers improve their employability, adult education programmes – both coverage and participation in such programmes are declining. There are also large regional and social disparities in labour market participation, the labour market is not sufficiently inclusive, although it is shrinking, and the gender pay gap persists.

It should be noted that the country is not making efficient use of global resources for consumption to achieve higher economic growth – the country's economic growth is not decoupled from environmental degradation and domestic material consumption is increasing.

In the context of the implementation of SDG 8, it is recommended to strengthen measures aimed at reducing social income inequalities, strengthening cooperation between science and business, and ensuring the sustainable and efficient development of innovation and advanced technologies in industrial sectors, as well as developing the skills needed to do so. In order to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation and make it a strategic priority in its own right, more resources are needed to transform production towards a circular economy. This requires a stronger focus on the implementation of circular economy principles in all sectors of the economy, with specific public interventions for businesses, as well as interventions for workers and employees to promote public awareness. It should be noted that the country's economy can adapt to changing conditions and strong inter-institutional cooperation is essential.



Source: Joana Burn.



Source: Startup Lithuania.

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



SDG 9. BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION AND FOSTER INNOVATION

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Establish a framework for promoting innovation and developing the use of innovation in all industrial sectors
- Strengthening cooperation between science and business, increasing the number of research institutions
- Improve transport and tourism infrastructure
- Promote the digital transformation of the circular economy

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

9.1. The share of the rural population living within 2 km of a year-round road increased from 96.7% in 2011 to 97.3% in 2021.

9.1. In 2018-2021, the number of goods transported in the Lithuanian transport sector by all modes of transport increased (165,175,000 to 183,562,000 tonnes), However, the number of passengers carried by all modes of transport declined (from 380,163 in 2018 to 208,854 thousand in 2021).

9.2. The number of persons employed in Lithuania's manufacturing sector increased (from 15.9% in 2018 to 16.6% in 2021), but the share of manufacturing value added in GDP decreased (from 16.6% in 2018 to 16.1% in 2021).

9.3. Value added by small industrial enterprises as a share of industrial value added has fallen between 2018 and 2021 (from 19.5% to 17.5%).

9.4. The country experienced a decrease in CO2 emissions per unit of value added from the energy sector in 2018-2021 (from 0.27 to 0.23 kt/million € GDP).

9.5. Between 2018 and 2021, both R&D expenditure as a share of GDP increased (from 0.94% to 1.12%) and the relative number of R&D personnel increased (from 4,268 to 5,302), but the large R&D potential is not fully exploited to generate real economic benefits.

9.b. Between 2018 and 2021, the share of manufacturing value added generated by advanced and medium-high technology increased from 23.7% to 31.5%.

9.c. 99.99% of the population of Lithuania is covered by a mobile phone network.

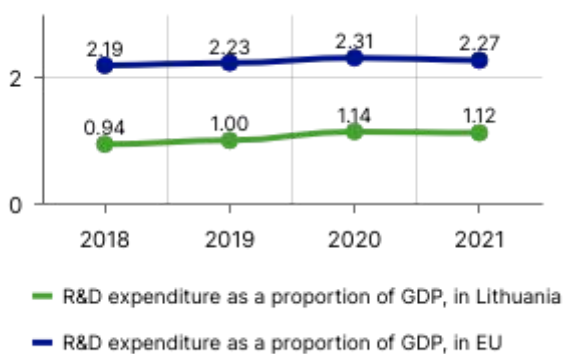
More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 9 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

SDG 9 focuses on sustainable growth in the economic sector, building resilient infrastructure that meets the needs of society, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, industrial growth and innovation.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

National R&D expenditure is crucial to achieving the SDG 9. The graph below shows R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP in Lithuania and the EU. The data show that R&D expenditure in Lithuania as a share of GDP increased between 2018 and 2021, but remained below the EU average, lagging behind by more than 1 percentage point.



35 FIGURE. R&D EXPENDITURE AS A PROPORTION OF GDP, IN LITHUANIA AND IN EU, 2018-2021 (%).
Source: State Data Agency, EUROSTAT, 2023.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

9 and other SDGs are pursued by Lithuania taking into account the environmental impact – the NCCMA has set goals and objectives of Lithuania's climate change management policy for 2030, 2040 and 2050 in the areas of climate change mitigation and adaptation to the effects of climate change. The Agenda aims to reduce GHG emissions by 30% by 2030 compared to 2005, including absorption by the land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector, by shifting economic sectors towards innovative, low-emission and environmentally friendly technologies and RES. The set goal is to achieve climate neutrality in 2050: a 100% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 compared to 1990 shifting to innovative, low-emission and environmentally friendly technologies and the use of RES in all sectors of the economy, with up to 20% covered by natural sinks in the sector of land use, land-use change and forestry, and the use of environmentally safe carbon capture and utilisation technologies, to compensate for GHG emissions in sectors where technological possibilities for zero-emissions have not been found.

The Agenda emphasises the goal of improving energy efficiency in the industrial sector Promoting the substitution of polluting technologies with less polluting ones, Apply circular economy principles Apply a wide range of innovative solutions introducing new business models, Promote zero and low waste production, reuse and recycle waste rational use of resources, secondary and climate-friendly raw materials.

Lithuania's policy on adaptation to climate change aims to reduce the current and foreseeable vulnerability of the country's natural ecosystems and economic sectors, to strengthen adaptive capacity, to cost-effectively mitigate risks and damage, and to maintain and increase resilience to climate change, in order to ensure favourable conditions for society to live in and to sustain economic activities, without jeopardizing food production. One of the key long-term directions for adaptation to climate change up to 2050 is to ensure the resilience of engineering infrastructure to climate change and the sustainable use of natural resources such as water, biodiversity and soil, to promote the development of green infrastructure (e.g. sustainable alternatives to grey infrastructure and resilience-enhancing measures for the living environment), and of other solutions based on natural processes.

The development of climate neutral industry and infrastructure is also highlighted in NECAP, which outlines measures for industrial modernisation and the transition to climate neutrality: The introduction of alternative fuels and the use of RES in industrial enterprises, improving energy efficiency reducing the use of coal, coke and lignite in industry, promoting the digitalisation of industry improving the resilience of technical infrastructure to climate change threats in the energy, transport and industrial sectors.

Under SDG 9, Lithuania aims to build high quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure. The goals of the NPP in the transport sector will be implemented through the 2022-2030 Transport Development Programme (replaced by the National Transport Development Programme 2014-2022), which aims to improve transport connectivity within the country, with EU Member States and third countries, ensure road safety improve digital connectivity and increase the efficiency of transport infrastructure use and value added in the sector, Increase the share of energy from RES and the use of alternative fuels in the transport sector, Promote sustainable intermodal mobility and reduce the environmental impact of transport; Develop and adapt the transport infrastructure necessary for international military mobility. In addition, the 2022-2030 Economic Transformation and Competitiveness Development Programme aims to implement measures that will contribute to the development of high quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure for economic development and the improvement of people's well-being, including the development of means of transport and capacity building.

The key changes for the next decade to ensure progress in the social, economic, environmental and security fields are set out in the three strategic goals (1, 5, 9) of the NPP. The 18th Government programme also sets promoting goals to create sustainable growth in the economic sector and a resilient infrastructure that meets the needs of society. The economic projects of future connectivity system, sustainable and accessible cities, vibrant innovation ecosystem, circular economy and climate neutral economy focus on the implementation of SDG 9.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

The proportion of rural inhabitants living within 2 km of a road all year round increased from 96.7% in 2011 to 97.3% in 2021 (target 9.1). The values of the other indicator,

which shows the number of passengers transported and the volume of freight transported by mode of transport, changed between 2018 and 2021 in some modes of transport: The number of passengers transported by mode of transport increased in water transport and decreased in rail, road and air transport. Meanwhile, the number of goods transported by road, water, air and pipeline increased, while the number of goods transported by rail decreased. Although COVID-19 and its mitigation measures had a significant impact on the indicator during this period, leading to lower population mobility, experts argue that the main structural problem in this area was the lack of detailed, long-term plans for infrastructure development and renewal – without continued investment and thoughtful planning, it was not possible to ensure the success and sustainability of infrastructure projects. The poor performance was also due to the fact that the existing rail infrastructure did not provide fast and comfortable connections, the quality of the technical parameters of some road infrastructure did not meet requirements and the lack of necessary infrastructure components. The necessary changes under the 2022-2030 Transport Development Programme are complicated by legal and environmental requirements that slow down the development of transport infrastructure – according to the Public Information Regulations approved by the Government, the spatial planning organiser is not provided the right conditions and opportunities to inform all stakeholders, which often prevents the implementation of spatial planning activities within the set deadlines. National, EU and international legislation may limit the possibilities to implement projects within the set deadlines, and the implementation of projects is determined by the long deadlines for carrying out procedures.

The decline in the number of passengers carried by air has been influenced by the low rating of Lithuanian airports in terms of connectivity and quality of service (Lithuania's air transport score in 2018 was 4.64, ranking 22nd among all EU countries). The existing airport infrastructure has not kept pace with the capacity of increased passenger flows – there are challenges in ensuring environmental and flight safety requirements, as well as a lack of direct flight connections and low frequency of existing and new flights. To address these challenges, the Lithuanian Transport Infrastructure Development Plan 2030 was adopted in 2022.

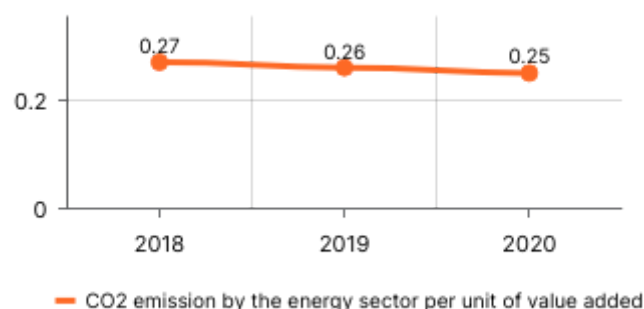
The Lithuanian transport sector is still dominated by state-owned companies whose legal status limits their ability to develop their assets, manage business risks more efficiently and implement new activities. The legal status also prevents them from attracting more diverse forms of capital and investment, expanding their range of services and competing independently with private equity firms. In order to give the less valued transport sectors a better chance to compete with their counterparts in other countries, it is necessary to review the legal, regulatory and fiscal environment in order to promote and increase the added value generated by these sectors.

However, it is noteworthy that measures have been developed to improve the accessibility of mobility in order to improve the results of the indicators of target 9.1. One such measure is the Sustainable Mobility Plans for Lithuanian cities. Such plans have been prepared by 20 municipalities and financed by EU funds. These plans give priority to public passenger transport and its infrastructure, pedestrian, driverless and micro-mobility infrastructure, and clean alternative fuel vehicles and their infrastructure. They also include a range of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainable mobility. By implementing the plans, municipalities are reducing pollution and noise from vehicles in cities, encouraging people to choose alternative modes of transport for their daily commute, and using and upgrading existing and new infrastructure to support these vehicles.

Although the development of Lithuania's transport infrastructure and the quality of services are still below the EU average and the potential of the transport system is not fully exploited, the Lithuanian transport sector has experienced sustained growth in recent years, with Lithuanian transport companies investing in and expanding their fleets, establishing themselves in EU markets and continuing to increase the transport sector's gross value added, exports of transport services and revenues.

Under goal 9, Lithuania also aims to promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and significantly increase the share of the industrial sector in terms of employment and GDP by 2030 (target 9.2). Partial progress has been made in this area for the period 2018-2021: Although the value added per capita generated by manufacturing increased and the number of people employed in manufacturing increased, the value added generated by manufacturing as a percentage of GDP decreased slightly during this period, from 16.6% to 16.1%.

The decline in the result for this indicator may have been strongly influenced by COVID-19 – although the impact of the pandemic in 2020 varied considerably across industries, the impact of the pandemic in 2020 was particularly strong in the services sector (accommodation and food services, arts, entertainment and recreation, other service activities and administrative and support service activities) recorded the largest reductions in value added. In 2021, the indicator shows an upward trend. In addition, the share of high and medium-high tech manufacturing in Lithuania's manufacturing value added increased between 2018 and 2021 (target 14.b.) from 23.7 to 31.5%.



36 FIGURE. CO2 EMISSION BY THE ENERGY SECTOR PER UNIT OF VALUE ADDED IN LITHUANIA, 2018-2020 (KILOTONNES / EUR MILLION OF GVA). Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

Lithuania aims to boost industrialisation and innovation by increasing opportunities for small industries and other enterprises (target 9.3). Some progress has been made in this area since 2018: Although the share of value added generated by small industrial enterprises in industrial value added decreased from 19.5% to 17.5% between 2018 and 2021, the share of small industrial enterprises with a loan or credit line decreased slightly during this period. Lithuania has performed well in many areas, including business internationalisation, entrepreneurship and responsive and accountable public administration, state aid and public procurement. However, it is notable that young enterprises face many barriers to integration into current markets. According to the experts, although there are agencies in Lithuania that support business growth and competitiveness, the system is fragmented, there is a lack of cooperation and knowledge sharing between agencies and there is a need to develop a consolidated service delivery system and a coherent strategic policy to support businesses. There is also a need for joint provision of financial and capacity building measures such as legal advice.

Under SDG 9, Lithuania also aims to modernise infrastructure and equip industrial sectors with new facilities to make them

more sustainable by 2030 (target 9.4). Progress in this area was made in 2018-2020: declined (from 0.27 to 0.25 kt/million € GDP) CO2 emissions per unit of value added from the energy sector. The modernisation of infrastructure and industry increases productivity, reduces service or repair costs, and makes more efficient use of resources, as well as promoting the reduction of environmental damage through sustainable production processes. This has been influenced by the measures taken to encourage industrial enterprises to increase their use of renewable energy sources. However, it should be noted that to further improve the indicator, it is necessary to reverse the preference for the use of primary raw materials and to ensure a holistic, inter-agency approach to a low carbon economy that meets the needs of the future by encouraging businesses to move towards a low carbon economy and by stimulating the supply of talent and skills for a smart economy.

In SDG 9, the indicator on the coverage of the entire country population with a mobile phone network was achieved during the reporting period (target 9.c). Currently, 99.99% of the population in Lithuania has access to a mobile phone network. Next-generation 5G connectivity is an important driver of economic progress and the basis for the development of a digital society. At the end of 2019, the Ministry of Transport and Communications prepared and presented at an international conference the roadmap for the development of 5G communications for 2020-2025 and from 2020 5G communication became available to consumers – 25.7% in 2020 and 31.9% in 2021 of the population lived in the 5G network area.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

It is important to note that the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis that Russia started in 2022 will most likely prompt Lithuania to update its legislation and provide opportunities for the industrial sector to modernise its infrastructure. This would help to meet the challenges posed by the drastic increase in energy prices, while investing in renewable energy to find alternatives to other primary energy sources. All this would lead to greater resource efficiency and cleaner and greener technologies and production processes in industry.

Inadequate financing remains one of the main challenges to progress on SDG 9, and Lithuania needs to invest further in improving the innovation ecosystem. Indicators such as exports of ICT services, patent applications, business expenditure on R&D and income from intellectual property are still among the 20 weakest indicators of Lithuania's GII, so further progress is needed.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Progress in the SDG 9 is assessed as moderate – the development of high quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, inclusive and environmentally friendly industrialisation, and innovation through the promotion of R&D and technological renewal in the industrial sector are essential for economic development and human well-being.

In Lithuania, CO2 emissions per unit of value added from the energy sector decreased between 2018 and 2020. In order to further improve the indicator, it is necessary to change the preference for the use of primary raw materials. In addition, although the development of Lithuania's transport infrastructure and the quality of services are still below the EU average and the potential of the transport system is not fully exploited, the sustainable growth of Lithuania's transport sector in recent years has been driven by the EU's economic recovery as well as Lithuania's sustainable urban mobility plans. It should be noted that Lithuania's vast research and experimental development potential is not fully exploited to generate real economic benefits.

In the implementation of SDG 9, it is recommended to encourage businesses to move towards a circular and climate-neutral economy, and to increase the supply of talent and competencies needed for Industry 4.0, automation and robotics, to ensure the coordinated use of R&D&I infrastructure; it is therefore recommended to allocate the largest investments to overcoming it by 2030. In the Lithuanian transport sector, changes to the legal framework are needed to enable more effective change in the connectivity sector.



Source: Renatas Venclova.

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



SDG 10. REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Reducing poverty in the country
- Strengthening the framework for the integration of immigrants
- Ensure national preparedness for crisis situations
- Reduce income disparities between regions

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

10.1. In 2019, the growth rate of per capita household income for the poorest 40% of the population was 8.2%, 1.7 percentage points lower than the growth rate of per capita household income for the total population (which was 9.9%).

10.2. From 2018, the at-risk-of-poverty rate (the share of the population living below 50% of the median income) in Lithuania fell by a fifth to 12.4% in 2021 (in 2018: 15.8%). Implemented reforms have contributed to a significant reduction in child poverty, but at-risk-of-poverty among the elderly remains a major challenge.

10.4. Income of working people in Lithuania continues to grow as a share of GDP (from 44.8% in 2018 to 48% in 2021), reflecting the country's improving quality of life and economic situation. Income inequality has also continued to fall since 2018.

10.5. A problem that has emerged in recent years is the rapid annual increase in nominal house prices (7.4% in 2018 and 19.8% in 2021), however, the level of non-performing loans (NPLs) in the banking sector continues to decline.

10.6. Lithuania has maintained consistent representation in international organisations for the period 2018-2021.

10.7. Lithuania is facing a growing number of irregular migrants, in particular due to the irregular migration crisis caused by the Belarusian regime.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 10 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

Reducing inequality is one of the most important challenges for Lithuania, as the problem of inequality is closely linked to the challenges of poverty reduction and ensuring equal opportunities. Reducing inequalities is an important goal to ensure equal opportunities and conditions for people to participate in society and the labour market.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

In 2018, Lithuania has made the most progress in the EU in reducing inequality in income distribution. The gap between the disposable income of the highest 20% of the population and the disposable income of the lowest 20% of the population has narrowed by almost sixfold, from 7.09 to 6.14 times, between 2018 and 2021. Despite this significant progress, income inequality in Lithuania remains one of the highest in the EU, ranking fifth in the EU after Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia and Spain, and a fifth above the EU average (which was 4.97 times higher in 2021).

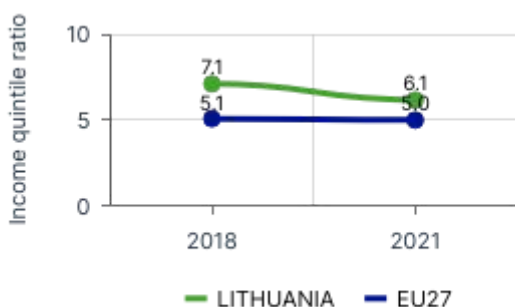


FIGURE 37. INCOME DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTRY, 2018-2021 (INCOME QUINTILE RATIO BETWEEN TOP AND BOTTOM QUINTILES)
Source: EUROSTAT, 2023.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

In order to achieve the SDG 10, Lithuania's first priority is to put in place an effective legislative framework to reduce inequalities in the country. The strategic goal of the NPP „To improve the social well-being and inclusion of the population, strengthen health and improve Lithuania's demographic situation” states that income inequality in Lithuania is caused by large disparities in the employment of low-skilled and high-skilled workers, limited progressivity of the tax system and an inadequate social protection system. In this regard, the problem of inequality has been addressed by improving the structure of the tax and benefit system and increasing the progressivity of the tax system. The aim is to bring social support as close to the individual as possible and to better adapt it to the needs, situation and potential of the individual. To improve the situation, it is foreseen to increase the participation of the unemployed in the labour market, to make better use of the potential of available labour resources and to address the shortage of skilled workers. Previously mentioned 2021-2030 Development programme for reducing income inequality aims to increase the progressivity of the tax system and improve the structure of the tax system, address the methodology for setting the minimum monthly wage, the personal income tax system, the disproportionate remuneration of public sector employees, the unproductive structure of the economy and tax evasion.

In the 2022-2030 Regional Development Programme, among the identified regional development challenges, 2 address the different economic growth potential of regions, uneven economic development and the higher risk of poverty and social exclusion that characterise individual regions. These challenges will be addressed through the Regional Development Plans prepared and approved by the Regional Development Councils, in the framework of the implementation of Strategic Objective 7 of the NPP.

Also important is the horizontal principle of “equal opportunities for all”, already mentioned in the NPP, which ensures that the implementation of the NPP objectives and the preparation of national development programmes must take into account the needs of people with disabilities, women and men, different age groups, national minorities and other groups at risk of discrimination, and must provide for measures and indicators to implement the principle of equal opportunities.

Lithuania's fight against inequality goes beyond the economic dimension to include other forms of inequality such as discrimination. The Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-Discrimination 2021-2023 is important in this area, as it aims to promote respect for human beings, ensure the implementation of the provisions of legislation establishing the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities, raise public legal awareness, increase public understanding of discrimination, inform the public about the measures taken to promote equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and strengthen inter-institutional cooperation in the field of equal opportunities. The Social Mobilisation Development Programme 2021-2030 also addresses the challenges of discrimination, gender inequality and domestic violence. This development programme implements the objectives of the NPP to improve the well-being of people with disabilities and their families, the elderly and other vulnerable and socially excluded groups, and to strengthen attitudes of social participation, social responsibility and community spirit in society.

The Law on Equal Opportunities also aims to ensure the implementation of the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, which establish equality of persons and prohibit the restriction and privileging of human rights on the grounds of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, religion, beliefs or opinions. The 2022 amendments to this Law provide protection against harassment and sexual harassment in the field of consumer rights and organisations and associations, and enable the Office of the Ombudsman for Equal Opportunities to deal with a wider range of complaints from citizens. The amendments to the law have also extended the protection against persecution through a complaint – now the protection against persecution also extends to education, consumer protection, organisations and associations.

Lithuania also contributes to reducing inequalities internationally: The Strategic Action Plan 2021-2023 of the MSSL includes a measure to transfer Lithuania's experience in the field of social protection to the EU Eastern Partnership countries and other developing countries through events, visits or consultations with the EU Eastern Partnership countries.

The implementation of SDG 10 and other SDGs also aims to involve the public – the MSSL has a separate NGO Development Unit, which aims to encourage state and municipal institutions to consult with civil society and involve NGOs in decision-making processes, and to plan the development of NGOs to ensure greater public participation and quality institutional partnerships with NGOs. One of the main principles of cooperation with the NGO sector is the launch of public calls for NGO projects, which offer a range of incentives for project implementation.

RISK OF POVERTY IN LITHUANIA IS DECREASING

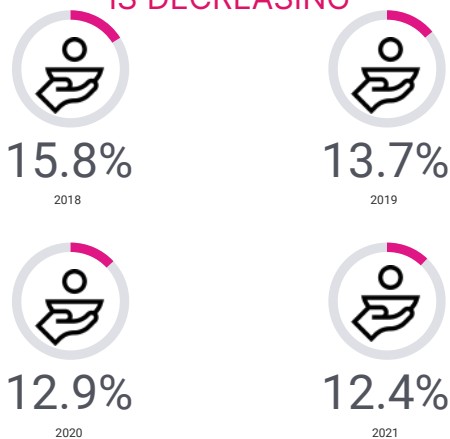


FIGURE 38. RISK OF POVERTY IN LITHUANIA, 2018-2021.
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

As part of SDG 10, Lithuania aims to reduce inequalities among the population, and progress has been made in this area since 2018. The at-risk-of-poverty rate (the share of the population living below 50% of the median income) in Lithuania will decrease steadily between 2018 and 2021 (from 15.8% to 12.4%), which may be due to the implementation of the measures of the MSSL Strategic Action Plans 2018-2020 and beyond, aimed at reducing poverty and integrating the socially vulnerable population into the labour market, providing quality and efficient social services, and others. Also relevant are the types of support mentioned in the description of SDG 1, such as cash social assistance, child allowances, as well as public housing assistance and social support for learners. On the other hand, poverty remains a major concern for people aged 65 and over, with an at-risk-of-poverty rate for this group of 21.3% in 2021, 8.9 percentage points higher than the overall national at-risk-of-poverty rate.

As Lithuania's economy continues to grow, the gap in purchasing power between the population and the EU average is narrowing. Between 2018 and 2021, Lithuania's gap with the EU narrowed, as measured by GDP per capita adjusted for purchasing power: In 2018, the difference was €5,600 or 22.7%, while in 2021 it was €3,400 or 11.7% (see Figure 39).

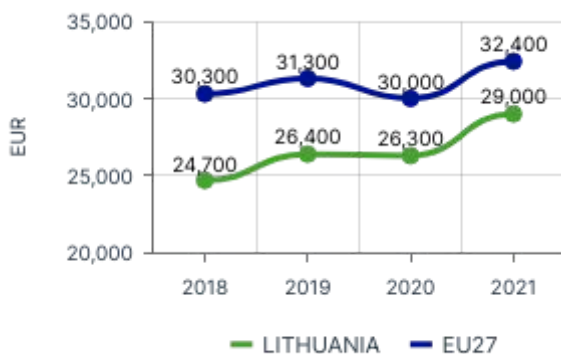


FIGURE 39. COMPARISON OF GDP PER CAPITA ADJUSTED FOR PURCHASING POWER PARITY (EUR), LITHUANIA AND EU (27) 2018-2021
Source: EUROSTAT, 2023

Although the pandemic period is often associated with an increase in income inequality in EU, a decrease in the Gini coefficient of both pre-tax and after-tax income is observed in Lithuania in 2019-2020 (see Figure 40), showing that income inequality has continued to decrease in Lithuania. This has been underpinned by the anti-crisis packages, many of which have benefited from EU financial support. On the other hand, it is important to note that during the pandemic period, wages in some occupations grew faster than in others, so while there is an overall downward trend in inequality between 2019 and 2020, certain areas (for example, between big cities and rural areas) have contributed to increasing inequality. Changes in personal income tax, which increased the amount of tax-free income in order to raise the incomes of the lowest earners, have also had a positive impact on reducing income inequality.

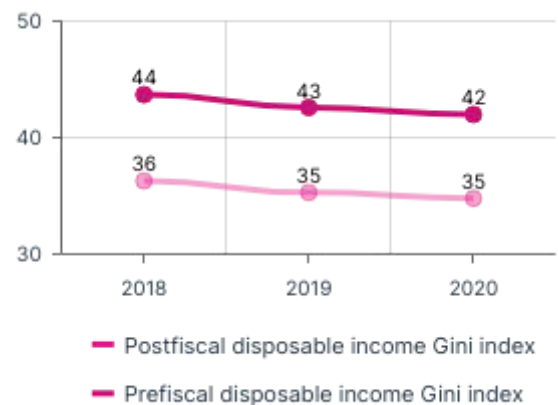


FIGURE 40. POSTFISCAL AND PREFISCAL DISPOSABLE INCOME GINI INDEX IN LITHUANIA, 2018-2020 (%).
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Despite the positive developments outlined above, it is important to note that the level of poverty risk in Lithuania is still quite high compared to other EU countries, and in order to further improve the indicator it is necessary to strengthen the country's social security system and improve the structure of the social benefits system, increase the progressivity of the tax system, promote the growth of the minimum monthly wage and address the problems of the unproductive structure of the economy (unproductive sectors) and the problem of tax evasion. It is also important to address the significant regional disparities in Lithuania, which also contribute to income inequality and uneven development across the country. In 2021, the per capita purchasing power standard compared to the EU average was 133% in the Capital region and in the region of Central and Western Lithuania, only 72% of the EU average. Again, it is important to note the high inflation and uneven wage growth in recent years, which likely contributed to rising poverty risk and income inequality rates.

Given the increase in immigration in recent years, especially due to the hybrid attack on Lithuania and other EU countries in the region by Belarus from 2021 onwards, it is important to strengthen the system of integration of immigrants, which in Lithuania is still strict and does not allow to take advantage of the contribution of immigrants to the national economy and the implementation of the Agenda. (Lithuania ranks last in the EU in naturalisation or granting citizenship to immigrants).

It is important to understand the contribution of legal and manageable migration to a country's sustainable development, both in terms of economic benefits (remittances, arrival of workers and businesses) and intellectual benefits (arrival of researchers and scientists and the innovations they create). The MSSL Action Plan for the Integration of Foreigners into Society 2018-2020 sets out a number of measures to make progress in this area, but often at the end of the integration period it is still difficult for a foreigner who does not speak the language well, has no home, is not always firmly established in the labour market and does not have relatives or other support to survive.

Migration is a global phenomenon and Lithuania and the international community are constantly confronted with the challenges of mass, uncontrolled and irregular migration. In this context, the UN Agreement on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which sets out 23 aspirations for better management of migration flows, is becoming increasingly relevant. However, further progress on integration is needed in the light of the increasing number of people immigrating to Lithuania and Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, which has triggered the biggest migration crisis in Europe since the Second World War.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Lithuania's progress towards achieving the SDG 10 can be assessed as moderate. Since 2018, there has been progress in reducing inequalities in income distribution and regulation, as well as in reducing the at-risk-of-poverty rate and Lithuania's purchasing power gap compared to the EU average. However, despite these positive developments, it is important to note that the at-risk-of-poverty rate in Lithuania is still quite high compared to other EU countries, and there are a number of key challenges that hinder further progress on the SDG 10: Lithuania has large income disparities between regions, the at-risk-of-poverty rate remains quite high (especially among the elderly), the country's immigrant integration system needs more comprehensive changes, and the state's crisis preparedness is still not fully implemented.

This SDG requires coherent inter-institutional work, which has not yet been achieved – there is still a strict division of responsibilities between ministries and a lack of cooperation on broader issues such as inequality, which requires a broader and more complex approach. To achieve this goal, it is also important to effectively involve municipalities and their institutions, which have a significant impact on tackling inequalities at the local level. While progress has been steady in recent years, there is a need to continue to focus on reducing poverty levels in the country, as well as to strengthen the integration system for immigrants and to mobilise international organisations and NGOs providing assistance to migrants (e.g. International Organisation for Migration, UNHCR) in the face of increasing levels of immigration. We need to reduce development disparities between different regions of Lithuania by encouraging investment outside the major cities. Finally, it is important to ensure the country's preparedness for crisis situations, building on the practices used during COVID-19 to manage a pandemic

GOOD PRACTICE

Every year, MSSL launches the social initiative "Compare Clothes, Not People" to reduce inequalities between members of society, sending a sensitive message. The campaign promotes the idea that everyone can be an equal colleague with the right competences and that people should not be intimidated by their background, life experiences, physical characteristics or other features. Everyone can contribute to building tolerance and respect for the person next to them who has a different experience and background. The campaign has produced videos and invites employers and citizens to express solidarity with people experiencing social exclusion by wearing the campaign's symbol of odd clothes.



Source: P. Peleckis, 2019.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



SDG 11. MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Sustainable urban development for inclusive and sustainable living conditions
- Provision of and access to public services by place of residence

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

11.1. Targeted social policies in Lithuania are not sufficient to ensure access to decent, safe and affordable housing for all (a slight increase in homelessness is recorded: 0.03% in 2011 and 0.05% in 2021).

11.2. Smart mobility and ITS solutions do not yet allow citizens to use public transport conveniently, both in Lithuanian cities and at regional level: The number of households that say it is very easy or easy to use public transport services is decreasing (79.7% in 2012, 79.02% in 2021).

11.3. The opening of data, the introduction of uniform public consultation practices, the promotion of openness in public governance processes and the involvement of the public in these processes have enabled greater public participation in decision-making processes, but only before the pandemic – in 2018, 34% of the population had been involved in local public affairs in the last 12 months, 38% in 2020 and 33% in 2021.

11.4. In Lithuania, the management, updating and promotion of cultural heritage is ensured and the resources allocated to this area are increasing (in 2018 – €50.37 million, in 2021– €69,49 million).

11.5. The restructuring of crisis and emergency management and the establishment of the National Crisis Management Centre creates preconditions for the coordination of different types of crises and emergency management. Emergencies in the country (COVID-19, fire in Alytus, etc.) required larger allocation of funds from the municipal reserve (in 2018 – €293.8 thousand, in 2021 – €1.5 million).

11.6. Air quality in Lithuanian cities is deteriorating: Annual average concentrations of fine particulate matter (PM10) in urban background air quality measuring stations are increasing (18.49 µg/m³ in 2018, 21.83 µg/m³ in 2021).

11. a. As of 2015, the vast majority of the country's population lives in cities that implement urban and regional development plans that take into account population projections and resource needs.

11. b. Since 2012, all municipalities across the country have been preparing and implementing emergency prevention plans.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 11 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

Lithuania aims to make cities vibrant centres of economic growth, cultural and social life that promote healthy lifestyles, the development of green infrastructure, nature-based solutions, responsible production and consumption, and ensure the quality of the natural environment, creating conditions for mitigating climate change and increasing resilience to adverse climate change.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

At the EU level, Lithuania, together with institutions, organisations and cities from other Member States, participates in the EU Urban Partnership on Sustainable Land Use and Natural Solutions, which aims to improve the environment and quality of cities through urban processes. Both the EU Urban Agenda and the New Urban Agenda share the same vision of an open and transparent multi-level and cross-sectoral governance approach to achieve the broader goals of the EU Urban Agenda. While implementing SDG 11, Lithuania has shown progress on a number of challenges, but there are still challenges where Lithuania needs to make progress.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

SDG 11 goal is enshrined in several of the strategic objectives of the NDP and in other longer-term national strategic documents. The White Paper on Lithuanian Regional Policy enshrines the goal of harmonising the visions and actions of national and local authorities, as well as social and economic partners, in order to achieve territorial cohesion. The Recommendations on the Main Directions of Lithuanian Urban Policy and their Implementation identify the importance of SDGs for the planning and development of urbanised and urbanising areas. The Comprehensive Plan of the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania which is a spatial planning document that defines the directions of the spatial development of the territory and the functional priorities of the use of the territories, ensures the compatibility of the strategic planning documents in force in Lithuania and those under development that have a spatial/territorial expression, aims to develop cities as more sustainable, climate-resilient, compact and in accordance with the principles of the circular economy. It should be noted that this plan is considered as a single national framework, ensuring the spatial integrity of all national strategies.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

Lithuania aims to ensure access to decent, safe and affordable housing and basic services for all by 2030 (target 11.1). Lithuania's targeted social policy, which promotes the supply of affordable quality housing and social housing through rent subsidies for disadvantaged social groups, young families, single mothers and fathers and large families, is crucial for reducing waiting lists for social housing and ensuring decent housing conditions. However, it should be noted that with an increase in the number of people waiting for social housing (10,486 households waiting for housing assistance in 2018, 10,993 persons/families waiting in 2019) and a slight increase in the number of homeless people compared to the permanent population (0.03% in 2012, 0.05% in 2021), country's social policy is seen as insufficient and homelessness is being managed rather than tackled.

The challenges of housing exclusion and increasing homelessness need to be addressed through integrated and sustainable solutions that include prevention and support, increasing the social housing stock, finding alternative accommodation and improving access to rent subsidies for single people. In order to ensure more effective and person-centred services, it is appropriate to involve NGOs as partners.

In order to increase the use of sustainable transport systems by the Lithuanian population (target 11.2), particular attention is paid to the development of public transport systems, both at urban and regional level. It should be noted that the number of private vehicles grew rapidly between 2018 and 2021: According to the data of 2018, the country had 512 cars per 1,000 inhabitants, in 2021 – 574 cars. Lithuania is above the EU average (544 passenger cars per 1 000 inhabitants in 2018 and 567 in 2021). The dominance of private transport for individual journeys is not part of sustainable urban development and makes it economically, socially and environmentally unsustainable, which is why the country's population is encouraged to use public transport. However, in Lithuania it is still not convenient to plan door-to-door journeys by public transport: In 2021, 79.02% of households say it is very easy or easy to use public transport, a decrease of 0.58 percentage points compared to 2012 (79.7% in 2012). In order to increase the population's use of sustainable transport systems and strengthen public transport services, Lithuania is implementing smart mobility solutions, including Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) solutions, with a strong focus on the integrity of intermodal connections and routes, thus ensuring connectivity with other municipalities and contributing to sustainable mobility. At the same time, the quality of roads is also being addressed: Improving the pavement condition index, applying the principles of compactness in the planning of the country's urbanised areas and in the development of urban structures at international and regional levels.



FIGURE 41. NUMBER OF PRIVATE VEHICLES PER 1 000 INHABITANTS IN EU27 AND LITHUANIA, 2018-2021.
Source: State Data Agency, EUROSTAT, 2023.

Special emphasis is placed on planning sustainable, compact and comprehensive cities (target 11.3). Demographic changes in the country are leading to a decrease in the number of settlements and a weakening and thinning of the settlement network. As of 2018, the population density in the built-up areas of Lithuania's 5 largest cities has slightly increased (38 inhabitants/ha in 2018, 39 inhabitants/ha in 2021), both within and across Lithuania (42.9 thousand/1 km² in 2018, 43 thousand/1 km² in 2021). However, in the European context, Lithuania's indicators of both built-up area and population density are among the lowest, and there are no significant, globally noticeable development processes.

In order to achieve sustainable and inclusive urban development, intersectoral synergies are created using the solutions identified in the Lithuanian Comprehensive Plan to create conditions for the emergence of new trends in economic development, demographic and social development, autonomy and responsibility of municipalities in the regions. The focus is on encouraging local governments to create liveable cities and towns by designing strategic urban development zones, infrastructure corridors, public spaces, public construction sites and green infrastructure to meet public needs, involving citizens in decision-making processes.

The opening of data, the introduction of uniform public consultation practices, the promotion of openness in public management processes and the involvement of the public in these processes have enabled greater public participation in decision-making. Between 2018 and 2020, there has been an increase in the indicator “percentage of population involved in local public affairs in the last 12 months” (34% in 2018, 38% in 2020), which is not high compared to Western and Northern European countries. The 33% decrease in this indicator observed in Lithuania in 2021 is attributed to the consequences of the application of COVID-19 and related restrictions. In this context, further initiatives to involve the public in public affairs, including education, communication and institutional capacity building, are encouraged, as well as the creation of opportunities for greater involvement of NGOs in public governance, and the use of tools and IT solutions to increase the accessibility of institutional information.

Lithuania's urban centres are planned according to the principles of compactness to ensure access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces (target 11.7). This means that the focus is not only on the regeneration of urban areas, local services, optimal transport infrastructure, efficient mobility and sustainable housing, but also on urban green and public spaces, applying the principles of universal design and integrated planning, and the humanisation of public spaces and streets, so that the same environment and infrastructure can be used by all, without excluding special needs. Such planning makes it possible to achieve inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and settlements.

The country focuses on ensuring a polycentric hierarchical urban structure that creates the conditions for the balanced development of territories (target 11.a). The urban agglomerations of metropolitan centres have a significant impact on the viability of regional-level elements of the urban fabric (transport, energy and engineering hubs, public services, resource use), so multi-municipal solutions, public-private partnerships and the development of multi-municipal solutions are used to maintain regional urban fabrics. From 2019, there is a slight increase in the share of the population living in small and medium-sized cities (up to 100 000 inhabitants) that implement urban and regional development plans that take into account population projections and resource needs, which decreases by 0.6 percentage points in 2021 (75.7% in 2018, 76.2% in 2019, 76.1% in 2020, 75.6% in 2021). This dynamic is partly due to COVID-19, a negative demographic change.

Focus on reducing the negative per capita environmental impact of cities (target 11.6). Only 4% of Lithuania's territory is urbanised, it is in the main areas of movement, that specific environmental problems such as poor air quality, noise, high greenhouse gas emissions, waste and wastewater generation, etc. are faced. In 2022 the majority of monitoring stations recorded lower annual levels of fine particulate matter (PM10) than in 2018, the annual average concentrations of fine particulate matter (PM10) at urban background air quality monitoring stations are decreasing (in 2018 - $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$: 18.49, in 2022 - $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$: 21.83). Further progress requires further environmental (e.g. establishment of low emission zones in city centres), infrastructural changes (e.g. low-emission heating solutions, concentration of industrial zones in the periphery), integration of sustainable mobility plans with a special focus on urban planning and renovation, and development and application of nature-based solutions in cities.

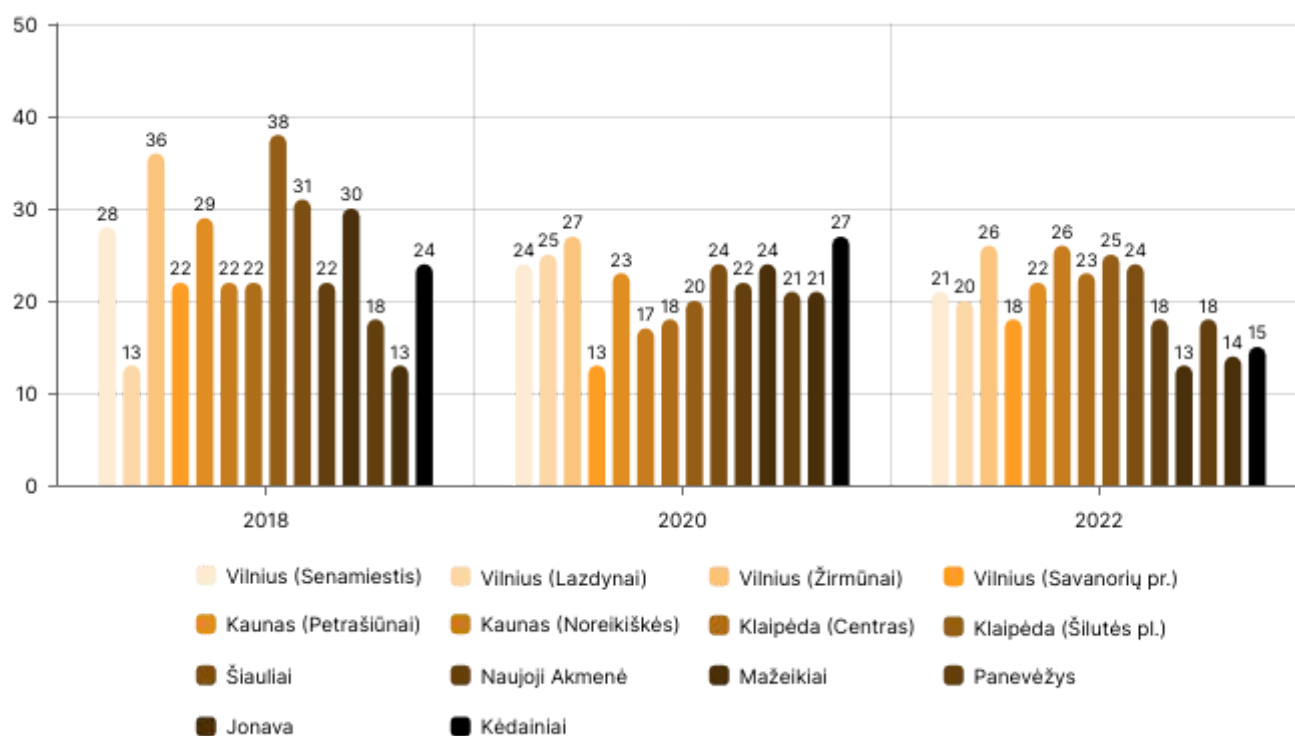


FIGURE 42. ANNUAL MEAN CONCENTRATIONS OF FINE PARTICULATE MATTER (PM10) AT URBAN BACKGROUND AIR QUALITY MONITORING STATIONS IN LITHUANIA, 2018-2022. Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

Lithuania is making progress on many of the SDG 11 targets. Since 2018, the majority of the Lithuanian population (99%) have access to a municipal waste management system. While the municipal waste service is being developed, it is also important to reduce the amount of waste generated, to properly sort the waste generated, to encourage sustainable consumption by the public, to choose durable, reusable, used and/or worn items, products, packaging, and to make use of little-used items and equipment through rental and repair services. Reducing food waste in the country is important both in households and in the food industry. In accordance with the principles of the circular economy, it is necessary to increase the volume of sorting by preparing waste for reuse, to seek rational, innovative solutions for recycling a larger volume of all types of waste and returning it to production in the form of raw materials, and to apply appropriate waste management.



91% OF LITHUANIANS SEPARATE THE WASTE THEY PRODUCE IN THEIR DAILY ACTIVITIES

In accordance with the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Lithuania has consistently fulfilled its obligations to international organisations to preserve the values of cultural and natural heritage (target 11.4). The country promotes the management, updating and enhancement of these values by ensuring coherent implementation of the commitments of international organisations and creating incentives for managers of cultural heritage sites and private investment and involving local communities. Local communities are involved and tourism and services are intensified to increase knowledge of cultural and heritage attractions. From 2018 to 2019, there is an increase in the national and municipal budget allocations for the preservation of cultural heritage, with a slight decrease in 2020, which can be explained by the reallocation of funds to address the consequences of COVID-19 (in 2018 - €50.37 million, in 2019 - €62.75 million, in 2020 - €57.77 million, in 2021 - €69,49 million).

Between 2020 and 2022, the management of situations related to natural disasters and the resulting deaths and people affected by them became a major concern (target 11.5). The increasing frequency of natural disasters and emergencies has led to a significant increase in the amount of money allocated by municipalities to respond to emergencies and/or extreme events, to deal with their consequences and to partially compensate for the damage caused. In 2018, €293.8 thousand of such funds were allocated, in 2020 - €1,261.2 thousand, and in 2021 - €1,535 thousand. Tackling the drivers of climate change is crucial to increasing the resilience of cities to the threats of climate change (target 11.b). Climate change solutions are integrated into national and regional programmes for natural/natural hazard management, emergency prevention plans, urban greening plans, reducing and absorbing GHG emissions and urban "heat island" risk by providing permeable green stormwater storage areas (e.g. artificial water bodies), permeable ground surfaces.

The consequences of COVID-19 (2,266 deaths in 2020 and 7,018 in 2021) have accelerated the development and implementation of a planned crisis and emergency management system. In 2022, the Law on Crisis Management and Civil Protection was adopted, and the National Centre for Crisis Management was established at the government level to become the main coordinating body for the management of crises and emergencies of all kinds in the country. It should be emphasised that the system under development ensures not only coordinated state preparedness for crisis and emergency management, but also faster and more expert and specialised decision-making on crisis and emergency management, recovery and damage reduction measures.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Challenges remain in the implementation of SDG 11, hindering better progress towards the goal. The country faces the challenge of implementing sustainable urban development, inclusive and sustainable living conditions and the provision of public services based on where people live. Developing and implementing strategic changes to plan for greener cities and towns and to bring public services closer to people help to reduce these challenges. Ensuring that all sections of society, regardless of their economic situation, have access to quality public services is essential for sustainable and balanced urban development.

One of the main challenges for the implementation of the SDG 11 in Lithuania is related to the development of the public transport system to ensure the application of intelligent mobility, ITS solutions, the creation of different transport connections and thus the access of the Lithuanian population to these services.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

The country's progress on the SDG 11 is considered moderate. Lithuania's strategic agenda includes changes that promote targeted social policies, sustainable urban and settlement development, and the absolute majority of the population lives in cities that are implementing urban and settlement development plans. The country is making efforts to ensure sustainable living conditions through viable urban planning, but the measures taken are not sufficient: The country has not yet ensured access for all to decent, safe and affordable housing, public transport is not convenient for residents and quality public services are not easily accessible. The development of sustainable cities also involves the involvement of members of society in the decision-making process, social responsibility and safety. In Lithuania, the opening up of data and the introduction of a unified practice of public consultation allowed for greater public involvement in decision-making processes, but only until the pandemic. The country's experience in managing COVID-19 and other emergencies has accelerated the development and implementation of a planned crisis and emergency management system. In the context of the increasing risks of natural disasters linked to climate change, and in order to ensure disaster risk prevention, it is recommended to continue interregional cooperation, in particular in the field of civil protection and emergency response policy, with a view to major or regional natural disasters in the preparation, planning and implementation of effective warning systems, response and post-disaster recovery.

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



SDG 12. ENSURE SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION PATTERNS

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Implementation of circular economy (closing the loop) and circular business models.
- Promoting the sustainable use of resources and reducing consumption.
- Promoting sustainable tourism that is compatible with environmental enhancement and community cultures.

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

12.1. Lithuania is implementing a ten-year framework of programmes for sustainable consumption and production: the transition to a circular and climate-neutral economy is enshrined in the NPP, the NCCMA is prepared, the State Waste Prevention and Management Plan, the Roadmap for Lithuania's Industrial Transition to a Circular Economy, and the Action Plan for Lithuania's Transition to a Circular Economy by 2035 is being prepared.

12.2. Lithuania's domestic material consumption indicator increases due to low circularity of material cycles (17.7 tonnes per capita in 2018 and 20.7 tonnes per capita in 2021).

12.4. The amount of hazardous waste generated in the country is increasing (64 tonnes per 1,000 inhabitants in 2018 and 72 tonnes in 2021). The use of hazardous waste materials to manage the hazardous waste generated is increasing (47.4% in 2018 and 50% in 2020), while the incineration of hazardous waste is decreasing (from 6.4% in 2018 to 5.9% in 2020), as well as the export of such waste (25.9% of hazardous waste exported in 2018 and 24.1% in 2020).

12.5. The amount of municipal waste per capita is changing (464 kg of municipal waste per capita in 2018, 483 kg in 2020 and 479 kg in 2021). Notably, in 2021, Lithuania has seen a decrease, while the EU has maintained a steady increase. However, the recycling of waste generated is lower: in 2018, the recycling rate of municipal waste as a percentage of municipal waste generated was 52.58%, in 2021 it was 44.3%.

12.7. Lithuania makes a breakthrough in green public procurement: The value of these purchases compared to the total value of public procurements increased from 9.3% in 2018 to 60.2% in 2022, and steadily rising further.

12.8. Since 2010, sustainable development has been implemented in national policies and curricula for teacher training.

12.a. Renewable energy production in Lithuania is increasing: RES electricity generation capacity per capita increased from 299.5 W in 2018 to 397 W in 2021.

12.b. The implementation of standard accounting tools to monitor the economic and environmental aspects of tourism has changed: while the number of Tourism Satellite Account Tables has remained stable (7 in 2018-2020), the Environmental Account Tables have been discontinued as of 2019 (2 in 2018, 0 in 2020).

12.c. The country is rationalising inefficient fossil fuel subsidies: The share of fossil fuel subsidies (consumption and production) in GDP has decreased from 0.63% in 2018 to 0.53% in 2020.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 12 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

The transition to a circular and climate-neutral economy is considered a strategic priority on the country's strategic agenda (e.g. NPP, provisions of the NCCMA, etc.) The country's target is to make the Lithuanian economy fully circular and climate neutral by 2050. On this basis, the importance of developing the circular economy is also highlighted in other strategic documents of the country, in different directions. A holistic view of the circular economy aims to maximise the value of resources based on a vision of a sustainable society that takes into account environmental, social, cultural and financial resources and products.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Lithuania is making good progress in waste management as well as in resource and energy efficiency. In 2022, Lithuania was ranked 31st out of 180 countries in the Environmental Well-being Index (which ranks countries' environmental performance), with a score of 55.9 (compared to 29th place and 69.33 in 2018).



FIGURE 43. LITHUANIA IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE INDEX, 2018-2022.
Source: YALE, 2023

Lithuania's economy has significant potential for circularity: Reducing GHG emissions, saving material resources, stimulating job creation, saving costs in a wide range of industries – all of it can be achieved with the right regulatory framework, increased resource efficiency, a range of fiscal incentives, and technology and innovation to boost competitiveness.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

The circular economy policy developed at EU level also has a significant impact on Lithuania's actions at national level to create a sustainable, low-carbon, resource-efficient and competitive economy. The strategic documents (such as established NPP, NCCMA or Circular Economy Action Plan, which is currently preparing) enshrine the aspiration to become a fully circular Lithuanian economy by 2050. This aim creates a need for enhanced planning and implementation of the circular economy agenda in the six intervention areas: Circular Industry, Circular Construction, Circular Bioeconomy, Circular Transport, Circular Waste and Circular Consumption. Longstanding tripartite, nationwide sectoral agreements on increasing emission taxes, public subsidies and green innovation policies, as well as close cooperation between science, business and public authorities, ensure a smooth transition to a climate-neutral and circular economy. This will increase the competitiveness of domestic companies and meet the highest international sustainability standards, while decoupling the country's economic growth from the consumption of natural resources.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

To achieve sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources (target 12.2), Lithuania promotes sustainable, resource-efficient and nature-friendly extraction methods and secondary use of raw materials, as well as replaces exhaustible resources with renewable ones, develops a more efficient land management system and conducts research of geological processes and phenomena and characteristics of the earth. Extending producer responsibility by removing tax incentives for fossil fuels aims to reflect the true cost of natural resources.

Lithuania's material use footprint in 2018 was 19.8 tonnes per capita. The Raw Material Consumption Indicator (RMC) (a material footprint indicator that shows the amount of material, in raw material equivalent, required to produce a product in a given geographical area) was 20.2 tonnes per capita in 2018, rising to 22.7 tonnes per capita in 2020, significantly above the EU average (EU average: 14.5 tonnes per capita in 2018 and 13.7 tonnes in 2020). This can be explained by the production of low value-added products, the prevalence of outdated and/or resource-inefficient technologies, and the limited use of digital solutions, leading to relatively low resource productivity in Lithuania. The material productivity indicator was 0.92 €/kg in 2018 and 0.79 €/kg in 2021. Compared to the EU average (2.09 €/kg in 2021), the difference is significant. In this context, it is important to focus on the development of new business models and the use of modern, low-carbon, low-emission, digital technologies and their supporting processes to promote the use of resources that create more value.

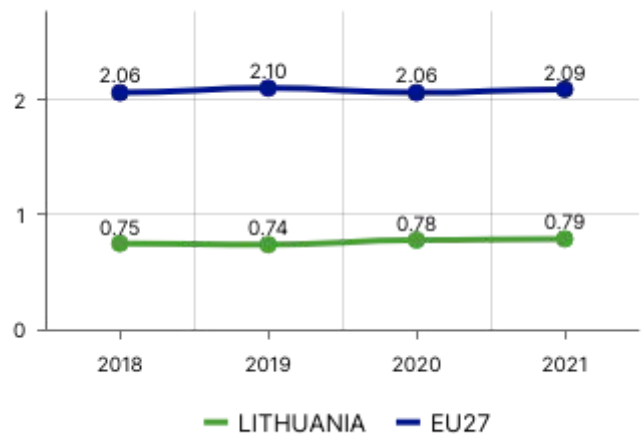


FIGURE 44. MATERIAL PRODUCTIVITY (RATIO OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT TO DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION OF MATERIALS (GDP/MV)) IN THE EU AND LITHUANIA, 2018-2021.
Source: EUROSTAT, 2023

There is a growing need for sustainable green energy to reduce CO2 emissions and contribute to the fight against climate change (target 12.a). By developing green electricity generation and following the principles of gradual integration of RES into the market, transparency and active participation of energy consumers, Lithuania aims to generate 30% of the country's electricity consumption from RES by 2025 and 50% by 2030.

Renewable electricity generation capacity in watts per capita has increased by 3% since 2018 (299.5 watts per capita in 2018 and 397 watts per capita in 2021). The main thrusts for achieving the RES strategic goal are focused on increasing the share of electricity consumption from RES and maximising the share of RES in district heating for district heat consumers, individually heated households and individually heated non-domestic consumers.

The removal of fossil fuel subsidies, together with environmental taxes, contributes to a circular economy (target 12.c). In Lithuania, fossil fuel subsidies (for consumption and production) have decreased from USD 0.2898 billion in 2018 to USD 0.2549 billion USD in 2020. The goal is to phase out fossil fuel subsidies from 2023, while increasing the excise tax on diesel. These plans are aimed at preserving the competitiveness of the Lithuanian economy, which is why the EU has been actively involved in the creation of a carbon border adjustment mechanism to ensure that both imported and domestically produced products are subject to the same carbon tax. These measures are expected to reduce GHG emissions from fossil fuel use and encourage the use of innovative low-GHG technologies.

In order to promote waste prevention and to ensure that production and other economic activities do not increase, or do not increase at a higher or lower rate than production, special attention is paid to the prevention of waste from production and other economic activities, in particular hazardous waste (target 12.4). The amount of hazardous waste per 1 000 inhabitants has increased since 2018 (64 tonnes per 1 000 inhabitants in 2018 and 72 tonnes in 2021). This significant change is not only due to the HAZ-IDENT project implemented by MoE. It should be noted that the aim of this project is to improve the capacity of environmental authorities and economic operators to properly identify and classify hazardous waste, and to develop a national uniform methodology for the identification of hazardous waste for use by state and local authorities, institutions and bodies, and economic operators. The country's international commitments have also contributed to this significant change, with the signing of international environmental agreements on the management of hazardous waste and other chemicals (6 agreements were signed in 2020 and 7 in 2021).

To achieve sustainable resource use and waste reduction (target 12.5), Lithuania focuses on waste prevention, reuse, efficient waste collection and recycling, production from secondary raw materials and extended producer responsibility – the circular economy. Due to economic stability and growth in purchasing power, the amount of municipal waste per capita has been increasing since 2016, both in Lithuania and in EU countries. In Lithuania, municipal waste per capita increased by 3% between 2018 and 2021 (464 kg per capita in 2018 and 480 kg in 2021). The same trend is observed for the EU average (500 kg per capita in 2018 and 530 kg in 2021).

The amount of municipal waste recycled as a proportion of the municipal waste decreased since 2018 (conducted 52.58% in 2018, 44.3% in 2021). However, in order to achieve the country's strategic goals (15% of municipal waste to be landfilled in 2025 and 5% in 2030, and at least 60% of municipal waste in Lithuania to be reused and recycled in 2030), it is necessary to focus on the proper preparation of waste for recycling and its further use.

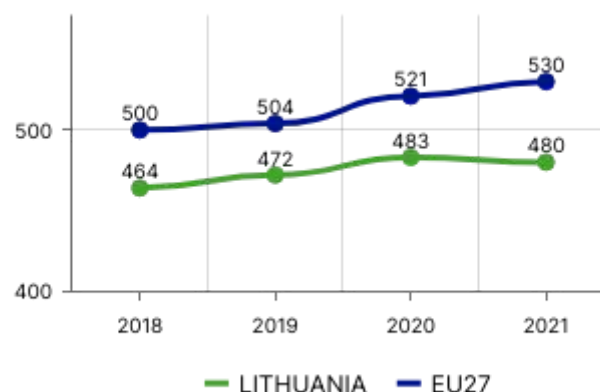


FIGURE 45. MUNICIPAL WASTE GENERATION PER CAPITA IN THE EU AND LITHUANIA, 2018-2021 (KG).
Source: State Data Agency, EUROSTAT, 2023.

In promoting sustainable public procurement (target 12.7), Lithuania is focusing on the example of the public sector as a modus operandi, where public institutions aim to consume only green electricity and heat, use clean transport and purchase works and services only through green procurement. In 2020, Green Public Procurement (GPP) in Lithuania accounted for only 5% of total procurement by value, which is why a legal reform of GPP was initiated in 2021 and a new GPP target was announced by a decree of the Lithuanian government, which stipulated that: 10% in 2021, 50% in 2022 and all purchases must be green from 2023. To better monitor the implementation of the GPP, an open data tool has been developed to monitor and analyse the GPP indicators in real time. According to the tool, the GPP value reached 16.2% in 2021 and 60.2% in 2022. This means that the progress of GPP in relation to the national goals is continuous and exceeds expectations year after year. However, the current situation (war in Ukraine, rising inflation, energy price crisis) means that green procurement remains a challenge that requires more effective involvement of all sectors. In 2023, the implementation of the GPP will be over 80%, but further progress in the GPP will require more communication, cooperation with different disciplines as well as suppliers of goods and services, and the development of the skills needed to implement the GPP (both, for public and private sector staff).

Reducing per capita global food waste and loss is also an important part of achieving SDG 12 (target 12.3). Most food waste is generated in households due to not (re)assessed consumption and habits. It is evaluated, that in Lithuania, the amount of household food waste per capita was 37 kg in 2018, while in 2020, following changes in methodologies, this amount of waste increased to 86 kg. This amount exceeds EU average (70 kg of food waste per capita in the EU in 2020). It is estimated that in 2020, the EU had lost a total of 127 kg of food per capita, compared to 137 kg of food per capita in Lithuania. Economic stability and growth in purchasing power, as well as the impact of COVID-19, are changing the habits of the population, leading to increased food waste. The NECAP and the Circular Economy Action Plan draw attention to the problem of food waste and promoted the application of financial instruments in the retail sector and public education, with the aim of reducing the amount of food waste generated in households by 10% by 2030, which will gradually reduce GHG emissions.

The importance of sustainable development of the tourism sector and the regions is seen as a potential for national progress (target 12.b). The development of a distinctive image of the country, especially the creation of visual content, and the breakthrough of domestic tourism have created the conditions for the development of the tourism sector. However, the negative impact of COVID-19 on the tourism sector has been enormous: A 58% decrease in the total number of tourists in 2020 compared to 2019. However, from 2021 an increasing trend of tourists is observed.

The goal for the development of the tourism sector in Lithuania is to reach 49th place in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index by 2030 (56th place in 2017, 59th place out of 140 countries in 2019). The Sustainable Tourism Guidelines emphasise the ambition to improve Lithuania's position in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index by three places each year compared to the previous year, as well as to encourage foreign tourists to visit Lithuanian regions (at least 30% of foreign tourists to visit Lithuanian regions by 2025), to stimulate the growth of the number of tourism providers with international certificates, and to stimulate the growth of the annual GDP generated by tourism (on average 3% from the previous year's level). The main priorities are the development of regional tourism, the promotion of green (ecological) tourism, the development of cultural routes, the improvement of services provided by Lithuanian tourism centres, the more active involvement of institutions responsible for national heritage and ethnic groups in the tourism sector, and the establishment of closer cooperation between tour operators and the existing tourism information centres.

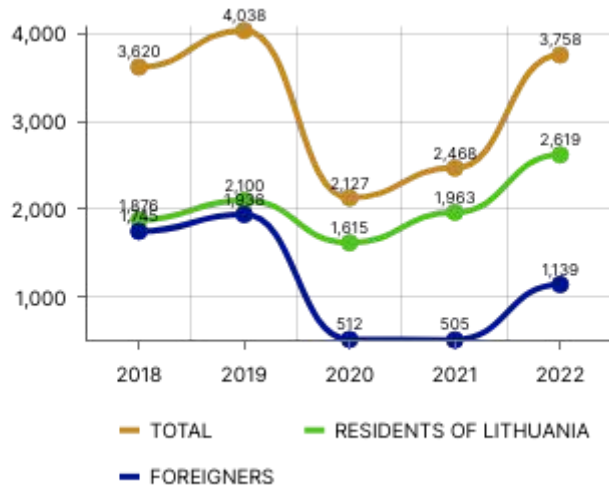


FIGURE 46. TOURISTS STAYING IN LITHUANIAN ACCOMMODATION ESTABLISHMENTS, THOUS. Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

The development of accessible tourism for all is promoted through information measures, the development of a labelling system for accessible tourism services and the improvement of the accessibility of tourism for people with special needs. Encourage entrepreneurship in the tourism sector through the creation of entrepreneurship programmes and the provision of advisory services for small tourism enterprises. At present, the widely recognised international certificates "Green Key" and "Blue Flag" are not widely used in Lithuania; therefore, certification of tourism services would not only promote responsible use of natural resources and reduction of environmental impact, but also contribute to a more successful image building of Lithuania as a modern country that meets international tourism standards. This should be achieved through financial support from the state to the certified service provider and through closer cooperation with international organisations that issue certificates for sustainable tourism services.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Lithuania faces the challenge of strengthening the implementation of the circular economy through circular business models and closed-loop solutions. The development of the circular economy in the country has been slow, covering only a few industrial sectors, and has been uneven. It should be noted that while resource-independent economic growth is being pursued as a cornerstone of the circular economy, Lithuania (along with other EU countries) needs to invest heavily in the transformation of production. In Lithuania, decoupling economic growth from resource use is not a separate strategic priority, so it is mainly promoted through the promotion of resource efficiency.

Promoting the sustainable use of resources and reducing consumption is also identified as a challenge. The country's material consumption of raw materials continues to grow, mainly due to low value-added production, the use of outdated and/or resource-inefficient technologies and limited use of digital solutions.

The country is also missing the potential of tourism to contribute to the creation of resilient infrastructure and opportunities for innovation and its successful implementation, not only in large cities but also at local level.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Lithuania's progress on SDG 12 is insufficient: The country is not making significant changes to meet the goal, the situation is stagnating. Although the promotion of a circular economy is enshrined in Lithuania's strategic documents and the country's economy has a tangible circular potential (measures are envisaged to reduce GHG emissions and conserve raw material resources, etc.), this can only be achieved through an appropriate regulatory framework, increased resource efficiency and various fiscal incentives, technologies and innovations to strengthen competitiveness.

The high consumption of materials, increasing amount of municipal waste generated by the population and the mixed municipal waste, which accounts for a significant proportion of waste, are driving the search for economically viable technologies for recycling some materials, the creation of new types of businesses and jobs and the development of business models based on circular economy principles. In the manufacturing and industrial sectors, there remains a need to deploy innovative, environmentally friendly technologies, to reduce dependence on imported raw materials, to ensure the availability of local secondary raw materials, and to reduce resource intensity through the integration of circular economy management systems, which take into account the lifecycle of the products and the environmental impact.

Promoting sustainable tourism is seen as a potential for national progress. However, the following factors limit progress Lithuania's low global profile as an attractive tourism destination, slow transformation of the tourism sector, infrastructure gaps and bottlenecks, and ineffective tourism management. In order to develop an effective national tourism strategy and development directions, the focus should be on infrastructure development, business and skills development, and opening up data to foster entrepreneurship and enable the government to make more effective and data-driven tourism management decisions.

GOOD PRACTISE

In Lithuania and other countries, various ways of sharing or exchanging items have been developed and are being implemented, but the idea of the UAB "VAATC" - the "DĖK'UI" sharing station - stands out among them. These stops, for the convenience of the population, offer the possibility to see the items not only in real life but also in a virtual stop on the website www.stoteledekui.lt. Items that are checked out can be reserved and, on arrival, not only reserved items can be collected, but also items not yet reserved.

Such sharing stations are a true example of community and their benefits are mutual: they allow residents to dispose of unwanted items in good condition without polluting the environment, legally and conveniently. People are not charged for the items delivered, and they are not counted towards the annual free waste delivery quantities set for residents.

The network of stations is expected to encourage the public to consume more responsibly, to reuse and reuse items, to save financial resources and to ensure a more orderly waste management system.



Source: STOTELE DĖK'UI.

Sustainable mobility platforms are active in the country's major cities, allowing people to travel comfortably within a city or across the country without having their own private vehicle. Several segments stand out:

- 1) public transport platforms, which provide convenient online planning, routing and ticketing, as well as a real-time view of the traffic situation when connected by teleconference;
- 2) Platforms for renting low-emission or low-impact mobility equipment - several platforms in Lithuania offer services for renting scooters, bicycles or e-cars. To access these platforms, all you need to do is register on the platforms and you can use the services throughout the season;
- 3) Platforms for renting the right vehicle - again, several platforms offer services for renting a car for personal trips or a larger vehicle, for example, for moving house.

It is hoped that these platforms will encourage the public to choose sustainable mobility, less polluting means of transport and contribute to resource conservation.

13 CLIMATE ACTION



SDG 13. TAKE URGENT ACTION TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Increase of global temperature and its negative impacts on natural ecosystems, social living conditions, and sustainable development of economic sectors.
- Additional investment, fiscal and innovative technological measures are needed to accelerate the decarbonisation of all sectors of the economy, to achieve the 2050 carbon neutrality goal and to ensure climate resilient development.
- Improving the state of natural ecosystems (acidification of waters, loss of biodiversity) and increasing the resilience of infrastructure in economic sectors to climate change.
- Raising awareness of climate change mitigation and adaptation, education and development of skills for all relevant groups in society.

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

13.1. Since 2012, all municipalities in Lithuania have been preparing and implementing emergency prevention plans.

13.2. Lithuania has developed NECAP and NCCMA, but GHG emissions have slightly increased from 5.1 tonnes in 2018 to 5.3 tonnes per capita in 2020.

13.3. Lithuania has included climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience building and prevention issues in primary, lower secondary, upper secondary general, upper secondary vocational and higher education curricula.

13.a. In 2020, support for international climate finance in developing countries from public financing amounted to €1.32 million, rising to €1.94 million in 2021. Lithuania focuses on bilateral projects in Eastern Partnership countries.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 13 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

Lithuania has identified 5 priority areas for the implementation of SDGs, including SDG 13. The climate crisis is one of the most important challenges facing humanity, posing an existential threat to natural ecosystems and humanity, and increasing risks to national security and social stability. The last eight years have been the hottest in the history of meteorological observations. In 2020, the global average temperature was 1.2°C above pre-industrial levels. 2020 was the warmest year in the history of meteorological observations in Lithuania. SDG 13 calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its consequences.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The SDG 13 aims to tackle climate change and its negative impacts. Reducing national GHG emissions is crucial to achieving the SDG 13. Between 1990 and 2021, Lithuania achieved a 57.7% reduction in GHG emissions and a 78% increase in GDP, reflecting the country's sustainable development. Lithuania has met its GHG emission reduction targets for 2013-2020 set in the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and in the EU Climate and Energy Package. In the sectors covered by the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS), GHG emissions decreased by 37% in 2020 (target: 21%), while the non-ETS sectors (transport, industry, agriculture, waste, small energy) did not exceed the allowed increase of 15% and reached 11% respectively. However, the intensity of GHG emissions from energy consumption in Lithuania remains higher than the EU average. The graph below shows that Lithuania's GHG intensity index differs from the EU result by almost 14 percentage points in 2018 and the gap widens to 23.4 percentage points in 2020.

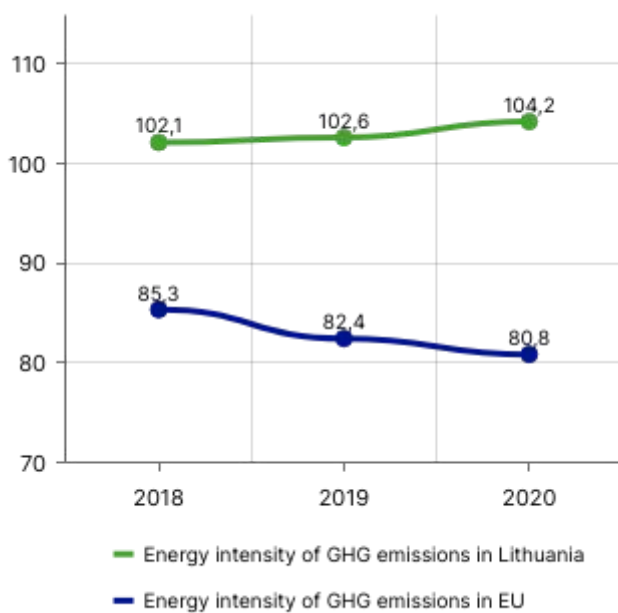


FIGURE 47. ENERGY INTENSITY OF GHG EMISSIONS IN LITHUANIA AND EU, 2018-2020. Source: EUROSTAT, European Environment Data, 2023.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

Lithuania has ratified and is implementing, together with the EU and its Member States, its commitments under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. A national greenhouse gas inventory report containing data on greenhouse gas emissions in Lithuania is submitted annually to the EC and the UNFCCC Secretariat.

The transition to a climate neutral economy by the middle of XXI century is one of the EU's key long-term goals. The 6 strategic goals of the NPP (in particular 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10) define the indicators for the achievement of SDG 13. As part of the implementation of Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action, Lithuania has adopted the NECAP, which sets out measures to mitigate climate change, adapt to adverse climate change and transition to climate neutrality. The 18th Government Programme also focuses on and sets goals for tackling the climate change crisis and reducing GHG emissions – implementing the EU's Green Deal goals in all sectors of the economy.

As part of the 18th Government Programme, the updated NCCMA was adopted, which sets ambitious goals and targets for climate change mitigation (GHG emission reductions) and adaptation in the short term (up to 2030), medium term (up to 2040) and long term (up to 2050). By 2030, the NCCMA has set the following goals: 30% reduction GHG emissions compared to 2005, or 70% compared to 1990, with a 50% GHG reduction in the EU ETS sectors and a 25% reduction in the non-EU ETS sectors, including the inclusion of the land use, land-use change and forestry sector, compared to 2005. It also sets 2030 GHG reduction targets for individual sectors not covered by the EU ETS: 14% in transport, 19% in industry, 11% in agriculture, 65% in waste management and 26% in small-scale energy. The target is set at 85% GHG reductions in 2040 and climate neutrality in 2050, with 100% GHG reductions and 20% coverage by natural and technological sinks.

The NECAP plan is being updated to meet the increased reduction goals, and to ensure a high quality update of the NECAP measures, the MoE, together with the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania, has established sectoral decarbonisation working groups, which have enabled representatives from business, academia and NGOs to agree on the most effective measures to reduce GHG emissions.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

Under SDG 13, Lithuania aims to strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacity of all sectors of the economy to the adverse effects of climate change and natural disasters (target 13.1). Since 2012, all municipalities in Lithuania have been preparing and implementing emergency prevention plans. In implementing the goals and objectives of the National Strategy for Climate Change Management 2013-2050, adopted in 2012 and valid until 2020, Lithuania has endeavoured to integrate these goals and objectives into national policies, sectoral strategies and development programmes (target 13.2).

Despite the implementation of the goals and objectives of the National Strategy for Climate Change Management Policy, the measures of the Inter-institutional Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy and the adoption of the NECAP in 2019, GHG emissions have slightly increased from 5.1 tonnes in 2018 to 5.3 tonnes per capita in 2020, due to the country's declining population and rapidly growing GDP. Experts stress the need for ambitious cross-sectoral climate change policies, higher environmental taxes and the phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies. Without these measures, Lithuania's GHG emissions, especially in the transport and agriculture sectors, will not decrease at the required rate and it will be difficult to meet the GHG reduction goals. The ambitious sectoral GHG reduction goals set by the NCCMA remain important in contributing to the achievement of Lithuania's GHG reduction goals at both national and municipal level. In addition, the national coordination mechanism for sustainable development and climate change policy needs to be improved to ensure the involvement of all relevant societal groups. It is important to note that the activities of the above-mentioned decarbonisation groups promote inter-institutional cooperation, involving both the highest representatives of the public sector and the private and non-governmental sectors.

Measures to improve energy efficiency, electrify rail transport and promote the use of electric vehicles are being implemented to reduce GHG emissions in all sectors of the economy. New afforestation, sustainable forestry and reforestation, restoration of other natural habitats that sequester organic carbon (grasslands, wetlands) and other measures are planned to increase GHG absorbents.

Additional measures need to be developed and implemented to reduce GHG emissions from agriculture: Promoting sustainable agriculture, crop rotation, increasing the area of permanent grassland, improving soil fertility, innovative manure management technologies, biogas production, improving the accounting and transparency of synthetic fertilisers, promoting their substitution by organic fertilisers, changing the composition of livestock feed (to reduce methane and nitrous oxide emissions), organising farmer education and information, reviewing the use of subsidies and tax incentives, and other measures.

The main measures to reduce GHG emissions in the transport sector relate to the reduction of GHG emissions from light-duty vehicles. Additional legislative and economic measures should be taken to reduce GHG emissions in the transport sector by promoting the development of alternative fuel infrastructure and energy efficiency through the phasing-out of old vehicles and the purchase of low-emission, low-consumption alternative fuel vehicles, and by promoting sustainable mobility through the development of public transport, cycle paths, charging infrastructure for electric vehicles, electrification of railways, increasing transport capacity and other similar measures.

Lithuania is also working to improve education, public awareness and human and institutional capacity for climate change mitigation and adaptation (target 13.3). Country has mainstreamed climate change mitigation, adaptation, resilience building and prevention into formal and non-formal education programmes and retrained workers in innovative low-GHG technologies. However, more needs to be done to improve the implementation of climate change education. Teachers' knowledge of climate change is limited, and there is a lack of regular professional development opportunities and methodological materials. Curricula still lack a cross-cutting, interdisciplinary approach to climate change that highlights the problem and its consequences. To understand and

address the challenges of climate change, it is important to apply the principles of active and inclusive learning and to develop learners' practical skills. There is also a need to improve institutional capacities, such as better forecasting skills or damage monitoring.

Lithuania is also contributing to the international climate finance goal of raising €100 billion annually by 2025 to implement climate action in developing countries (target 13.a), and progress has been made in 2018-2020: Lithuania's funding increased from €918.6 thousand to €1,148.4 thousand. Between 2014 and 2021, Lithuania has committed €5.3 million in grants for mitigation projects in developing countries under the Climate Change Programme. The total value of these projects, including private funding, is around €7.5 million, with public support amounting to €1.32 million in 2020, rising to €1.94 million in 2021.

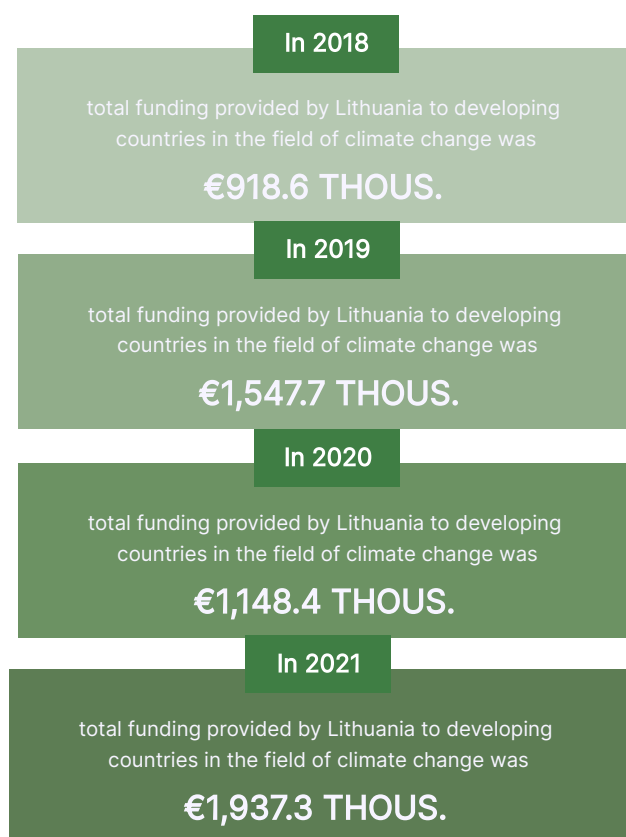


FIGURE 48. TOTAL FUNDING PROVIDED BY LITHUANIA TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN THE FIELD OF CLIMATE CHANGE, 2018-2021(THOUS. EUR). Source: Ministry of Environment, 2023.

Lithuania focuses on bilateral RES technology deployment projects in the Eastern European Partnership countries, attracting private sector investment. Lithuania's climate development cooperation has increased steadily in recent years. For the implementation of development cooperation projects in 2022-2025, the MoE will allocate €8 million from the Climate Change Programme (€2 million per year). At least a further €2.4 million is expected to be raised for development cooperation projects from private sources for the period 2022-2025.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

With the disappearance of COVID-19 and the sharp drop in the number of deaths caused by the pandemic, this global crisis has been replaced by another – the war in Ukraine launched by Russia in 2022, as well as the energy crisis in Europe. With a significant increase in the price of primary energy resources and the failure to develop RES and less polluting heat generation infrastructure (e.g. Vilnius CHP plant), it is predicted that some Lithuanian cities may revert to more polluting heating methods (e.g. fuel oil) in the coming winters. Inadequate infrastructure and financing will prevent those who want to use RES from doing so in the near future. Higher electricity prices and the cost of charging points for electric cars could also slow down the reduction of GHG emissions. A decrease in GHG emissions was observed in 2020 compared to 2019. This decrease could be influenced by the measures taken to combat COVID-19 and changes in working culture (e.g. teleworking, working from home, resulting in fewer cars on the road). For these reasons, it is expected that higher GHG emissions will be recorded between 2021 and 2023.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Progress on the SDG 13 is assessed as moderate. Building adaptive capacity and resilience in the context of the SDGs helps to minimise the impacts of climatic change, responding to the inevitable consequences in a socially sustainable way. In order to halt climate change and thus avoid the losses and damages it causes, it is crucial to scale up mitigation measures, to change fiscal policies to encourage the phasing out of fossil fuels and to increase sustainable investments in renewable energy sources (RES), the use of other alternative energy sources (e.g. hydrogen) and electrification.

It is important to emphasise that GHG emissions in Lithuania in 2018-2020 have increased from 5.1 to 5.3 tonnes per capita in 2020. Therefore, it is significant to set ambitious GHG reduction goals for individual sectors of the economy and implement measures to achieve them. It is also substantial to improve education and information, strengthen Lithuania's capacity for mitigation planning and management, and provide support to the most vulnerable and least developed countries. It should be noted that Lithuania's development cooperation for climate change has been steadily increasing in recent years and the development cooperation projects for 2022-2025 are expected to be implemented in the EU. The MoE will allocate €2 million annually for climate change projects.

The implementation of SDG 13 requires the transformation of all economic sectors towards climate-neutral and climate-resilient development. It is recommended to design, development and use innovative low-GHG technologies and renewable energy, as well as to implement energy efficiency and circularity measures in all sectors of the economy and promote sustainable means of agriculture.

In order to qualitatively assess the progress of the indicators of this SDG, it is also recommended to replace the Lithuanian indicator 13.1.1 "Number of deaths due to COVID-19" related to the UN indicator "Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population" with a new indicator that would more accurately reflect the scope of the SDG 13.1 target, not only indicate the number of people died from COVID-19.

GOOD PRACTISE

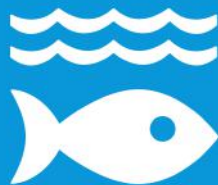
While seeking to promote and increase the knowledge and capacity of society, public authorities, and private businesses in the field of sustainable development and environmental protection, various NGOs carry out activities in areas such as environmental protection, climate change, integrated natural resource management, environmental education and information. The activities also help to develop local, regional, and international cooperation.

In 2022, the "Mobile Climate Museum" was launched. It has equipped with four 12-meter-long sea containers, where visitors can view the interactive climate change exhibition and learn that even what we put on our plate, how we travel, how we dry our hair, and what kind of sports shoes we wear have an impact on the climate. In Lithuania, the Mobile Climate Museum is coordinated by the Active Youth Association. The museum has also developed the "Sustainability Methodology" as a tool for teachers and youth workers of all disciplines, which allows learners aged 10-18 to strengthen their knowledge of climate change issues and environmental ideas.



Source: Climate Museum, 2022.

14 LIFE BELOW WATER



SDG 14. CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEAS AND MARINE RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Eutrophication of the Baltic Sea
- Ensuring that the exploitation intensity of commercially exploited fish stocks remains within safe biological limits
- Maintain the structure of the Baltic Sea food web

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

14.1. According to 2021 data, eutrophication – the main problem of the Baltic Sea in Lithuania and the region – affects about 97% of the Baltic Sea.

14.2. The width of the Lithuanian coastal strip from the sea to the protective beach ridge has decreased from 45-60 m to 44-51 m between 2018 and 2021.

14.3. In the period 2018-2021, the problem of marine acidification has been successfully reduced: The average acidity of seawater decreased from 7.91 to 8.13 pH.

14.5. In 2021, the share of marine protected areas was 18.2%, exceeding the goal of 10% by 2020.

14.6. Lithuania's progress in implementing international measures to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is set to receive the highest score in both 2018 and 2020 (5 points out of 5). However, in 2021, the status of the fish community along the Lithuanian coast of the Baltic Sea is assessed as average.

14.7. As of 2019, the share of sustainable fisheries in GDP has remained stable since 2017.

14.a. The Ministry of Agriculture's funding for marine research declined from €45.8 thousand to €28.6 thousand between 2018 and 2021, but Lithuania's total funding for marine research is significantly higher, reaching more than €500 thousand in 2022.

14.b. The extent to which Lithuania has a legal, policy and/or institutional framework that recognises and protects the rights of small-scale fisheries to marine resources and markets is good in both 2018 and 2020 (4 points out of 5).

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 14 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

Water affects all aspects of human life, and in a highly hydrological environment, activities far from water bodies have an impact on them.

The Baltic Sea is one of the largest bodies of saline water on the planet due to its specific hydrographic and climatic conditions. Highly sensitive and interconnected marine ecosystems have created a habitat for the unique flora and fauna of the Baltic Sea. This has also contributed to its exceptional sensitivity and vulnerability. Hydrodynamic characteristics and human activities have led to a sea that is now eutrophic, polluted with hazardous substances and waste, and facing problems of biodiversity loss. The Baltic Sea area belonging to Lithuania is the site of intensive economic activities. Achieving this goal will therefore help to address key challenges and preserve the Baltic Sea and its ecosystem.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The focus on stopping the acidification of the seawater is crucial for the achievement of SDG 14. The graph below shows the average acidity of seawater in Lithuania and the acidity of ocean and seawater worldwide. Based on the collected data, it can be said that although in 2017 Lithuania's Baltic Sea acidity (pH) result (7.96) was significantly below the world average (8.058), in 2020 Lithuania's result (8.04) was almost equal to the world average (8.053), and in 2021 Lithuania's result further improved and showed a positive reduction in acidity. However, it cannot be said that this is a long-term improving trend.

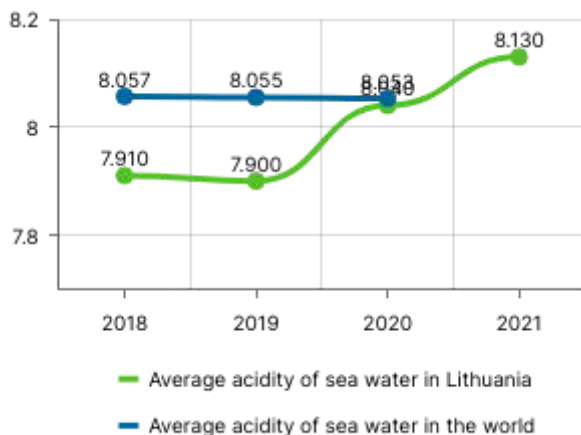


FIGURE 49. AVERAGE ACIDITY OF SEA WATER IN LITHUANIA AND IN THE WORLD (PH). Source: Ministry of the Environment, Copernicus Marine Authority, 2023.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

The Environment and Climate Change Management Development Programme and the Agriculture and Food, Rural Development and Fisheries Development Programme aim to implement measures to improve the state of the Baltic Sea and its coasts and to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources. As water and water-related activities are of great importance to the state, society, economy and population, the Water Development Programme 2017-2023. The purpose of

the Programme is to set the targets, goal and results to be achieved in the field of Lithuanian waters by 2023, in line with other related policies, based on the country's traditions, EU legal norms, international conventions, resolutions, agreements and programmes.

At the end of 2022, the National Water Plan 2022-2027, prepared by the MoE, was approved by the Government, which ensures sustainable and integrated management of water bodies, the marine environment, flood risks and water management in the future. Strategic goal 6 of the NPP sets out indicators to address the 14th SDG, which is to increase the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems, water resources and coastlines to the impacts of climate change, and to improve the status of water bodies (the Baltic Sea, surface water and groundwater). The 18th Government programme also focuses on the sea, with plans to protect migratory fish species, review the regulation of commercial fishing and improve the state of the Baltic Sea.

It is important to note that Lithuania ratified the Helsinki Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Basin (HELCOM) in 1992. The countries of the Convention and the EU have agreed to ensure the ecological restoration of the Baltic Sea. The HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, renewed in 2021, is an ambitious programme of measures covering all elements of the marine ecosystem and their impacts. It includes around 200 specific actions and measures on biodiversity, eutrophication, hazardous substances, shipping and fisheries, to be implemented by 2030 at the latest.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

Under SDG 14, Lithuania aims to significantly reduce marine pollution by 2025, in particular pollution from land-based activities (target 14.1). It should be noted that chlorophyll 'a' (from 6.247 to 5.345 µg/l) and total nitrogen dropped in the period 2018-2021 (from 0.441 to 0.412 mg/l), but total phosphorus increased (0.22 to 0.31 mg/l). This change in nutrients is due to an excess of nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) – the Baltic Sea is suffering from eutrophication, where phytoplankton organisms develop more intensively, algae blooms start to flourish, oxygen is depleted and water clarity decreases. Eutrophication is a major problem in the Baltic Sea in Lithuania and the region, affecting about 97% of the sea. The main impacts on eutrophication are caused by agricultural activities and inadequately treated wastewater discharges (below prescribed standards).

According to the evaluations carried out between 2014 and 2020, the Curonian Lagoon and the Baltic Sea coast were not in good ecological status. One of the causes of poor ecological status is excessive concentrations of total nitrogen. In the central and northern parts of the Curonian Lagoon, total nitrogen concentrations between 2010 and 2020 corresponded to very poor ecological status in about 32% of the surveys, while about 23% corresponded to poor ecological status, and the amount of total nitrogen (nutrients) entering the Baltic Sea from Lithuania via the Nemunas River was also increasing rapidly.

Eutrophication in Lithuania is caused by agricultural activities and domestic waters (industrial and municipal wastewater chemicals). This process can be controlled by reducing the use of chemicals with harmful components and by following good wastewater management (treatment) practices. In order to reduce the input of eutrophication-causing biogenic substances into the sea, a pilot project was carried out in Lithuania in 2021 to collect phytoplankton biomass in the Curonian Lagoon using floating devices and to use the collected biomass in bioreactors for agrotechnological and other applications.

A tool was also developed to assess the influence of biological processes (nitrogen fixation, denitrification and cyanotoxin production) on nutrient balances in the Curonian Lagoon and nutrient inputs to the Baltic Sea.

According to the Helsinki Convention, the target loads of total nitrogen from Lithuania to the Central Sea should not exceed 25,827 t/y of total nitrogen and 703 t/y of total phosphorus by 2021. However, the studies showed that pollution from Lithuania, as well as from other neighbouring Baltic Sea countries, exceeded the limits. According to data from 1995 to 2019, an average of 38,289 tonnes of total nitrogen and 1,351 tonnes of total phosphorus per year were discharged from Lithuania into the Central Baltic. Against this background, in 2021 all nine Baltic Sea countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, and Sweden) and the EU adopted the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) 2030, which shows that management to improve the health of the Baltic Sea up to 2021 has not been effective. The updated version of the BSAP focuses on eutrophication, hazardous substances, maritime activities and biodiversity, but will also address new challenges such as underwater noise and marine litter. The updated BSAP should also help to promote transboundary cooperation.

Lithuania is also working to minimise and address the impacts of acidification of the Baltic Sea, including by promoting closer scientific cooperation (target 14.3). The average acidity of seawater is decreasing (from 7.91 to 8.13 pH) between 2018 and 2021. However, this cannot yet be said to be a long-term upward trend. Nevertheless, it can be partly attributed to the reduction of CO₂ emissions in Lithuania in 2020. Successful implementation of the other SDGs and reductions in CO₂ emissions can make a significant contribution to maintaining a stable level of marine acidity. A comparison of Lithuania's and the world's performance in terms of acidification mitigation is presented at the beginning of this chapter on SDGs.

One of the strategic Lithuania's goals is the sustainable management and protection of the ecosystems of the Baltic Sea and its coasts (target 14.2). This area is on a regressive path between 2018 and 2021: The width of the coastal strip from the sea to the protective beach ridge has been reduced from 45-60 to 44-51. It is important to note that the shoreline and the amount of bulk sediment can narrow and/or widen significantly over the course of a year, so it is important to distinguish a multi-year trend for more accurate results. The 2021 study points out that the Curonian Spit and the mainland coast of the Baltic Sea are severely affected by water erosion caused by storms. The state of the coastline is influenced by the increasing frequency of hurricanes that disrupt the coastline, the reduced flow of sandy sediments from the main currents and anthropogenic factors. The changing processes of coastal management in the Baltic Sea have not been sufficiently studied, resulting in a lack of knowledge for strategic decision-making on the most optimal coastal management measures (beach replenishment with imported sand, protection of the protective ridge against scour and sea erosion), as well as highlighting the often delayed and irregular financing of coastal management works and the increasing costs of implementing coastal management

measures. However, some of the measures taken have been effective: Since 2014, coastal management works have been carried out to promote the protection and regeneration of the ridge, such as the accumulation of sand on the ridge, which is considered a preventive measure to mitigate the problems caused by climate change.

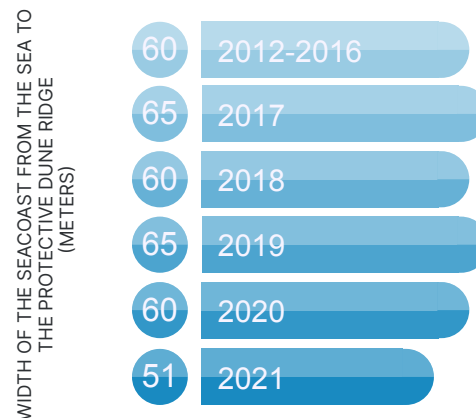


FIGURE 50. WIDTH OF THE SEACOAST FROM THE SEA TO THE PROTECTIVE DUNE RIDGE (METERS)
Source: Ministry of Environment, 2023.

Lithuania aims to conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas by 2020, in line with national and international legislation and the best available scientific information (target 14.5). The period 2018-2021 shows a steady maintenance of the achieved goals: The share of marine protected areas (also part of NATURA 2000) is 18.2% over the period. However, Lithuania has not developed the necessary management plans for MPAs and the lack of regulation of human economic activities contributes to marine pollution by litter, oil and other harmful substances, fishing gear, non-indigenous species and noise.

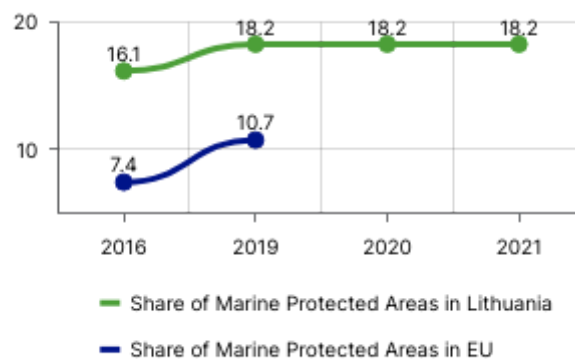


FIGURE 51. SHARE OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN LITHUANIA AND THE EU (%)
Source: Ministry of Environment, EUROSTAT, 2023.

Lithuania is committed to combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and to increasing the economic benefits of sustainable use of marine resources (targets 14.6. and 14.7). The share of sustainable fisheries in GDP remained stable at 0.05% in 2017-2019, and Lithuania's progress in implementing international measures to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in 2018-2020 was rated as the highest progress score (5). Fisheries planning is carried out in the context of both EU (e.g. CFP) and national obligations. The main strategic planning documents in the field of fisheries during this period were the Lithuanian Fisheries Sector Action Programme, the Baltic Sea Environmental Strategy, the National Environmental Strategy and the Water Development Programme.

Overexploitation must be avoided in order to conserve fish stocks, and the precautionary principle is recommended for fisheries policy planning. It is important to note that despite the highest progress score, the 2021 study states that in the assessment of the status of the Baltic Sea coastal waters, 4 of the 6 key fish indicators (Fish Community Abundance Index, Fish Community Diversity Index, Species Abundance in the Core Coastal Fish Community and Abundance of Core Coastal Fish Functional Groups) are in good environmental status according to the criteria of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. However, 2 of the 6 indicators – the fish community size index and the fish community trophic index – are not at good environmental status. The reasons for this have been attributed to intensive fishing not only offshore but also in the Curonian Lagoon (harvesting fish larger than 30 cm, which are naturally dominant at lower trophic levels). Due to the critical state of the cod population in the Baltic Sea, fishing for cod has been banned throughout the Baltic Sea by an EU decision. It is important to note that bottom trawling for cod (which intensively disturbs the seabed in marine the seabed of marine protected areas) was suspended from 2020. Another problem in the fisheries sector is the loss or deliberate discarding of fishing gear that acts as a trap for seabirds and mammals. Such nets also kill fish that are not intentionally caught but are caught in such lost gear.

The regional analysis of the Baltic Sea basin shows that while the performance of the fleets of most countries in the Baltic Sea region has improved in recent years, the Lithuanian Baltic Sea fleet has suffered losses – the majority of the Lithuanian Baltic Sea fleet has been concentrated on cod fishing for many years, and as a result the performance of the companies' fishing activities has deteriorated due to the reduction in cod quotas and the deterioration in the quality of the fish, as well as the complete ban on commercial cod fishing. Meanwhile, the performance of the pelagic segment has improved, but the overall performance of the Baltic and coastal fleet remains negative, which has been stabilised with the help of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. By bringing fishing capacity into line with fishing opportunities in the Baltic Sea, and by investing in operational efficiency, catch quality or added value for the remaining fishing enterprises, the aim is to achieve a balanced Baltic Sea fleet by 2030.

Lithuania is also working to give small-scale fishermen access to marine resources and markets. Lithuania scored 4 out of 5 points for the indicator on the extent of legal, strategic and/or institutional programmes that recognise and protect the rights of small-scale fisheries to marine resources and markets (target 14.b). One of the reasons for the underachievement of this objective is that most micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in the marine fisheries sector have limited financial capacity to invest in value-added and sales development, and their profitability is low.

However, according to the estimates of the Market Observatory (EUMOFA), it is reasonable to expect that the recovery of the fisheries sector from the effects of COVID-19 may be smoother than that of the economy as a whole, since in principle none of these sectors has been completely shut down, although they have encountered serious difficulties. Preliminary estimates by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries suggest that the impact of COVID-19 on the aquaculture sector is less than on the fisheries sector. The small-scale segment of inshore fisheries has been most affected: Revenues from Baltic Sea fisheries, which have been increasing since 2017, declined in 2020 and are at their lowest level since 2009. To increase the resilience of the fisheries sector to similar global crises, the aim is to increase the use of short supply chains and technological solutions by 2030.

Lithuania aims to increase the share of the research budget (target 14.a) allocated to marine technology research. However, the ŽŪM funding for marine research, chosen as an indicator for target 14.a, has decreased between 2018 and 2021: Lithuania has allocated €45.8 thousand for marine research in 2018, which declined to €28.6 thousand in 2021. However, it should be noted that the Ministry of Agriculture, together with the Fisheries Service at the Ministry of Agriculture, Klaipėda University and the Agriculture Data Centre (State Enterprise) is implementing a data collection programme with more than €500 thousand planned for 2022, which means that the implementation of the Lithuanian indicator of target 14.a. is receiving much more attention than reflected in the SDG statistics.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Cooperation between countries is essential for the protection of the Baltic Sea. One of the problems is the lack of cooperation in the implementation of the HELCOM BSAP. The lack of cooperation is evident with Lithuania's neighbours, and the biggest problem is with the Russian Federation, where there has been no cross-border cooperation since 2015: There is no possibility to exchange monitoring data and information on transboundary surface waters, to coordinate measures to improve the status of transboundary waters, to coordinate rapid response to pollution incidents and to address other issues related to pollution prevention in the Baltic Sea. It should be noted that Russia's geopolitical actions make cross-border cooperation impossible in the short term. Furthermore, it is crucial that the countries succeed in achieving the goals of the updated BSAP by 2030 and do not repeat the mistakes of the implementation of the BSAP by 2021. Successful implementation of the updated plan would contribute significantly to the achievement of Lithuania's SDG 14.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Progress on the SDG 14 is assessed as moderate – although the Baltic Sea environment is in a particularly poor state in terms of eutrophication indicators and is moving further away from the goals for reducing nutrient inputs to the sea, the Baltic Sea acidity indicator has improved over the 2018-2021 period. However, it cannot be said that this is a long-term upward trend. Protecting marine and coastal ecosystems, preventing and mitigating marine pollution and ocean acidification, and improving scientific knowledge, research capacity and marine technologies are essential to conserve and sustainably use the seas and marine resources. In addition, a deeper involvement in cross-border cooperation mechanisms is worth mentioning, as the quality of the Baltic Sea is not only influenced by Lithuania, but also by other Baltic Sea countries.

In the context of SDG 14, it is proposed to focus more on the regulation of human activities: conducting regular coastal surveys, strengthening cross-border cooperation and developing the necessary management plans for marine protected areas. In order to better measure progress towards the goal, it is proposed to expand the list of funding sources for indicator 14.a., “Ministry of Agriculture funding for marine research”, in order to provide a more precise outcome on the achievement of progress.



SDG 15. PROTECT, RESTORE AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE USE OF TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS, SUSTAINABLY MANAGE FORESTS, COMBAT DESERTIFICATION, AND HALT AND REVERSE LAND DEGRADATION AND HALT BIODIVERSITY LOSS

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Development of protected areas, conservation of protected species as well as halting decline of ecosystems and addressing the challenge of biodiversity loss.
- Ensuring sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

15.1. Between 2018 and 2021, Lithuania expanded its forest coverage (from 33.6% to 33.7%) and protected area, against the country's area (from 17.6% to 17.7%).

15.2. The area of newly planted forests in Lithuania decreases from 1 018 to 882.5 ha early between 2018 and 2021. It should be noted that the share of degraded land in relation to the total land area was 12.4% in 2016-2019 (7 919 km²).

15.5. The Red List Index for 2021 is 0.99. However, this indicator does not provide a complete picture of the status of habitats and biodiversity in Lithuania.

15.6. Lithuania has adopted legal, administrative and policy measures to ensure fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of genetic resources, but the legal framework in place since 2001 needs to be improved.

15.7., 15.c. Proportion of illegally hunted animals in Lithuania increased between 2018 and 2021 (0.03 to 0.06%).

15.8. Since 2010, Lithuania has adopted national legislation to prevent and control the spread of alien invasive species.

15.9. Lithuania has integrated biodiversity indicators into national accounting and reporting systems.

15.a., 15.b. Between 2018 and 2021, Lithuania's funding for biodiversity protection, landscape management and conservation increased from €8.1 million to €11.76 million.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 15 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

Natural and semi-natural ecosystems cover more than a third of Lithuania's territory. The greatest wildlife diversity is concentrated in forests and wetlands. In Lithuania, coniferous forests dominate, occupying 55.7% of the forest area, followed by soft-leaved forests (40.9%) and hard-leaved forests (3.4%). In order to conserve forests and all the organisms that live in them, Lithuania is committed to protecting valuable landscapes, habitats and other important elements of biodiversity, as well as to protecting and restoring destroyed or degraded ecosystems. In order for forests to provide multiple benefits to society, they must conserve biodiversity, increase landscape stability, improve environmental quality and enhance the sustainability of forest ecosystems.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

SDG 15 aims to protect, restore and promote the conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial, inland water, forest and wetland ecosystems. The graph below (see Figure 52) shows the protected area, against the country's area, in Lithuania and EU (%). As can be seen, in 2021 the area of protected areas in Lithuania (as a percentage of the total area) was 8.7% lower than the EU average.

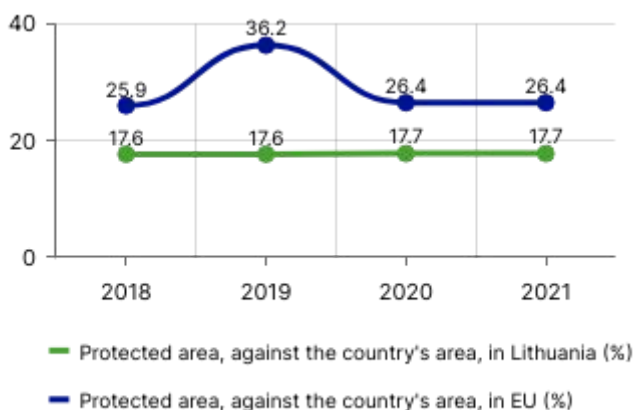


FIGURE 52. PROTECTED AREA, AGAINST THE COUNTRY'S AREA, IN LITHUANIA AND THE EU (%)

Source: EUROSTAT, Ministry of Environment, 2023

STRATEGIC AGENDA

The transition to a climate neutral economy by the middle of this century is one of the EU's key long-term goals. In line with the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action, Lithuania has prepared a NECAP that includes measures for mitigation and adaptation to climate change and for economy transition towards climate neutrality, such as the conversion of forests and shrublands, the restoration of wetlands and the promotion of perennial crops. The 18th Government Programme also focuses on and sets goals for the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, forests and the effective protection of natural habitats and protected species. In order to achieve these goals, the project "Conservation and sustainable use of natural capital" is being implemented. The Environment and Climate Change Management Development Programme aims to implement measures that contribute to the sustainable management of forests and the protection of biodiversity.

The National Environmental Strategy aims to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources and the stability of ecosystems by maintaining and developing sustainable forest ecosystems. The strategy proposes to apply near-natural forestry measures, to promote basic non-timber harvesting, to improve forest management measures in individual forest groups, and to ensure that the amount of timber harvested does not exceed the increment in all Lithuanian forests.

The Landscape and Biodiversity Action Plan 2015-2020 aims to improve the legal framework for the protection of protected species, to improve and maintain the habitat for protected species under appropriate natural conditions (e.g. by developing and implementing a project to restore ecosystems and biodiversity damaged in the past), and to assess the status of ecosystems and their services, conduct socio-economic assessments of key ecosystem services and identify ways to integrate the valuation of ecosystems and their services into decision-making processes, improve the effectiveness of wildlife monitoring, data collection, compilation and conservation, conduct studies on the status of invasive and alien species in Lithuania, implement measures to regulate and manage the abundance of invasive species, and ensure fair and equitable use of genetic resources.

One of the main strategic documents contributing to the implementation of the SDG 15 is Lithuania's Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Rural Development 2023-2027. The Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment revealed that the Strategic Plan will contribute to the achievement of national and international environmental, climate and SDGs, while the improved architecture of environmental measures and the increased scope of implementation of measures will ensure a greater contribution to the protection of the environment and climate mitigation goals than in the previous period (the Lithuanian Rural Development Programme 2014-2020). It is important to note that this assessment also reveals significant negative aspects of the implementation of the Lithuanian Agriculture and Rural Development Plan and the inadequacy of safeguards and measures to achieve the strategic goals of biodiversity protection, landscape protection, climate change mitigation, air pollution reduction and water protection.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

Under SDG 15, Lithuania aims to ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests and wetlands, and to make progress in the sustainable management of forests (targets 15.1 and 15.2), with steady progress since 2018. The share of forest coverage and protected areas increased slightly to 33.7% and 17.7%, respectively, by 2021. The increase in forest coverage is influenced by the implementation of the measures set out in the National Programme for the Development of the Forestry Sector 2012-2020. However, it should be noted that the annual area of newly planted forests in Lithuania decreased from 1,018 ha to 882.5 ha in the period 2018-2021. To address this situation, in early 2022, the administrative procedures for those wishing to plant forests were eased and the conditions for planting forests on more fertile land were made more favourable. This has led to a renewed upward trend in the area under afforestation (preliminary data indicate that 1 013 ha of new forests were established in 2022).

YEAR	AREA OF NEW FORESTS PLANTED IN LITHUANIA (HA)
2018	1 018
2019	1 004
2020	875
2021	882

The 2019 EC [report](#) on the implementation of the Habitats Directive indicates that only 1 out of 13 forest habitat types of European Community importance in Lithuania was assessed as favourable, and 6 as unfavourable. It is also important to note that forests in Lithuania are not intensively and sustainably used: Less than 2% of the total volume of the forest is harvested each year, or only about 70% of the net increment, leaving an ever-increasing reserve for the future. Thanks to highly sustainable forest management, the wood potential of forests has increased steadily over the past 50 years. A threshold is being reached where the amount of naturally regenerating wood that is not being used rationally is increasing. Dead wood on the ground in the country's forests accounts for more than 10% of the volume of tree stems growing in forests, with approximately 1.03 m3 of dead wood per hectare being completely decomposed and converted into CO2 each year.

The forestry sector is the largest GHG sink among all sectors in Lithuania (the absorbent). The country's forests absorb on [average](#) about 18 million tonnes of CO2eq/year, it is projected that if no action is taken, Lithuania's forests will emit more carbon dioxide than they can absorb as early as 2026. The application of sustainable forest management principles is crucial to address the identified problems. The EC points out that active measures by forest owners and farmers to increase the carbon stored in forests and agricultural soils would make an important contribution to the EU's overall GHG reduction commitments. Proper management is essential to ensure that forests store more carbon dioxide than they release: Restoring, planting and maintaining young forests, protecting trees and forest cover from damage and not tolerating forest destruction. The NCCMA has also set goals to contribute to sustainable forest management – to increase the stock of organic carbon stored in forests and wood products, to intensify (increase) the annual absorption of organic carbon through the development of sustainable forestry, to increase the use of local raw materials in the production of wood products, and to increase the country's forest cover to at least 35% (from 33.7%) by 2024, giving priority to areas planted with trees and shrubs in accordance with ecological principles. Another important tool that could help address the issue of forest expansion is discussion with representatives of different sectors, especially agriculture, as it is on their lands that the most (potential) forest cover can be increased.

Protecting existing forests is a crucial part of protecting ecosystems, not just creating new ones. Forest fire monitoring is carried out using the Automated Forest Fire Monitoring Ground System (AFFMS), which was installed in 2010-2013 in all Lithuanian forests classified as fire risk levels I and II (17 VMU regional units). High-quality, continuous monitoring of high-risk forest fire hotspots ensures the timely detection of forest fire hotspots in the early phase of fires, preventing them from spreading, reducing economic losses, damage to nature and atmospheric pollution, and preserving ecosystems and biodiversity.

However, according to the Environment and Climate Change Management Development Programme's progress measure "Promotion of forest development and sustainable development of the forest sector", the GASFFS equipment has been in use for 8-10 years and is obsolete (for optical detectors, computers, communications and other similar equipment, this is the end of life). The technological and physical obsolescence of the GASFFS (obsolete parts of the detectors used by the GASFFS, obsolete software, etc.) has been identified as a potential malfunction of the system and consequently as a negative consequence for the control of forest fires. More than €23 million of EU and other international financial assistance is planned to avoid this problem (including co-financing) – the funding allocated for this purpose and the implementation of the measure will lead to the modernisation of the GASFFS in Lithuania.

In addition, increasing the resilience of forest ecosystems to climate change-related natural disasters and increasing outbreaks of forest pests and diseases requires increasing forest biodiversity, changing attitudes and applying nature-friendly forestry measures and technologies, such as the establishment of climate-resilient, diverse conifer-deciduous stands and the use of self-sustaining forest regeneration.

Forests are most often mentioned in the discussion on GHG sinks, but wetlands also play a key role. Wetlands are often considered to be the most efficient carbon dioxide sinks from all terrestrial ecosystems. Restoring wetlands is important to protect ecosystems and biodiversity by filtering pollutants in wetlands, removing reeds and atypical woody vegetation, and damming watercourses to keep meltwater and floodwater in the wetland as long as possible. Agriculture can contribute to climate change mitigation by increasing the GHG storage/absorption function of soils through sustainable and environmentally friendly agriculture.

Lithuania is working to halt land degradation and restore soils (target 15.3), but the situation is deteriorating: The country's share of degraded land in total land area was 12.4% in 2016-2019 (7,919 km²), compared to 6.6% for the period 2000-2015 (4,202 km²). Lithuania is not yet threatened by desertification, but the issues of soil and land degradation covered by the UN Convention to Combat Desertification are of particular importance and relevance. In addition to soil erosion caused by wind and rain, irresponsible agricultural practices such as over-tillage, inappropriate use of agricultural machinery and heavy use of fertilisers contribute to the deterioration of Lithuania's soil. Lithuania is actively involved in addressing land degradation and desertification issues and is committed to collecting, analysing and exchanging information on desertification, as well as to sharing its experience and technological know-how to address the problem.

To conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems, Lithuania has increased funding for biodiversity protection, landscape management and conservation from €8.1 million in 2018 to €11.76 million in 2021 (target 15.a., 15.b.). It should be noted that the state budget, together with EU support, amounted to more than €25 million in 2021, which were used to finance the implementation of direct biodiversity and landscape protection projects, as well as measures related to education, drafting of legal acts, preparation of inventory documents, etc. Municipalities have earmarked about €7.6 million from their budgets for the implementation of biodiversity and landscape protection measures, including the protection of natural heritage sites, in 2021.

IN ORDER TO CONSERVE AND
SUSTAINABLY USE BIODIVERSITY,
LITHUANIA HAS INCREASED FUNDING
FOR BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION,
LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT AND
CONSERVATION
FROM €8.1 MILLION IN 2018
TO €11.76 MILLION IN 2021

On the other hand, according to the Lithuanian Priority Action Programme 2022 for the implementation of the EU Habitats and Wild Birds Directives submitted to the EC, the estimated financial needs for Natura 2000 priority actions for the period 2021-2027 amount to €851.97 million (or €121.71 million per year). This calculation includes Natura 2000-related horizontal measures and administrative costs, measures to maintain and restore species and habitats associated with Natura 2000 sites to good status, additional green infrastructure measures and additional measures for the conservation and restoration of species-specific conservation and restoration measures not linked to specific ecosystems or habitats.

However, it should be noted that site-specific conservation objectives have not yet been developed until 2022 for Natura 2000 sites in Lithuania. This fact has reduced legal clarity as to which areas should be conserved when planning and implementing economic activities, or to which ecological status habitats and species should be restored when planning and implementing active and passive conservation measures.

Lithuania is committed to taking urgent and necessary measures to reduce the deterioration of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and protect endangered species (target 15.5). In this area, the 2018-2021 period is on track according to the Red List index which is 0.99 in Lithuania. Conservation and restoration of ecosystems must be prioritised to maintain the Red List index, as this would also ensure the protection of individual threatened species – Red List species are the consequence of ecosystems not being protected. Experts say that saving a single species requires very large amounts of resources, which is why such projects are often met with public scepticism, despite the importance of restoring ecosystems for agriculture, tourism, industry, energy and public health and well-being. According to experts in the field, it is important to avoid superficial solutions (e.g. one-off stocking of water bodies) that do not work in the long term because of the poor state of the habitat.

It should be noted, however, that this Red List index does not provide a complete picture of the status of habitats and biodiversity. In Lithuania, according to the 2019 Habitats Directive report, the protection status of only 8% of Lithuania's forest habitats types was assessed as favourable, 46% of forest habitats were assessed as inadequate and the remaining 46% were assessed as poor. There was also no grassland habitat type of European Community importance with a favourable conservation status (25% of grasslands and their associated habitats of European Community importance are in unfavourable inadequate condition and 75% in unfavourable poor condition).

In addition, birds and insects, especially pollinators, are disappearing from the agricultural landscape. The populations

of 21 bird species associated with grassland and wetland habitats are declining in Lithuania. A total 11 of the 54 natural habitat of Community importance found in Lithuania (in addition to those found in the Baltic Sea) are also associated with wetland ecosystems, but surveys have shown that the status of most of these wetland habitats importance in Lithuania is unfavourable. Action is needed to address these problems: Identify and implement the necessary conservation measures in habitats that meet the ecological needs of the species and habitats within the habitat, otherwise, delays in implementing the measures will require greater financial investment to restore degraded habitats and could lead to the irreversible loss of some species.

Lithuania aims to stop unauthorised destruction of and illegal trade in protected flora and fauna species (target 15.7). In 2018-2021 the proportion of illegally hunted animals in the country has increased from 0.03% to 0.06%. The country takes legal and administrative measures to ensure that activities involving the development, processing, use, transfer and release of living genetically modified organisms and micro-organisms resulting from modern biotechnology, which may have a negative impact on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, are carried out in accordance with established requirements (target 15.6). Measures for the period 2021-2023 for the conservation and development of forest tree genetic resources aim at conserving forest tree genetic resources in their place of origin and, after their transfer to other environments, at the establishment and maintenance of plantations of major and rare forest tree species, and at participation in international organisations. However, the legal framework for the conservation and use of national plant genetic resources, in place since 2001, needs to be improved: The system is not adapted to the progress made in international law in this field, duplication and/or lack of clarity of the roles of some national actors in the field of conservation and use of genetic resources.

Lithuania has adopted national legislation to prevent and control the spread of alien invasive species (target 15.8.) and has integrated biodiversity indicators into national accounting and reporting systems (target 15.9). Invasive species pose a threat to native animal and plant species and ecosystems, damaging agriculture, local biodiversity, economies and even human health. It should be noted that limiting or eradicating the spread of invasive species is a particularly difficult process to manage because the species to be eradicated are also vulnerable to native flora and fauna. In order to properly address these issues by selecting the most effective and efficient eradication methods and measures, it is necessary to ensure that staff have appropriate and specialised training.

Professionals (ecologists, biologists, foresters, plantation specialists) are also essential to protect biodiversity, diverse ecosystems, animal and plant species. Experts say that the low attractiveness of the profession and the low salaries mean that there is a shortage of forestry and ecology specialists and field scientists, and a shortage of biological surveys to assess the state of habitats. Public involvement needs to be promoted through education, with more emphasis on conservation education in schools. The need for this expertise is likely to grow in the future, given the increasing importance of biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, so it is important to invest in its promotion and development now. In addition, there is a lack of scientific research on the impact of climate change on the viability of forest ecosystems, reliable research-based information and public awareness in Lithuania. While there is a considerable amount of basic research on adaptation to climate change, there is a lack of linkages between this research and policy decisions in the forest sector.

Given the funding needs, the above-mentioned increase in funding over the period 2018-2021 is relatively small and insufficient, and calls for a stronger increase in investment in the future. It should also be noted that in order to achieve a faster and more effective improvement of the indicator, it is important to ensure not only the nature protection of protected areas, but also the sustainable development of the country's green infrastructure as a whole. To this end, it is important to carry out a regular inventory of green areas, assessing the qualitative state of ecosystems.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

The creation and planting of new forests is essential to ensure the GHG benefits of forests. Although the state forest nurseries have the capacity to produce enough forest seedlings for new forests every year, the State Forest Enterprise has only 967 ha of state land available for planting new forests in the next two years. However, a feasibility study on the development of forests in the country in 2021 found that there are almost 158 000 ha of non-forest land in Lithuania that could be used for forestry. Much of this land is abandoned or unsuitable for farming, but is owned by elderly or urban private landowners who have no intention of farming it and could therefore transfer it to the state in return for reforestation.

It is also important to mention the emerging funding challenge: to ensure the development of protected areas and the protection of protected species, to halt the decline of ecosystems, to meet the challenges of biodiversity loss, and to ensure the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, the increasing funding needs are crucial - according to the calculations outlined in the previous chapter, almost 5 times more funding than the current level of the current level of funding is required to ensure the priority actions for Natura 2000.



CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Progress on the SDG 15 is assessed as moderate. In Lithuania, the area of forests and protected areas has slightly increased between 2018 and 2023, but proper maintenance is essential to ensure that forests store more carbon dioxide than they emit. Effective measures and the financial resources to implement them are essential to protect, restore and promote terrestrial, inland water, forest, wetland and wetland ecosystems and their sustainable use, in order to sustainably manage and restore forests, to combat desertification, to restore degraded land and soil, and to halt the loss of biodiversity and to protect endangered species.

In order to make progress on SDG 15 more accurate, it is recommended to pay special attention to sustainable forest management measures, as not all Lithuanian indicators of SDG 15 reflect sustainability – the Lithuanian indicator “Progress in sustainable forest management” mainly reflects the economic dimension, with a lack of consideration of ecological and social issues. In addition, it is proposed to expand the monitoring indicator for the status of natural habitats, as the Red List Index indicator does not provide complete information on the status of habitats and biodiversity. It is also important to update the statistics on the proportion of Lithuania's total land area that is degraded. It should be noted that it is essential to ensure the long-term and effective conservation (solutions) of biodiversity and to effectively integrate landscape and biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services into forestry, agriculture, spatial planning and other sectors of public administration or the economy, as well as into environmental impact assessments of planned economic activities.

It should be noted that the publicly available international report on the 2022 SDGs for Lithuania states that Lithuania has achieved SDG 15 indicators and is successfully maintaining achieved results of indicators. However, this interpretation of the data is not entirely correct.

The discrepancy is due to the fact that Lithuania's international report provides data on the average size of protected terrestrial and freshwater areas important for biodiversity. On the other hand, Lithuania's overall SDG progress statistics only reflect the total area of protected areas in relation to the area of the country.

The magnitudes of these indicators are different, resulting in one indicator being successfully implemented and the other in moderate progress.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



SDG 16. PROMOTE PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL AND BUILD EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Reduction in all types of violent crime
- Improve the level of confidence of citizens in democratic processes: political, public administration, and judiciary

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

16.1. Lithuania has been successful in reducing all forms of violence and the number of deaths caused by it, with the number of registered homicide victims falling from 92 in 2018 to 72 in 2021.

16.2. Violence against children is a major and growing problem, with the number of children who may have experienced physical violence increasing by almost a quarter since 2018 (1,254 in 2018, 1,538 in 2021) and sexual violence by 1.5 times (148 in 2018, 225 in 2021).

16.3. The proportion of persons arrested but not yet sentenced compared to the total number of prisoners in Lithuania has decreased since 2018, but a slight increase was observed in 2021 (from 10.9% in 2020 to 11.3% in 2021).

16.4. 701 illegally stored weapons seized in Lithuania in 2021 (in 2018 – 116).

16.5. Lithuania continues to tackle corruption in a targeted way, with the share of people and companies paying bribes in the last 12 months decreasing by a fifth since 2018 (12% in 2018, 10% in 2021) and by just over a third respectively (8% in 2018, 5% in 2021).

16.6. Execution of the state budget spending plan by function has declined in recent years. The proportion of the population satisfied with public and administrative services has also fallen (from 88% in 2018 to 82% in 2021), however, this change may have been strongly influenced by COVID-19 and its containment measures.

16.7. Lithuania continues to streamline the public sector, reducing the number of civil servants by 6.15% between 2018 and 2021.

16.10. The proportion of the population rating the quality of information on public sector websites as positive fell during the pandemic, but returns to almost its 2018 level by 2021 (81% in 2021, compared to 76% in 2020).

16.c. Since 2017, the country has had national human rights institutions in line with the Paris Principles.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 16 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

In implementing SDG 16, Lithuania needs to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions; ensure a competent and efficient public sector that contributes to the proper performance of state functions and meets public expectations; and ensure public safety and access to justice for all.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Lithuania remains one of the safest countries in the EU in terms of the proportion of people reporting crime, violence or vandalism in their place of residence, second only to Croatia. Between 2018 and 2020, this indicator shows slight progress, with the proportion of Lithuanians reporting crime, violence or vandalism in their place of residence falling from 3.7% to 3.3%. While this progress shows a growing sense of public safety, it is important to continue to address the growing problem of violence, particularly against children. However, the SDG 16 goes beyond security to the institutional dimension, involving the public in the activities of the State.

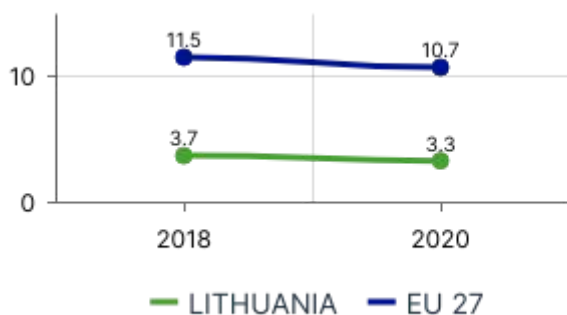


FIGURE 53. INCOME DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTRY, 2018–2021 (INCOME QUINTILE RATIO BETWEEN TOP AND BOTTOM QUINTILES)
Source: EUROSTAT, 2023.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

This goal is pursued through the implementation of the measures and goals set out in the country's national documents, in particular through strategic goal 8 of the NPP. This NDP objective on the effectiveness of the legal system aims to increase the efficiency, effectiveness, access to justice and public confidence in the judiciary, to reduce the disproportionate number of persons sentenced to real imprisonment and to ensure adequate conditions of detention for detainees in line with national and international standards, and to apply progressive re-socialisation measures. Ensuring public security is also an important objective of the 10 NPP - strengthening national security - which implements the objectives of reducing the threats of serious crime and terrorism (target 10.7) and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public security institutions (target 10.8). Meanwhile, strategic objective 8 of the NPP in the area of effectiveness of public governance aims at strengthening the government's capacity to formulate and implement sound policies, to implement results-based management and systematic evaluation of policy interventions, to strengthen the system of public sector institutions and improve their management, to achieve the rule of law and regulatory quality, to strengthen the capacity to adapt rapidly to changing conditions and to ensure the effectiveness of the individual areas of public activity (health, education, etc.).

Strengthening the public sector human resources system, enhancing the capacity and capability of these resources and ensuring strong leadership in the public sector. Implementation of the 8th and other strategic objectives and targets of the NPP also aims at improving the corruption prevention system, coherently integrating corruption prevention measures into the legal framework, enabling institutions to operate more efficiently and transparently and to enforce the rule of law, and strengthening cooperation between institutions in the area of corruption prevention.

Lithuania 2030, which highlights the scale and importance of the problem, and the [National Anti-Corruption Programme 2015-2025 of the Republic of Lithuania](#), which was replaced in 2022 by the [National Anti-Corruption Agenda 2022-2023](#). [Lithuania's National Security Strategy](#), updated in 2021, also contributes to this goal by providing for the development of the national law enforcement system and the activities of specialised units to combat organised criminal groups, to improve the ability to locate criminally acquired assets, and to ensure the effective prevention of financial crime, and to ensure the effective prevention of financial crimes of a transnational nature that cause significant damage to the State budget, the detection and investigation of VAT fraud, evasion and avoidance of excise, corporate and other taxes, money laundering and illicit enrichment, and in all international formats, to ensure respect for the norms and principles of international law and human rights. The strategy also envisages cooperation in multilateral formats, including the UN, the EU and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in order to contribute to the rules-based order and international law, to promote global cooperation among democracies and to strengthen security cooperation between the EU and the UN.

Strategic goal 8 of the NPP is implemented through the [Public Governance Development Programme 2022-2030](#), which aims to improve the public governance system, its efficiency and openness, public participation in public governance decision-making processes, and the accessibility and availability of services. Also, [the Justice System Development Programme 2021-2030](#), which implements the NPP's objectives for change in the justice sector, which aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system and the effectiveness of the penal system. The 18th Government Programme also highlights a number of goals related to the implementation of SDG 16: It focuses on openness of institutions to the public (e.g. through data disclosure) and transparency, increasing accountability, inter-institutional cooperation, flexibility of public administrations, modernisation (through e-services), institutionalisation of centralised management of the managerial corps, etc.

Ensuring that everyone has an equal right to justice is essential for the implementation of the SDG 16. The Constitution and laws of the Republic of Lithuania guarantee every person whose rights or freedoms are violated the right of access to justice. Persons who, due to their difficult financial situation or other special circumstances, are unable to defend their violated or contested rights adequately on their own may be granted state-guaranteed legal aid in accordance with the procedure laid down by law.

Increasing access to state-guaranteed legal services In 2022, the implementation of the Legal Aid Services Information System (TEISIS) was finalised, providing easy and convenient remote access to state-guaranteed legal aid.

Increasing access to justice and the publicity of the process has enabled the organisation of remote court proceedings and the public observation of remote court hearings. In order to speed up the dispute resolution process, some non-contentious matters have been transferred from the courts to notaries, measures are being implemented to balance the workload of the courts, and alternative dispute resolution methods are being promoted, such as the widespread introduction of mediation in 2019, the improved out-of-court settlement of consumer disputes, and the class action institute, among others.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

Lithuania's main focus in the implementation of SDG 16 is to improve the security of the population. A key indicator in this area – the number of recorded homicide victims – declined significantly between 2018 and 2021 (by a quarter, or from 3.3 to 2.6 cases per 100 000 inhabitants). This could be due to the measures taken in [the Public Security Development Programme 2015-2025](#) to reduce crime, increase the effectiveness of law enforcement and fight organised crime. This work will continue under the new Public Security and Development Programme, which is currently under preparation.

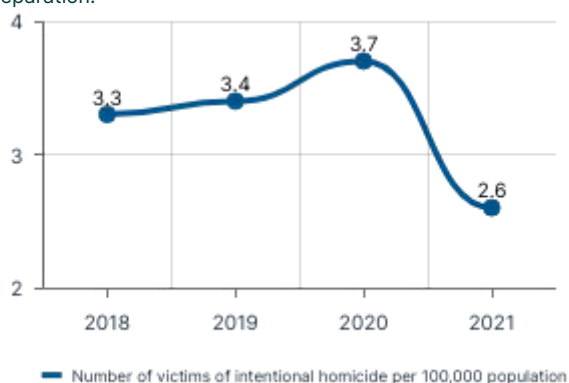


FIGURE 54. NUMBER OF REGISTERED HOMICIDE VICTIMS (PER 100 000 INHABITANTS) IN LITHUANIA 2018-2021
Source: State Data Agency, 2023.

Despite this progress, another important indicator – children who may have experienced violence – does not show such a positive change. While the incidence of psychological violence has decreased since 2018, the number of children (both boys and girls) who may have been subjected to physical and sexual violence has increased. This shows that existing measures are not sufficient and that further education against violence against children and additional safety measures, both in the immediate environment and in public spaces, are needed. An effective system for organising and implementing the prevention of crime and other violations of law must be established and its smooth functioning ensured.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the number of persons recognised as victims of trafficking in human beings (including exploitation for forced labour) in pre-trial investigations has almost doubled since 2018. However, in view of Belarus' hybrid attack on Lithuania and other EU countries in the region through irregular migration from 2021 and the arrival of large numbers of war refugees from Ukraine, who are more vulnerable due to their experiences and difficult material situation, it is important to continue to focus on the fight against human trafficking and border control.

The proportion of persons arrested but not yet sentenced as a proportion of the total number of prisoners in the country has been decreasing.

It is also important to note that the share of individuals and enterprises that have paid a bribe in the last 12 months decreased between 2018 and 2021. This shows that Lithuania is targeting one of the most important social problems (corruption) identified in several strategic documents. This positive development may be due to the implementation of anti-corruption measures, in particular those provided for in the [2015-2019 Inter-institutional Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Programme of the Republic of Lithuania for the period 2015-2025](#), which includes a wide range of initiatives (education, control, monitoring and others) both in the public sector and in society. This progress is also reflected in Lithuania's improving in the [Corruption Perceptions Index](#), which has been rising steadily since 2012. (In 2022, Lithuania scored 62 out of 100 points, ranking 12th among EU countries). For the second year in a row, Corruption Perception Index has increased by 1 point, which shows that the measures taken to develop anti-corruption policies and raise awareness of corruption are bringing about positive changes in the state and society. Nevertheless, it is important to continue to address the problem of corruption in a consistent manner by ensuring the implementation of anti-corruption measures in all regions of Lithuania, by continuing to carry out publicity, monitoring and prevention activities. [The amendments to the Law on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing of the Republic of Lithuania of 2022](#), which include the regulation and control of virtual currencies, also contribute to this goal.

Two major packages of draft laws are currently being prepared to further improve the institutional set-up of the state and increase the capacity and competence of institutions: The draft law on budgetary institutions and the draft law on public institutions. These projects propose to strengthen public governance by introducing a new governance model based on international good governance practices. Also important is the new version of the Law on Local Self-Government, which enter into force on 1 April 2023 and introduced a qualitatively new model of local self-government. The mayor, elected by the residents, becomes the executive body and head of the municipality, directly and personally responsible for the implementation of the laws, decrees of the Government and decisions of the municipal council, and for the management of the budget allocations of the entire municipality. In order to develop democratic processes in local self-government, this law expands the scope of action of minority and opposition members of the municipal council. The new model of local self-government should lead to greater autonomy and efficiency of municipalities.

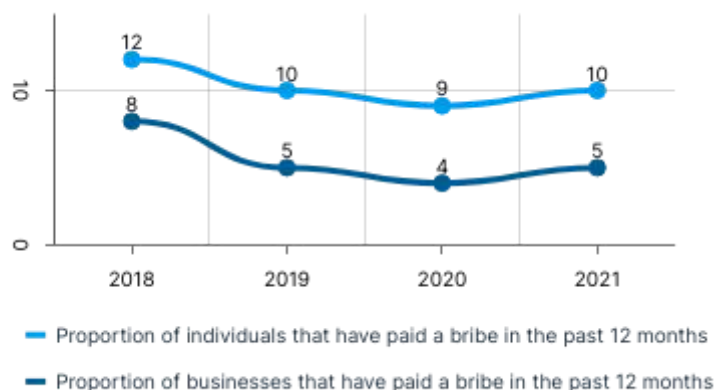


FIGURE 55. PROPORTION OF INDIVIDUALS AND BUSINESSES THAT HAVE PAID A BRIBE IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS (%) IN LITHUANIA 2018-2021
Source: Special Investigation Service, 2023

The implementation of cultural policies is also important for the achievement of SDG 16 and other SDGs (4, 8, 11). EC report [“Stormy times. Nature and humans: Cultural courage for change: 11 messages for action for and from Europe”](#). The experts formulated 11 messages with the goal that focuses on recommendations proposing areas for action and change to unlock the potential of the cultural dimension of SD, which is under-recognised in the 2030 Agenda framework. Messages 7 and 8 of this report, which also underpin the implementation of Lithuania's cultural policy, refer to SDG 16 and emphasise the importance of cultural rights for an effective people-centred approach to SD, as well as the need to ensure better opportunities for change, building positive motivation and resilience, perceived as a cultural right and a necessary resource for the future. The EU will need to step up its defence and promotion of artistic and cultural freedom and media freedom as a prerequisite for cultural diversity and related cultural freedoms. In this area, Lithuania has made significant progress on [the Media Freedom Index](#), moving from 28th place (2021) to 9th place (2022) in the world.

The Lithuanian public service also pays attention to organisational culture, which is also being developed and promoted – quality management methods are actively implemented in public institutions, for example the LEAN project, which aims to develop and implement a performance management system that will enable public sector institutions to organise their activities more effectively, continuously improve the quality of the functions they perform and more efficiently meet the needs of the public and other interested parties. The LEAN project involves 11 public institutions, 7 of which are ministries.

It is notable that among the SDGs 17, culture can only be seen in a fragmented way directly, but this does not detract from its importance in the context of the SDGs, but only confirms the assumption that the impact of culture in the sustainable development process can be on a par with the other dimensions (economic, social and environmental).

In Lithuania, the emphasis on libraries is notable. According to 2022 data, there were 2 152 libraries of various types and

sizes in Lithuania (including 1 183 municipal public libraries, 5 county public libraries, 34 higher education libraries, 774 general education libraries, etc.). These libraries contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the sustainable development according to the scope and capacity of their activities. It is believed that the National Martynas Mažvydas Library of Lithuania is the most important contributor to the implementation of the SDGs, as a national cultural institution shaping the implementation of the state information policy at the national level.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Overall, Lithuania's progress towards SDG 16 is steady and increasing. In recent years, Lithuania has made progress in reducing the number of victims of all forms of violence and homicide, in continuing to tackle corruption, and in optimising and reforming the public sector at both municipal and national level. On the other hand, it is important to continue to improve public safety by reducing all types of violent and non-violent crime, with a particular focus on education and preventive measures to reduce the incidence of violence (including psychological violence) against children.

Given the decline in public satisfaction with public and administrative services and the quality of information on public sector websites during the pandemic, it is important to have contingency infrastructure and operational plans in place and to improve the quality of institutions' websites and the information on them. It is also important to promote public confidence in the political process, public administration and the judiciary, which is low compared to other EU countries. Given the declining number of young civil servants (aged 18-30), it is also important to find ways to attract and motivate young people into the public sector. Changes in the civil service can help address this challenge.

THE MARTYNAS MAŽVYDAS NATIONAL LIBRARY OF LITHUANIA

The Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania provides access to information for all, thus contributing to the promotion of peace and justice and the implementation of the SDG 16. However, it should be noted that it also contributes to other SDGs: it helps the community served to access quality education (SDG 4), cooperates with national and international partners to build partnership networks for common goals (SDG 17), contributes to initiatives for sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), and through COVID-19 provided emotional support measures for users, as well as preventive protection measures for staff and users (SDG 3).



Source: We Love Lithuania, 2018.

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



SDG 17. STRENGTHEN THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALIZE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

KEY CHALLENGES:

- Increasing private sector investment that contributes to sustainable development
- Raising awareness of the importance of the Development in society and national institutions
- Moving towards a more balanced ratio of multilateral and bilateral ODA from Lithuania

(IN)PROGRESS OF KEY INDICATORS PER TARGET:

17.1. As the Lithuanian economy grows, so does the share of government revenue in GDP (from 34.5% in 2018 to 36.5% in 2021).

17.2. Lithuania's ODA allocation is growing systematically, but due to the country's growing economy, ODA as a share of Gross National Income (GNI) is growing more slowly (from 0.12% in 2018 to 0.14% in 2021). Preliminary data show that ODA as a share of GNI has increased to 0.29% in 2022, close to the country's strategic targets (0.33% by 2030).

17.3. The ratio of remittances to GDP is decreasing: from 2.6% in 2018 to 1.4% 2020.

17.4. Debt service costs have declined relative to exports of goods and services: from 1.4% in 2018 to 0.6% in 2021.

17.6. The number of fixed broadband internet subscribers in Lithuania is increasing: 28.2 subscribers per 100 inhabitants in 2018 and 28.7 in 2021. More and more people are using high-speed internet connections (over 100 Mbps).

17.8. Almost nine out of ten people use the internet (8 out of 10 in 2018). Internet use among young people (16-24 years) has remained stable in absolute terms (100%), while it has increased among older people (65-74 years): from 39% in 2018 to 55% in 2021.

17.13. Lithuania's macroeconomic indicators remain positive, but the main challenge is the sharp rise in inflation (1.9% in 2018, 10.6% in 2021).

17.14. Lithuania has mechanisms in place to ensure policy coherence for development.

17.18. The share of nationally published 2030 Agenda sustainable development indicators has increased by 10 percentage points compared to all nationally relevant indicators (80% in 2018, 90% in 2021).

17.19. The country has national statistical legislation and funded plans.

More information on (in)progress for specific indicators is available [here](#).

SDG 17 IMPORTANCE IN THE LITHUANIAN CONTEXT

Since joining the EU and becoming a donor country in 2004, Lithuania carries out continuous and effective development cooperation policy aimed at contributing to the implementation of the SDGs in partner countries. Based on the 2030 Agenda, development cooperation activities contribute to ensuring peace, promoting economic growth and social stability, reducing the inequalities between developed and developing countries, and integrating developing countries into the global economy. It focuses on sustainable development in all economic sectors, poverty reduction, quality education, gender equality, climate change mitigation, rule of law, effective institutions and global partnerships for the implementation of the SDGs.

Effective multilateralism and inclusive partnerships are long-standing priorities for Lithuania. Therefore, Lithuania has consistently strengthened its cooperation with the EU institutions, the UN, the OECD, the World Bank and other international organisations, international financial institutions and foundations coordinating global efforts to support developing countries. Tackling the challenges in recent years, Lithuania has continued its cooperation, strengthened partnerships, actively participated in discussions and constructively contributed to decision-making on key development cooperation issues in international organisations and multilateral forums.

Lithuania joined the OECD in 2018 and the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in the autumn of 2022. The successful accession to the DAC, the most important international donor forum, is one of the examples of Lithuania's recognition in the international arena. DAC membership confirms that Lithuania meets the high criteria for development cooperation, and that its experience is valued by the international experts. Lithuania is committed to further strengthen its development cooperation system through active participation in the DAC and the peer review mechanism.

PROGRESS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT



FIGURE 56. SHARE OF OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (ODA) IN RELATION TO GNI (%) FROM LITHUANIA AND OTHER EU COUNTRIES, 2018-2022
Source: EUROSTAT, 2023

Lithuania's ODA in 2021 was 0.14% of GNI, 0.02 percentage points higher than in 2018, and in a similar position among the other Member States that joined the EU in 2004. It is important to note that Lithuania's ODA has been growing modestly yet consistently in recent years. However, the significant additional support to Ukraine since the start of the Russian-led war has resulted in Lithuania's ODA being twice as large as its share in GNI in 2022.

According to the preliminary OECD data, Lithuania's ODA represented 0.29% of GNI. According to the OECD, the country's ODA has increased by 121.6%, ranking Lithuania fourth in terms of ODA growth when comparing its progress to other EU-DAC countries.

A quarter of Lithuania's total ODA was allocated to Ukraine – in 2022, Lithuania provided more than €47 million worth of assistance (development cooperation projects, humanitarian and financial assistance) to Ukraine. In addition, more than €43 million has been provided as a support to war refugees from Ukraine who have arrived in Lithuania.

STRATEGIC AGENDA

Strategic goal 9 of the NPP “Strengthening Lithuania's influence in the world and relations with the diaspora” underlines the aim to increase Lithuania's visibility and representation of its interests in international organisations (EU, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), UN, OSCE, EC, OECD, UNESCO, etc.), to participate in programmes and projects funded by the international donors, to share reform experience, to ensure achievement of the SDGs and to contribute to the well-being of people at the international level. It also envisages, that strengthening the implementation of the development cooperation policy will ensure Lithuania's international commitment (by 2030, to allocate for the ODA at least 0.33% of GNI). The NPP provides an intermediate value for the indicator, indicating Lithuania's target for ODA as a share of GNI in 2025, which would be 0.22%, while the Strategic Action Plan 2023-2025 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides shorter term intermediate values for ODA targets: to allocate 0.18% of GNI in 2023 and 0.2 in 2024.

National development programme, coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provides for measures to strengthen the effectiveness of the development cooperation system that enhances Lithuania's soft power. The strategic documents also emphasise Lithuania's commitment to multilateral assistance efforts through contributions to international organisations and funds that implement or coordinate the development cooperation activities, as well as through co-financing for the implementation of programmes and projects funded by the international donors. Lithuania provides humanitarian assistance in response to global humanitarian needs and supports initiatives that promote greater involvement of national institutions in development cooperation activities and raise the public awareness of the goals and importance of development cooperation to Lithuanian society.

Striving to enhance effectiveness of the development cooperation policy, a systemic reform has been implemented in Lithuania, the main outcome of which is the establishment of the Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance Fund (the Fund) in 2022. The Fund is not tied to annual budgeting rules, is open to other sources of funding and provides the necessary flexibility for multi-annual programming, thus allowing for the implementation of larger-scale programmes and projects. Seeking to enhance development cooperation activities and substantially increase ODA volumes, Lithuanian institutions aim to engage with economic and social partners, in particular private sector. In 2017, five main business umbrella organisations were included

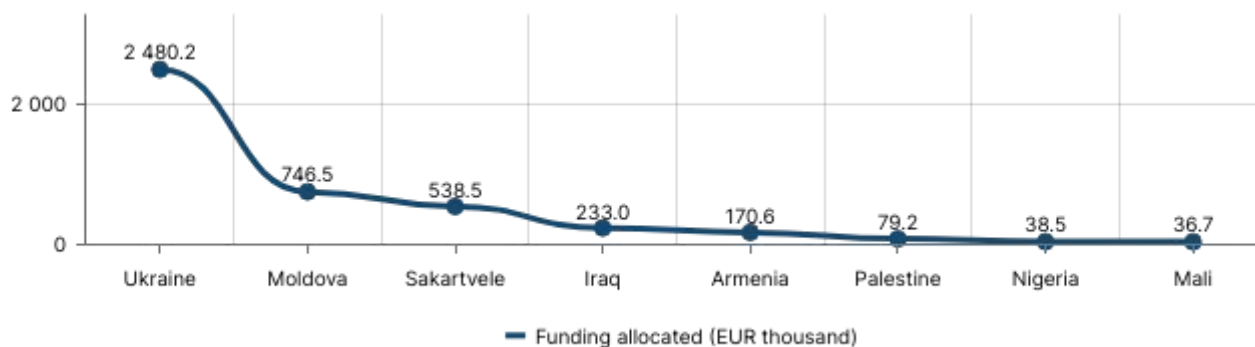


FIGURE 57. FUNDING FOR DC PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED BY LITHUANIA IN 2018-2022 (THOUS. EUR), BY COUNTRY
Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023

in the renewed National Development Cooperation Commission. In 2022, a representative of business associations was also included in the newly established Governing Board of the Fund. Municipalities (the Lithuanian Association of Local Authorities) and NGOs are also represented in the National Development Cooperation Commission and the Governing Board of the Fund and can participate in shaping Lithuanian development cooperation policies and in the decision-making process on the Fund allocations.

In 2021, the Strategic Guidelines for Development Cooperation 2022-2025 were adopted, aiming at establishing planning and management conditions for a more coherent, rational and sustainable development cooperation policy. It lays down policy guidelines and aims to support effective development policies contributing to the achievement of the SDGs, in accordance with the needs of partner countries.

The EU's Eastern Partnership countries, the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa are identified as the geographical development cooperation priorities for 2022-2025. The development cooperation strategies for Africa and Middle East for 2022-2025 focus on Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, and Iraq and Palestine, with digitisation, institutional capacity building with a focus on building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions and good governance, and sustainable economic development. Between 2018 and 2022, Lithuania has implemented 13 development cooperation projects in Nigeria, Mali, Iraq and Palestine with a total value of €387.5 thousand.

The development cooperation strategy for Armenia 2022-2025 states Lithuania's goal to strengthen Armenia's administrative and institutional capacities to implement reforms, transfer experience in public sector reform, support democratic transition, strengthen public resilience to disinformation and contribute to gender equality. As of 2018, Lithuania has implemented 27 development cooperation projects in Armenia worth more than €170 thousand. The development cooperation strategy for Uzbekistan for 2022-2025 highlights Lithuania's support to the country's education system, assistance to climate change mitigation and the introduction of innovative technologies, as well as support to increase the effectiveness of border management in Uzbekistan (and Central Asia).

The development cooperation strategies for Ukraine, Georgia (Sakartvelo) and Moldova for 2022-2025 highlight Lithuania's support for strengthening the administrative and institutional capacities of these countries in implementing reforms and transferring experience in public sector reforms, with a focus on strengthening civil society resilience to disinformation and promoting gender equality.

Lithuania has provided the largest amount of funding for development cooperation projects in Ukraine in 2018-2022, with 67 projects implemented for more than €2.48 million. In the same period,

in Georgia – 42 projects for €538.5 thousand and in Moldova – 32 projects for € 746.5 thousand. Additionally, at the end of 2022, €809 thousand was allocated to 15 projects in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, and Uzbekistan, as well as Palestine and Iraq (implementation starts from 2023) by the call for proposals under the Fund. Also, in 2018-2022, 17 regional projects were implemented in the EU's Eastern Partnership countries for €626 thousand.

At the multilateral level, Lithuania has consistently strengthened its cooperation with the EU institutions, the UN, the OECD, the World Bank and other international organisations, international financial institutions and foundations coordinating global efforts to support developing countries. The largest share of Lithuania's multilateral ODA is contributions to the EU budget for the implementation of development cooperation activities (€33.46 million in 2018 and €60.74 million in 2022), while the second largest contribution is allocated to the European Development Fund (in 2022, €5.06 million). It is also worth mentioning the successful participation of Lithuanian national institutions in the EU Twinning and TAIEX programmes for the transfer of reform experiences and cooperation with EU candidate countries and the EU's Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood countries: In terms of the number of EU Twinning projects won in recent years, Lithuania is among the top 5 most successful EU countries (30 between 2018 and 2021), and in 2021 Lithuania was the second most successful EU Member State in terms of participation in Twinning projects.

OVERVIEW OF (IN)PROGRESS

Lithuania aims to contribute to the enhancement of global development cooperation partnership, and the most important indicator in this regard is the ratio of Lithuanian ODA to GNI, which increased slightly between 2018 and 2021 (from 0.12 to 0.14%). The relatively slow growth of the indicator is partly due to the annual funding allocated for the implementation of the Inter-Institutional Development Cooperation Action Plan (2017-2019), which decreased from €12.66 million in 2017 to €11.93 million in 2018 (planned: €11.67 million), slowing down the growth of the Lithuanian ODA for 2017-2018. On the other hand, the allocations for the Inter-Institutional Development Cooperation Action Plan in 2019-2021 have been growing, with the actual funding allocated increasing from €15.59 million (planned: €15.68 million) in 2019 to €18.42 million (planned: €15.13 million) in 2021. Lithuania's total ODA allocations has also grown steadily over the 2018-2021 period: In 2018, the ODA amounted to €55 million, €60.4 million in 2019, €63.2 million in 2020, and €73.05 million in 2021.

Preliminary data shows that Lithuania's ODA in 2022 were €187.46 million. It should be noted that other significant push on Lithuania's bilateral ODA growth in 2020-2021 come from Lithuania's support to developing countries in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (in 2021, about 550 000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine were delivered to partner countries Armenia, Georgia (Sakartvelo), Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Vietnam), as well as from in-donor costs for refugee assistance and growing Lithuania's share to the EU budget, allocated for development cooperation activities. The growth of Lithuania's ODA as a share of GNI over the period 2018-2021 is also influenced by the country's economic growth, which has facilitated the growth of ODA. Since 2021, there has been renewed progress, which should continue in the medium term, given the large amounts of humanitarian and financial assistance to Ukraine and the systemic reform of the development cooperation policy. This would ensure the successful implementation of the intermediate objectives set out in the strategic documents.

It is important to underline that Ukraine became a key priority country for the Lithuanian development cooperation, receiving increasing support from 2022 onwards due to Russia's unjustified and unprovoked war. Prior to the war, Lithuania continued to share experience and provide support in response to Ukraine's needs, including by supporting the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA/DCFTA), providing assistance to Ukrainian citizens affected by the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine, strengthening the capacity of state institutions, facilitating reforms in education and health sector, and encouraging entrepreneurship. Lithuanian experts shared their experience in public financial management, rule of law reforms and competition. The brutal Russia's war in Ukraine radically changed the needs for assistance. Well-established direct institutional contacts have enabled Lithuanian institutions to respond quickly with urgent and targeted assistance (humanitarian, financial and expert). There is also a wide range of support for Ukrainian refugees in Lithuania: the country accepts Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war and provides them with cash social assistance, one-off settlement allowances, partial rent compensation, pensions and various social services.

Lithuania is also one of the first countries to contribute to the reconstruction of Ukraine's infrastructure and launched projects to rebuild Ukraine's public infrastructure. The Fund has launched three reconstruction projects in Ukraine for about €12 million. Reconstruction of education and training facilities damaged by the war, modernisation of energy infrastructure, and temporary resettlement of people made homeless by war are Lithuania's main priorities in supporting Ukraine's reconstruction in the short term. Lithuania continues to provide development assistance to Ukraine through the Fund. It will implement projects to improve the social and economic conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs), help Ukrainian institutions implement reforms necessary for the country's further integration into the EU, and strengthen independent media. Looking ahead and in terms of allocations, Lithuania's ODA is expected to grow at a slightly faster pace from 2022 onwards. In the short term, however, the most significant impact on the growth of Lithuania's ODA as a share of GNI will come from significant additional funding, (mainly from the Government Reserve and supplementary allocations to the ministries) in support of the war-torn Ukraine and to meet its basic needs of the population and institutions.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

One of the challenges in implementing Lithuania's ODA policy is that the majority (around 80%) of Lithuania's ODA in recent years has been multilateral. The newly implemented reforms (in particular the establishment of the Fund) aim at ensuring a gradual shift towards a more balanced ratio between multilateral and bilateral aid (the regulations of the Fund foresee the use of allocations for bilateral aid and co-financing). At the same time, it should be noted that the additional support to Ukraine in 2022 resulted in bilateral ODA reaching 59%.

Another challenge is the financing of bilateral development cooperation activities, which is exclusively based on direct financing of projects and programmes from the state budget, without diversification of the financial resources allocated to the ODA. In the nearest future, more attention is to be paid to innovative solutions and tools that can generate more added value, in particular financial engineering (e.g. through soft loans or financial guarantees for the implementation of the activities of the development cooperation), which is expected to accelerate the progress of the development cooperation policy, while at the same time involving more actively both the private and the NGO sector.

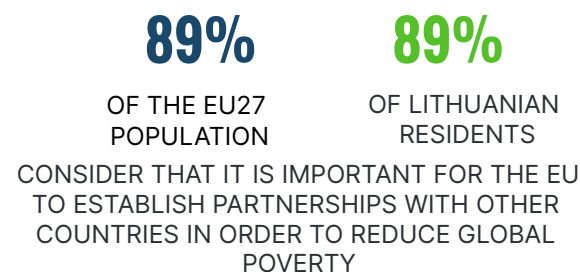
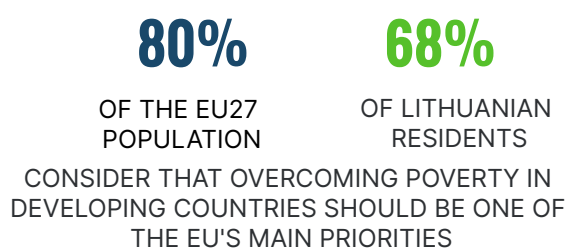
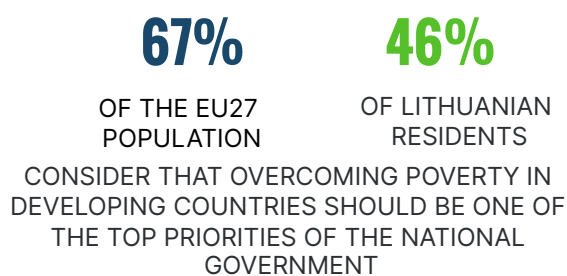


FIGURE 59. SUPPORT OF THE LITHUANIAN POPULATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (% OF POPULATION), 2022
Source: EUROBAROMETER, 2022.

There is also a limited understanding of the importance of this area, e.g. the role of development cooperation in foreign policy is still perceived in a rather narrow way and their potential and leverage is not appreciated. Significant changes in this area can only be achieved by changing the perception of development cooperation as an effective instrument for enhancing soft power and as a foreign policy area that perfectly combines value and economic interests.

Finally, it is important to mention the challenges of public opinion: according to the Eurobarometer survey published in June 2022, 89% of Lithuanian respondents believe that it is important for the EU to build partnerships with other countries to reduce global poverty (same as the EU average). However, compared to 2020, there has been a significant increase in the number of people who believe that reducing poverty in these countries should be one of the EU's top priorities, with 68% believing this. Lithuanian respondents are more confident than the EU average of 80%. Only 46% of Lithuanian respondents think this should be a priority for the national Government (well below the EU average of 67%). Based on previous data (2020), it can be seen that public attitudes towards development cooperation are improving in Lithuania, but not yet enough to reach the EU average.

On the other hand, in the case of Ukraine, the Lithuanian public is more supportive of financial aid – in March 2022 over half of Lithuanians had provided aid to Ukraine. Significant changes in favour of development cooperation can be achieved by strengthening communication and informing the public through public diplomacy about the benefits and importance of development cooperation, about Lithuania's contribution in this area – concrete results, achievements, success stories.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

Lithuania's progress towards achieving the SDG 17 can be assessed as moderate and sufficient to achieve the SDG. Despite the systematic reform of the country's development cooperation policy in recent years and the steady increase in ODA allocations, a number of key challenges remain that hinder faster progress towards the SDG. The importance of development cooperation in Lithuania's foreign policy is still perceived in a rather narrow way, its potential and leverage are underestimated, the majority of Lithuania's ODA is still multilateral, and there is still insufficient diversification of the financial resources allocated to development cooperation .

On the other hand, Lithuania is committed to continue its development cooperation activities by implementing measures aimed at financing and monitoring development cooperation projects, attracting private sector investments through public sector funds, informing the public in Lithuania and partner countries about development cooperation issues, organising events and visits, and participating in EU, UN and international donor activities. Lithuania aims to make a more significant contribution to global development cooperation efforts by initiating bilateral partnership programmes and sharing best practices in order to meet the international commitment by 2030 to allocate to ODA at least 0.33% of GNI, while meeting the intermediate targets set for the indicator.

In order to diversify the financing of development cooperation, it is important to include other sustainable financing modalities and to adapt innovative financial instruments. It is needed to assess the potential of new development finance institutions to provide financial services (soft loans and financial guarantees) to enterprises undertaking development cooperation projects. Given the absence of a national development bank in Lithuania, there is a need to explore opportunities for cooperation with national and international financial institutions and agencies. Finally, there is a need to raise awareness of development cooperation among the public society and national institutions: development cooperation must be long-term and consistent, generate economic and political returns, raise the visibility and positive image of Lithuania, and contribute to the promotion of democracy, human rights and good governance at the international level.

GOOD PRACTISE

Founded in 2015, "AfriKo" is a non-governmental research and consultancy centre that aims to become the leading hub for mutually beneficial international partnerships in the Baltic States. AfriKo brings together practitioners, businesses, political, cultural and academic communities working in and interested in Africa through its activities.

Between 2019 and 2022, AfriKo implemented the Digital Explorers project together with partners from the public and private sector. This initiative provided 30 young Nigerian IT talents with professional development opportunities in Lithuanian companies, created €2.5 million of added value for the Lithuanian IT sector, stimulated direct investment in Nigeria by the company "Telesoftas", and opened up opportunities for fintech cooperation between Lithuania and Nigeria.

"Digital Explorers has been recognised by the EC as a European success story in talent partnerships. After the first phase of Digital Explorers, the project is being further developed to include new partner countries (Kenya, Armenia, Iraq) and to share experience with the Baltic States (Latvia and Estonia). "AfriKo also produces and presents research on Baltic foreign policy and Africa-EU relations at international academic conferences. The Centre promotes research-based policy dialogue and cooperation with scholars from the Baltic region and the world, as well as a more strategic and comprehensive approach of the Baltic States towards Africa and other regions of global partnerships.



Source: AfriKo, 2021-2022.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

The success of the 2030 Agenda and the implementation of SDGs is closely linked to political attention and the continued provision of financial interventions and communications to create positive change. The country's systemic challenges, the impact of COVID-19, Russia's brutal and unjustified war against Ukraine, the rising cost of energy resources, and other socio-economic crises raise concerns about the continued success of the 2030 Agenda. In the face of crises, there should be a renewed drive for more effective cooperation at national and international levels, encouraging even more knowledge and evidence-based governance and innovation, as well as addressing systemic national challenges through coherent, integrated and continuous interventions.

STRONG NATIONAL LEGAL REGULATION

Both the previous and this VNR have focused on ensuring sustainable, innovative development in all sectors of the economy that contributes to solving social problems and leaves no one behind. Lithuania has maintained its policy continuity to contribute to the 2030 Agenda: both reports have been subject to an assessment of the coherence of the 2030 Agenda with national strategic planning documents, which has shown the consistency of the SDGs with Lithuania's strategic planning documents. Lithuania 2030 and the NPP provide the basis for the implementation of an institutional and strategic planning framework based on the principles of the sustainable development in Lithuania and help to ensure coherence between different policy areas. It should be noted that addressing the country's systemic challenges, such as income inequality and poverty, regional disparities and exclusion, and the demographic situation of society, requires an integrated, systemic approach, to which the above-mentioned legal framework contributes.

Both public institutions and NGOs note that while the national legal framework of the 2030 Agenda creates the right conditions for the coherent implementation of the SDGs, the relevance of the implementation process itself - political attention, inter-institutional cooperation, public information, and assessment of progress - has been episodic so far. In order to ensure a balanced assessment of progress on the 2030 Agenda, a proactive approach to the implementation of the SDGs is recommended, giving greater prominence to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on the political agenda and in the public sphere. In order to ensure a balanced assessment of the progress of the 2030 Agenda and the implementation of the NPP, coordinators of the horizontal principles (SD, equal opportunities for all, and innovation) have been appointed to prepare, among other systematic activities, annual reports on the implementation of the horizontal principles from 2023 onwards, which will become an integral part of the annual NPP implementation report.

These reports are expected to help better track the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and, accordingly, plan and implement the necessary interventions. However, in order to timely and proactively assess the implementation of the SDGs, it is important to strengthen institutional cooperation mechanisms.

Above all, it is crucial to ensure discussions on Agenda 2030 and its implementation at the political agenda as well as timely update the priorities of SDGs for Lithuania. It could be done by transferring additional sustainable development coordination functions to an already existing high-level structure - the State Progress Council - that would ensure the relevance of sustainable development at the strategic and political levels. This could be followed by the establishment of an official network of sustainable development coordinators, including representatives from governmental and non-governmental sector, business, academia, and other relevant stakeholders, which would provide necessary assistance and ensure consistency, appropriateness, and efficiency of the essential interventions to achieve SDGs.

These cross-cutting measures would contribute to raising the profile of the SDGs, strengthening inter-institutional cooperation, both in terms of public information and data monitoring and progress assessment mechanisms. It should be noted that the interactive data presentation used by the State Data Agency is convenient for public use, but the country's choice of indicators for the SDGs should be regularly reviewed and updated, bringing them up to date and as far as possible in line with the UN indicators.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA

A country's progress towards the 2030 Agenda can be divided into two phases: before the start of COVID-19 and in the post-COVID-19 period. It should be noted that from 2018 to the start of the pandemic, the country experienced economic growth, positive trends in SDG indicators and changes in the strategic planning framework. COVID-19 slowed the country's economic growth, contributed to challenges in reducing poverty, social exclusion and income inequality, promoting employment and created difficult conditions for the development of education and health services. These problems have been exacerbated by international challenges, such as the influx of migrants at Belarus' borders with EU countries in the summer of 2021, Russia's illegal military invasion of Ukraine starting in February 2022, the energy crisis. These challenges have undermined the country's progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda. In the absence of effective coordination mechanisms for the 2030 Agenda, national and international challenges have made inter-institutional cooperation even more difficult.

While evaluating individual SDGs, it should be noted that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is not uniform in Lithuania- the progress of some goals (for example, SDGs 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17) is greater than others. There are several reasons for this, such as the effectiveness of long-term interventions, public and political attention to the challenges associated with a given SDG, and strong collaborative links between institutions and public organisations for a concrete SDG. In particular, the poverty reduction support measures implemented to reduce poverty in the country (SDG 1) have been effective. However, in the longer term, the country's social protection system needs to be strengthened, with a particular focus on improving the situation of the socially vulnerable and reducing income inequalities.

While structural reforms in the education sector contribute to the improvement of the SDG indicators in the pursuit of quality education at all levels (SDG 4), it is important to reinforce the balanced strengthening of all levels of education, with a particular focus on the equalisation of educational starting points and the strengthening of the lifelong learning. In the context of strengthening the country's economic growth and labour market efficiency (in the case of SDG 8), the GDP growth in the pre-crisis period has led to an improvement in the position of the SDG indicators and in the country's employment and wage growth, but the country's long-standing problems such as long-term unemployment, the situation of NEET and the gender pay gap have not been addressed. In this context, it is recommended that, in addition to measures to reduce unemployment and ensure equal opportunities in the labour market, the use of innovation and technology should be strengthened. Strengthening the sustainability, inclusiveness and safety of the country's cities (SDG 11) includes increased use of intelligent mobility and ITS solutions, urban planning based on the principles of universal design and integrated planning, and the humanisation of public spaces and streets, as well as the planning of accessibility to public services. It is important to continue existing actions and to strengthen interregional cooperation, in particular in the field of civil protection and emergency prevention policies for the anticipation of major or regional natural disasters, their preparation, planning, effective warning systems, response and post-disaster reconstruction.

However, for some SDGs, the positive changes achieved are short-lived, despite the comprehensive long-term measures taken. In this context, both the successful implementation of SDG 1 and the application of additional measures to reduce income inequalities are important to ensure good nutrition in the long term (in the case of SDG 2). There is also a need to strengthen the sustainability of agriculture by reducing pollution of soil and waters, reducing GHG emissions and increasing energy efficiency, while supporting the growth of Lithuanian agricultural productivity. Reducing inequalities in the country (in the case of SDG 10) is also relevant to the implementation of SDG 1 – measures to reduce inequalities in the country are needed, with a focus on reducing poverty and income inequality. Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12) requires strengthening the development of a circular and climate-neutral economy, raising the sustainability awareness of the population to respect the environment, consume sustainably, sort waste correctly and promote sustainable consumption practices. It is also important to maintain political focus and strengthen inter-institutional cooperation in the implementation of the climate change and environment SDGs (SDG 13, 14, 15). The successful implementation of these goals also requires the application of science-based and innovation-driven solutions, as well as increased public awareness of the challenges facing individual ecosystems and how the country's population can contribute to mitigating these challenges.

CHALLENGES FOR PARTNERSHIP

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the mobilisation and cooperation of all relevant institutions. However, Lithuania lacks an effective and efficient inter-institutional sustainable development coordination mechanism for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as consistent public information on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In this context, there is a need to identify measures to ensure active inter-institutional cooperation in order to achieve the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda and to ensure targeted public information on the SDGs. According to NGOs, there is also a need to strengthen the involvement of public organisations in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the institutional level, as current initiatives and awareness-raising activities are not sufficient to make significant progress in the representation of societal groups in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA IN LITHUANIA

