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Lithuania

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Country report

Non-discrimination

Transposition and implementation at national level of
Council Directives 2000/43 and 2000/78

Lithuania

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¹ The author has gratefully built on the reports written until 2022 together with Gediminas Andriukaitis.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

Lithuania regained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1990. The current Constitution¹ was approved by referendum in 1992. On 1 May 2004 Lithuania joined the European Union, requiring significant changes to be made to the legal system in little over a decade to meet EU and international standards without broader discussion.

According to the general census² carried out in 2021, Lithuanians account for 84.6 % of the population, with the biggest minority groups being Poles (6.5 %) and Russians (5 %). The same may be applied to religion and beliefs: 74.2 % of the population consider themselves to be Roman Catholics; 13.7 % did not indicate their religion; 3.8 % are Orthodox; and 2.3 % belong to other religious communities. Hence, Lithuania could be considered a rather homogenous country. That is supported by the results of the 2019 Eurobarometer survey on discrimination: only 18 % of Lithuanian residents think that discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin is widespread in the country (the EU average is 59 %), and just 15 % think that religious discrimination is widespread (the average in the EU is 47 %).³ However, the same Eurobarometer survey shows that Lithuanian residents think that discrimination is most widespread on the basis of being Roma (48 %), sexual orientation (50 %), being perceived as too old or too young (45 %), disability (37 %) and being transgender (36 %). Attitudes towards LGB persons were among the least accepting in the EU according to the 2019 Eurobarometer survey.⁴

Prejudice against gay people is deeply rooted in society. The issue of sexual orientation is addressed by the Law on Equal Treatment⁵ (LET), which is designed to transpose EU anti-discrimination legislation. The education system is only just beginning to partly address the issue. Public discussions regarding same-sex partnerships have raised significant opposition, with some increase in hate speech.⁶

A small population of Roma (around 2 251) live in Lithuania, the majority being Lithuanian citizens. Despite the fact that the situation of Roma households has slightly improved during the past years (data from 2015 and 2020), an absolute majority of Lithuanian Roma (96 %) still live below the risk-of-poverty threshold, and 61 % live in households that experience severe material deprivation.⁷

¹ Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucija*), 1992, No. 33-1014, available in English at: <http://www3.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Constitution.htm>.

² 'Key results of the 2021 Population and Housing Census', Official Statistics Portal website, 21 December 2021, available in English at: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/en/informaciniai-pranesimai?eventId=288049>.

³ European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 493, 'Discrimination in the European Union', May 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/special/surveyky/2251>.

⁴ European Commission, 'Eurobarometer on Discrimination 2019: the social acceptance of LGBTI people in the EU', September 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/ebs_493_data_fact_lgbti_eu_en-1.pdf.

⁵ Law on Equal Treatment (*Lietuvos Respublikos Lygių galimybių įstatymas*), 2003, No. 114-5115, entry into force 01.01.2005, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.0CC6CB2A9E42/asr>.

⁶ In 2021, the Lithuanian Family Movement was established with the aim of opposing the rights of LGBT persons, ratification of the Istanbul Convention, etc. The Big Family Defence March was also held as a rally against 'genderist propaganda'.

⁷ Kontvainė, V. and Vši Diversity Development Group (2020), *Romų tautybės asmenų padėtis 2020 m.*, a sociological study, http://www.romuplatforma.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Rom%C5%B3-pad%C4%97tis-2020_TYRIMO-ATASKAITA_galutin%C4%97.pdf.

2. Main legislation

The principle of equality of persons is outlined in the Constitution. Although age, disability and sexual orientation are not explicitly mentioned in the constitution's equality clause, such grounds are protected under Article 29 of the Constitution as the number of grounds is non-exclusive according to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania.⁸

The Republic of Lithuania has signed, or signed and ratified, a number of international human rights treaties.⁹ According to the Constitution, international agreements that have been ratified by Parliament form a constituent part of the legal system. Protocol No. 12 to the ECHR has not been ratified. The Law on International Agreements¹⁰ asserts that, if an international agreement that has been ratified and enforced by the Republic of Lithuania establishes norms other than those established by the laws of the Republic of Lithuania, the provisions of the international agreement shall apply.

National anti-discrimination law consists of two major pieces of legislation: the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men,¹¹ adopted in 1998, which prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex¹² and established the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, and the Law on Equal Treatment, adopted in 2003, which was designed to ensure the implementation of the EU anti-discrimination directives in national legislation and added age, sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, and beliefs to the list of non-discrimination grounds, provided additional concepts and further expanded the competence of the Ombudsperson.

In 2022, important amendments to the Law on Equal Treatment were adopted, extending the competences of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and strengthening protection against discrimination, including through:

- Prohibition of harassment in the field of goods and services (until 2022, protection was limited to employment and education);
- Protection against victimisation in education (Article 6(4)) and in the provision of goods and services (Article 8(3));
- The extension of reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities to working conditions, not just premises;
- The introduction of a new ground of discrimination - family status, which falls under social status;
- The introduction of positive action in relation to social advantages¹³ for persons on grounds of age, disability and social status.

⁸ Conclusion of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, No. 22/94, 1995 (*Dėl Europos žmogaus teisių ir pagrindinių laisvių apsaugos konvencijos 4, 5, 9, 14 straipsnių ir jos Ketvirtąjo protokolo 2 straipsnio atitikimo Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijai*), available in English at: <http://www.lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta990/content>. Conclusion of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania elaborating on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, 11 January 2019, No. KT3-N1/2019, available in English at: <http://lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1915/content>.

⁹ For more details, see Annex 1.

¹⁰ Law on International Agreements (*Tarptautinių sutarčių įstatymas*), 1999, No. 60-1948, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.5BCEC9B41811/asr>.

¹¹ Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (*Lietuvos Respublikos moterų ir vyrų lygių galimybių įstatymas*), 1998, No. 112-3100, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.746227138BCB/asr>.

¹² 'Sex' and 'gender' can both be translated as *lytis* in Lithuanian. Therefore, in all legal acts, the term *lytis* might be used to refer to both sex and gender. In the official English translation of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the term 'sex' is used, whereas in the translation of the Law on Equal Treatment, 'gender' is used, in line with the translation of the Constitution. So far, this has not had any consequences for the application of the laws.

¹³ For example, it will be possible to apply certain discounts or additional measures based on a person's low income. These benefits will have to be justified by a legitimate aim pursued by appropriate and necessary means.

The Labour Code¹⁴ that entered into force on 1 July 2017 included most of the provisions on employment that were previously outlined in the Law on Equal Treatment. However, the code also introduced an obligation on public and private entities that employ more than 50 employees to adopt measures aimed at promoting and executing equality policies in the workplace, and it set out a broader list of non-discrimination grounds.

The new version of the Law on Equal Treatment was introduced in the Parliament in 2019, but deliberations on the bill have not yet been completed.¹⁵

3. Main principles and definitions

Currently, the Law on Equal Treatment repeats the wording of the directives in most instances, without going into the details of particular provisions, hence most concepts still require judicial interpretation. Both natural and legal persons are protected from discrimination. Besides the prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination, discrimination by association, harassment, instructions to discriminate and victimisation are also considered illegal. Since 2022, harassment has been prohibited in access to or the provision of goods and services.

An amendment¹⁶ to the Law on Equal Treatment passed in 2022 obliges employers to take reasonable measures to enable persons with disabilities to access employment, work, careers or training. This obligation extends beyond the provision of accessible work premises. Failure to provide suitable working conditions will be considered discrimination, unless the accommodation measures would impose a disproportionate burden on the employer.

Furthermore, the provision on genuine and determining occupational requirements in the Law on Equal Treatment is found in a list of exceptions to direct discrimination. The national provisions simply repeat the wording of the directive and do not elaborate on it. A case considering the exception was heard by the Supreme Administrative Court in 2019, as discussed in previous versions of this report.¹⁷

The concept of multiple discrimination has not been addressed by the legislation and has only been addressed by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, not by the courts. Assumed or associated discrimination is not explicitly prohibited by law, but it can be considered as being included in the definition of direct discrimination, although the issue has not been addressed either by the Ombudsperson or by the courts.

4. Material scope

National anti-discrimination law applies to both the public and private sectors. It should be applied in employment, education and access to goods and services on all grounds covered by the directives. In addition, national anti-discrimination law provides protection against discrimination on the grounds of social status (including family status), language, convictions and citizenship.¹⁸

¹⁴ Labour Code (*Darbo kodekso patvirtinimo, įsigaliojimo ir įgyvendinimo įstatymas. Darbo Kodeksas*), 2016, No. XII-2603, entry into force: 01.07.2017; latest amendments: 20 December 2018, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/f6d686707e7011e6b969d7ae07280e89/asr>.

¹⁵ There were some doubts and objections regarding the narrowing of exceptions for religious communities, as well as regarding the application of the law in the field of family and private life, etc.

¹⁶ Law amending Articles 2 and 7 and the Annex to the Law on Equal Treatment of the Republic of Lithuania No. IX-1826 (*Lietuvos Respublikos lygių galimybių įstatymo Nr. IX-1826 2, 7 straipsnių ir priedo pakeitimo įstatymas*), 28 June 2022, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/24f6571000e811ed8fa7d02a65c371ad>.

¹⁷ See *Country report, Non-discrimination, Lithuania, 2020, Transposition and implementation at national level of Council directives 2000/43 and 2000/78*, Reporting period 01.01.2019 – 31.12.2019, p. 128, <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5297-lithuania-country-report-non-discrimination-2020-2-81-mb>.

¹⁸ However, this applies only to EU and EEA citizens and their family members; the law does not explicitly mention partnerships (as opposed to marriage), and judicial interpretation is required regarding same-sex families. Same-sex partnerships remain unregulated by national law.

Part of the material scope of the directives still lacks protection by national law. The existing Law on Equal Treatment does not explicitly state that social protection and social security fall under its scope. The generally defined duty of state and municipal institutions and agencies to implement equal opportunities could theoretically be interpreted to apply to social security, and the prohibition of discrimination in access to and the provision of goods and services should apply to healthcare, since those fields are not mentioned among those where, according to the law, the principle of non-discrimination does not apply.

When it comes to social advantages and benefits, the practice of the Ombudsperson is inconsistent. In the past, it considered that social advantages did not fall under its scope. However, since 2014, it has accepted complaints and conducted investigations in the area of social benefits, and this practice was followed throughout 2021. In 2022, an amendment¹⁹ to the Law on Equal Treatment was adopted which introduced the possibility of granting social benefits to people on the basis of their age, disability and social status.

5. Enforcing the law

A victim has several choices as to whom to address complaints of discrimination. The victim may lodge a complaint with the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson,²⁰ a court or a labour dispute commission if it concerns an employment relationship. This is a mandatory institution for hearing labour disputes on points of law and for the resolution of individual and collective labour disputes on points of law.

However, it should be emphasised that the only way for a victim of discrimination to get compensation for the harm suffered is to pursue the case in court or before a labour dispute commission in cases of unfair dismissal. Barriers faced by litigants seeking redress are explained in more detail in section 6.1(b)

In practice, associations initiate administrative proceedings with the Ombudsperson, although case law on the issue confirms that only persons whose rights have been directly infringed by particular decisions have the right to appeal to the Ombudsperson.²¹ Even though support from various associations is crucial in discrimination cases, the right of associations to engage in legal proceedings in representation of the public interest is limited in both regulation and practice.

Finally, one must take into account the fact that the national NGO scene is rather weak and fragmented, lacking financial and human resources. There are only a few NGOs that deal with human rights (and non-discrimination is only one field of their activities), in addition to organisations that deal with particular grounds of discrimination.

In Lithuania, there are two options for imposing sanctions for discriminatory behaviour: judicial proceedings in criminal, administrative or civil courts or through the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (who can impose sanctions but does not in any way compensate the victim). As there have been only a handful of successful discrimination cases (most of them on the ground of gender and only a few on other grounds), it is not possible to provide a comprehensive answer about general trends. Currently, judicial compensation for victims of discrimination ranges from EUR 579 to EUR 3 000, although it can be higher in cases that ended in settlement between the two parties.

¹⁹ Law amending Articles 2 and 7 and the Annex to the Law on Equal Treatment of the Republic of Lithuania No. IX-1826, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/24f6571000e811ed8fa7d02a65c371ad>.

²⁰ Throughout the report, the terms 'the Office' and 'the Ombudsperson' are used; they both refer to the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson.

²¹ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, No. A662-665/2010, decision of 19 April 2010 (*Vyriausiojo administracinio teismo sprendimas byloje Nr. A662-66/2010*); Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, *Europos žmogaus teisių fondas v. Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba*, administrative case No. A492-2078/2013, decision of 7 November 2013.

Decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson to apply administrative sanctions are binding, so they can be challenged in court. In the absolute majority of cases, the Ombudsperson chooses to issue 'opinions' to stop discriminatory actions, although these are not essentially binding. Since May 2017, a table of recommendations and the status of their implementation (a monitoring report) has been available on the website of the Ombudsperson.²² Of the 11 decisions mentioned in the table for monitoring in 2022, five are in the process of implementation (in addition to 10 decisions that have been implemented since 2019) and six decisions have been implemented.

In 2022, seven of the Ombudsperson's decisions were challenged in the courts. In all cases, the courts refused to annul the decisions adopted by the Ombudsperson, and five applications have not yet been analysed by the courts. The Ombudsperson has participated in a total of 17 administrative cases and has issued conclusions or participated as a third party in six civil cases.²³ The data in the annual report are not disaggregated by grounds of discrimination.

According to the annual reports of the institution, the Ombudsperson issued a fine only a few times during its past 17 years of operation (four times in 2005, and twice in 2006, 2008 and 2012). However, such administrative sanctions cannot be considered effective, proportionate and dissuasive. Fines are provided for in the Administrative Violations Code and can range from EUR 40 to EUR 560 (or from EUR 560 to EUR 1 200 for repeated offences).²⁴

6. Equality bodies

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is the national anti-discrimination body, established to fulfil the requirements of the Racial Equality Directive. When the Law on Equal Treatment came into force in 2005 it expanded the mandate of the previous Ombudsperson for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women. A new institution – the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson – was established in 2005, covering all grounds of discrimination in Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC plus the ground of gender.

For the Ombudsperson, recent years have marked an important turning point in moving towards increased efficiency and strengthening the institutional structure. The institution was re-structured with four internal divisions (the legal division, equal opportunities mainstreaming division, communication division and operational management division) in addition to a financial adviser and the Ombudsperson herself. Furthermore, the institution has been adopting strategic plans since 2016.

The Ombudsperson considers itself as a mixed mandate (promotional and tribunal) body, and it carries out different functions that may be attributed to a quasi-judicial body, but it also carries out education, campaigning and research activities. The Ombudsperson exercises its functions with respect to gender, race, 'nationality', citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin and religion. Decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson can be overruled by a court. Applying to the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson does not prevent a complainant from lodging a claim with a court on the same matter (however, the Ombudsperson cannot deal with a complaint at the same time as it is being examined by a court). The Ombudsperson often acts as a mediator in practice as, according to the Office of the Ombudsperson, peaceful resolution of discrimination is one of its main objectives.

²² See the website of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson at: <http://www.lygybe.lt/lt>.

²³ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2023), *Annual Report for 2022*, https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2023/03/d1_lgkt-2022-metu-veiklos-ataskaita_kovo-13-d_final.pdf.

²⁴ Administrative Violations Code (*Lietuvos Respublikos Administracinių nusižengimų kodekso patvirtinimo, įsigaliojimo ir įgyvendinimo tvarkos įstatymas. Lietuvos Respublikos administracinių nusižengimų kodeksas*), 25 June 2015, No. XII-1869, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/4ebe66c0262311e5bf92d6af3f6a2e8b/asr>.

According to the law, the Ombudsperson is not obliged to provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination in pursuing their complaints of discrimination, as specified in Article 13 of the Racial Equality Directive, by bringing discrimination complaints or intervening in legal cases. Such activities are not exercised in practice either. However, the Ombudsperson does offer people direct consultations by e-mail, phone or Facebook. The Ombudsperson has a right to conduct independent research related to complaints of discrimination and to draft independent reports and overviews of the situation as regards discrimination and has a right to offer recommendations.

Since 2019, the Ombudsperson has been monitoring compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Moreover, the Ombudsman's competences were extended in 2022 due to the addition of areas and grounds for discrimination in the law. The amendment to the law creates a legal basis for the Ombudsperson to investigate cases of harassment and sexual harassment in access to and the supply of goods and services. In addition, since August 2022, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has been able to investigate complaints about possible discrimination related to family status, having or not having children, etc.

The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is an independent institution financed from the fiscal budget, and the Ombudsperson is appointed by Parliament for a five-year term (for no more than two consecutive terms). However, since there is no board or other body, civil society is neither consulted nor involved in the appointment. Hence, the work of the institution and its political independence completely depend on the position of the head of the institution – the Ombudsperson themselves.

The pending Draft Law on Equal Treatment, which was introduced in the Parliament in 2019, would allow the Ombudsperson to submit complaints to the courts in representing a public interest. In addition, the new law would provide for two additional types of decision to be taken by the Ombudsperson: (1) a recommendation to adopt an internal document in the organisation to ensure equal opportunities for employees; and (2) a proposal to organise internal training on non-discrimination. However, deliberations on the draft law had still not been completed by the end of 2022.

7. Key issues

Most of the national anti-discrimination legislation repeats the wording of the directives, without going into details of particular provisions. In the opinion of the author, transposition into national law is still insufficient concerning the following aspects:

- The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, when applying administrative sanctions, issues them to the executive body of a legal person (director, etc.) but not to its employees. According to the Ombudsperson, the current wording of the Law on Equal Treatment does not suggest that it could be enforced against a broad spectrum of parties.²⁵
- As to the laws on self-employment, it is not precisely clear from the Law on Equal Treatment whether the directives have been adequately transposed. Self-employment is not explicitly mentioned in the Law on Equal Treatment but, on the other hand, the Labour Code is a *lex generalis* in the occupational sphere, and therefore its principles would apply in the absence of specific rules.
- The existing Law on Equal Treatment does not explicitly state that social protection, social security and healthcare fall under its scope.
- The Law on Equal Treatment provides an exception concerning recruitment and employment by employers with an ethos based on religion or belief. However, it is applied not only to recruitment but to education materials and other matters. The exception in the Law is much broader than that of the directive, where a 'person's

²⁵ For more details, please see section 2.6.

- religion or belief constitutes a genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement'. It remains unclear which organisations can take advantage of this exception, and there is no case law or interpretation on the matter.
- The right for associations to engage in legal proceedings was included in the Law on Equal Treatment, repeating the wording of the directives. However, exercising this right is limited in practice. The Code of Civil Procedure states that only actual members of a particular organisation can be represented in court by that association. In theory, associations can act on behalf of the victim in administrative procedure only, but not in civil cases.
 - The system of sanctions must be significantly strengthened to make them effective, proportionate and dissuasive.
 - Providing independent assistance to victims of discrimination in pursuing their complaints of discrimination does not explicitly fall within the competence of the national equality body.

No statutory amendments to ensure the equality of LGBTIQ persons were made during 2022, despite several legislative attempts in recent years. Moreover, such attempts have encountered strong opposition from the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference in particular.

Some positive examples may also be noted. In 2022, the Lithuanian Parliament adopted amendments²⁶ to the Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities,²⁷ implementing the disability reform. The new legislation aims to improve the disability assessment model, provide more targeted support for people with disabilities, increase access to services and assistance, improve the speed with which personalised services and assistance can be provided and make public information more accessible to all. The positive changes are expected to affect the daily and social life of more than 221 000 people with disabilities. The reform will enter into force in 2024.

On 19 July 2022, the Lithuanian Parliament adopted legislative amendments²⁸ proposed by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, expanding the opportunities for people with disabilities to actively participate in the labour market and providing employers with the necessary assistance in recruiting them or keeping an employee in their job after they acquire a disability. The new amendments to the laws entered into force on 1 January 2023.

The National Equality and Diversity Awards, an awareness-raising initiative implemented jointly by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and a group of NGOs, has been taking place annually since 2014.²⁹

²⁶ Law on Amendments to the Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities No. I-2044 (*Lietuvos Respublikos neįgalųjų socialinės integracijos įstatymo Nr. I-2044 pakeitimo įstatymas*), 20 December 2022, No. XIVP-2014(2), <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/253a8e20720911ed8a47de53ff967b64?jfwid=17mdq90dwb>.

²⁷ The new law will be known as the Framework Law on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

²⁸ Law on Amendments to Articles 2, 16, 20, 24, 25, 30-2, 35, 38, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 and 47 of the Law on Employment No. XII-2470 (*Lietuvos Respublikos užimtumo įstatymo Nr. XII-2470 2, 16, 20, 24, 25, 30-2, 35, 38, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 ir 47 straipsnių pakeitimo įstatymas*), 19 July 2022, No. XIV-1390, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/a2d72942080211edbfe9c72e552dd5bd>.

²⁹ For more details, please see section 10 (Best practices).

INTRODUCTION

The national legal system

The Republic of Lithuania is a unitary state. The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania³⁰ was adopted by referendum on 25 October 1992 and entered into force on 2 November 1992. Lithuania is party to a number of international agreements that guarantee protection against discrimination on various grounds. Article 138(3) of the Constitution states that international agreements that have been ratified by the Parliament form a constituent part of the legal system. According to the Law on International Agreements, if an international agreement that has been ratified and enforced by the Republic of Lithuania establishes norms other than those established by the laws of the Republic of Lithuania or by other legal acts existing or coming into force after the date of the entry into force of the international agreement, the provisions of the international agreement shall apply.

The Constitution stipulates that constitutional review in Lithuania is exercised by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania. It ensures the supremacy of the Constitution within the legal system, as well as constitutional justice by deciding whether laws and other legal acts adopted by Parliament are in conformity with the Constitution and whether the acts adopted by the President, or the Government are in compliance with the Constitution and the law.

The right to file a petition with the Constitutional Court concerning the constitutionality of a legal act is vested in the Government, groups consisting of at least one fifth of all members of the Seimas (Parliament), the courts and the President of Lithuania. The right for individuals to lodge petitions with the Constitutional Court was granted in 2019.³¹

List of main legislation transposing and implementing the directives

The main laws designed to implement the anti-discrimination directives are:

Official title of the law: The Law on Equal Treatment of the Republic of Lithuania³²

Name used in this report: Law on Equal Treatment

Abbreviation: LET

Date of adoption: 18 November 2003

Entry into force: 1 January 2005

Latest relevant amendment: 20 December 2022

Web link: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.0CC6CB2A9E42/asr>

Grounds covered: gender, race, 'nationality', citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin and religion.

Civil/administrative law

Material scope: public and private employment, access to goods or services (including housing) and education

Principal content: The main national law, implementing directives, covering prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation, instruction to discriminate and regulation of the competences of a specialised body.

³⁰ Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://www3.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Constitution.htm>.

³¹ Law amending Articles 106 and 107 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, 21 March 2019, No. XIII-2004; entry into force: 1 September 2019; available in English at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/786eb162508a11e98bc2ba0c0453c004?jfwid=pffih3y6p>.

³² Law on Equal Treatment of the Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Respublikos Lygių galimybių įstatymas*), 2003, No. 114-5115.

Official title of the law: Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities of the Republic of Lithuania³³

Name used in this report: Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities

Abbreviation: LSIPD

Date of adoption: 28 November 1991

Entry into force: 15 December 1991

Latest relevant amendment: 20 December 2022

Web link: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.199156E4E004/asr>

Ground covered: Disability

Civil/administrative law

Material scope: private and public employment, access to goods or services (including housing), education, social protection

Principal content: Prohibition of discrimination on the ground of disability, various measures on social inclusion, provision of services etc.

Official title of the law: Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania³⁴

Name used in this report: Labour Code

Abbreviation: LC

Date of adoption: 14 September 2016

Entry into force: 1 July 2017

Latest relevant amendment: 28 June 2022

Web link: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/f6d686707e7011e6b969d7ae07280e89/asr>

Grounds covered: gender, race, 'nationality', citizenship, language, origin, social status, age, sexual orientation, disability, health status, ethnic origin, membership of political parties or other organisations, religion, belief, convictions or views, intention to have a child, family and marital status, conditions not related to characteristics of employees, or other grounds set out in the law.

Civil law

Material scope: Employment

Principal content: General prohibition of discrimination in employment, duties for employers

³³ Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities of the Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Respublikos neįgaliųjų socialinės integracijos įstatymas*), 1991, I-2044.

³⁴ Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Respublikos darbo kodeksas*), 2016, XII-2603.

1 GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Constitutional provisions on protection against discrimination and the promotion of equality

The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania includes the following articles dealing with non-discrimination.

Article 29 of the Constitution declares that: 'All persons shall be equal before the law, the courts, and other State institutions and officials. A person's rights may not be restricted, nor may he be granted any privileges, on the ground of gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions, or views.'

A general equality clause is embodied in Chapter 2 under the heading 'The Individual and the State'. The wording of the article thus covers religion (beliefs) as well as political views. According to the Constitutional Court, convictions are a broad and diverse constitutional notion, including political and economic convictions, religious feelings, cultural disposition, ethical and aesthetic views, etc.³⁵

Although disability, age and sexual orientation are not explicitly mentioned in the text of the Constitution, the Constitutional Court stated, in a landmark decision, that the list of discriminatory grounds in Article 29 is not exhaustive, and therefore covers discrimination on the grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation and gender identity. According to the Constitutional Court, the Constitution is an integral enactment and cannot be interpreted literally.³⁶

Constitutional provisions regarding the principle of non-discrimination were commented upon in a ruling by the Constitutional Court on 11 November 1998. It stated that:

'the principle of equality of persons is defined as non-discrimination. ... Discrimination is, as a rule, understood to mean changing the situation of a person or a group of persons relative to other persons without any valid reason. ... The principle of equality of persons, which is established by Article 29 of the Constitution means, in essence, a prohibition of discrimination. Discrimination is most often understood as a restriction of the rights of an individual or a granting of certain privileges according to his or her sex, race, *nationality*, language, origin, social status, religion, convictions or views.'³⁷

Besides the ruling mentioned, the Constitutional Court elaborated on the non-discrimination principle in its conclusion of 24 January 1995, in particular on the meaning

³⁵ Ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania of 13 June 2000, available in English at: <http://www.lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1161/content>.

³⁶ Conclusion of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania elaborating on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, 11.01.2019, No. KT3-N1/2019. 'Therefore, Paragraph 2 of Article 29 of the Constitution may not be understood as consolidating an exhaustive list of the grounds of non-discrimination; otherwise, the preconditions would be created for denying the equality of all persons before the law, courts, and other state institutions, i.e., the very essence of the constitutional principle of the equality of the rights of persons, as guaranteed under Paragraph 1 of Article 29 of the Constitution. ... In the context of the constitutional justice case at issue, it should be noted that one of the forms of discrimination prohibited under Article 29 of the Constitution is the restriction of the rights of a person on the grounds of his/her gender identity and/or sexual orientation; such a restriction should also be regarded as degrading human dignity.' The Constitutional Court elaborated on the provisions of the Constitution, taking into account the constitutional provisions on equality and referring also to international agreements and CJEU and ECtHR case law. Conclusion available in English at: <http://lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1915/content>.

³⁷ Ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania No. 100-2791, 1998 (*Dėl Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo rinkimų įstatymo 38 straipsnio 4 dalies ir Lietuvos Respublikos savivaldybių tarybų rinkimų įstatymo 36 straipsnio 4 dalies atitikimo Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijai*), <http://www.lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1134/content>.

of the non-discrimination clause and the grounds of discrimination using a 'non-formalistic' approach.³⁸

Other constitutional clauses relating to equality and non-discrimination are as follows:

1) Article 25 deals with freedom of expression and prohibits the instigation of national, racial, religious, or social hatred, violence or discrimination or the dissemination of slander or misinformation. Article 26 proclaims freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.

2) Article 48 states that:

'Each human being may freely choose a job or business, and shall have the right to have proper, safe and healthy conditions at work, to receive fair pay for work and social security in the event of unemployment.'

However, some clauses outline rights that are enjoyed solely by citizens of the country.

3) Article 33 states that:

'Citizens shall have the right to participate in the governance of their State both directly and through their democratically elected representatives as well as the right to enter on equal terms the State service of the Republic of Lithuania.'

4) According to Article 37:

'Citizens belonging to ethnic communities shall have the right to foster their language, culture, and customs.'

These provisions do not apply to all areas covered by the directives. Their material scope is not broader than that of the directives.

The Constitution is directly applicable. According to Article 6 of the Constitution, 'The Constitution shall be an integral and directly applicable act. Anyone may defend his rights by invoking the Constitution.' The Constitutional Court has stated on many occasions that constitutional provisions and the Constitution itself are directly applicable and that each individual may defend his or her rights on the basis of the Constitution. Nevertheless, cases where claimants base their demands directly and solely on the relevant provisions of the Constitution are rare in practice.

Regarding the enforcement of provisions of the Constitution against private individuals, the constitutional equality clause is embodied in the chapter headed 'The Individual and the State', and the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court on Article 29 of the Constitution is rather limited. It has always been interpreted as applying to the relationship between the individual and the state and never as governing the relationship between individuals. It is therefore doubtful whether it could be enforced against private individuals.

³⁸ Conclusion of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, No. 22/94, 1995 (*Dėl Europos žmogaus teisių ir pagrindinių laisvių apsaugos konvencijos 4, 5, 9, 14 straipsnių ir jos Ketvirtąjo protokolo 2 straipsnio atitikimo Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijai*), available in English at: <http://www.lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta990/content>.

2 THE DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION

2.1 Definition of the grounds of unlawful discrimination within the directives

The general rule is that national legislation does not provide definitions of equality grounds, with the exception of 'social status', 'disability' and 'citizenship', which are defined in different laws.

According to Article 2(8) of the Law on Equal Treatment, 'social status' is defined as family status, the level of education attained by a natural person, his or her qualifications and characteristics related to that person's financial or economic situation (such as income or property ownership).

Citizenship was added to the list of protected grounds in the Law on Equal Treatment in 2017 as a result of the transposition of Directive 2014/54/EU on measures facilitating the exercise of rights conferred on workers in the context of freedom of movement for workers. In the context of the Law on Equal Treatment, it is explicitly defined that the ground of citizenship only applies to citizens of EU and EEA countries and their family members.³⁹ However, the wording does not mention unmarried partners (neither opposite-sex nor same-sex partners).

a) Racial or ethnic origin

Neither the Law on Equal Treatment nor any other law provides definitions of race or ethnic origin. In the reports of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, race, 'nationality', citizenship, language, origin and ethnic origin are always reported under the same headline and are dealt with as interrelated concepts. The Ombudsperson refers to the definition of racial discrimination provided in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination:

'As defined by the Convention, "racial discrimination" means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. Therefore, such definition implies a possibility to claim that the characteristics of race, *nationality*, origin, ethnic origin and language are highly related.'⁴⁰

As the previous *Annual Report* of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson states:

'Legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania do not provide any definition of race, *nationality*, ethnic origin or origin, nevertheless, persons approaching the Office based on alleged discrimination on the ground of language very often indicate the grounds of *nationality* together. Identification of the grounds is made with the help of indicated factual circumstances within the complaint. When applicants file complaints regarding discrimination based on the ground of race or ethnic origin, they also refer to themselves as belonging to a specific ethnic, *national* or territorial group based on their origin and describe themselves based on skin colour. Sometimes origin is defined by cultural characteristics, such as language, or a common attitude towards ethnic majority or minority. When applicants imply the grounds of *nationality* and citizenship, they usually emphasise the connection with a specific country or

³⁹ For more detail, see section 8.2.

⁴⁰ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2019), *Annual Report for 2018*, <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2019/04/Igk-2018-m.-veiklos-ataskaita-.pdf>.

belonging to an ethnic majority or minority.’⁴¹

In 2022, according to its annual report, the Ombudsperson’s Office received 30 complaints and 148 inquiries on the grounds of race, ‘nationality’, citizenship, language, origin and ethnic origin. Situations related to these grounds are usually discussed together, as they are highly intertwined. Complainants and applicants often point to more than one of these grounds when making their complaints. Many consultations were provided by phone or via Facebook.

The Office has noted that, with each passing year, individuals have got better at identifying the ground on which they have been discriminated against. Until a few years ago, applicants who had applied to the Office regarding possible discrimination on the ground of ‘nationality’ had also indicated race, origin and ethnicity as grounds of discrimination. In 2021, it was observed that individuals very clearly distinguished and noted the precise grounds on which they felt that they have been discriminated against.

Continuous discussions have been taking place regarding a possible definition of national/ethnic minority in the Law on National/Ethnic Minorities. The working group formed for the preparation of the Law presented a draft to the Ministry of Culture and the Council of National Minorities in 2020.⁴² However, this draft has not been made available to the public. The previous Law on National Minorities, which was in force until 2010, did not provide any definitions.

There has not been any case law regarding discrimination on the ground of race, while the majority of cases before the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson have concerned ‘nationality’ (ethnicity), language or ethnic origin. Due to the lack of jurisprudence, it is not possible to identify patterns in the interpretation of the grounds of race or ethnic origin by the courts in practice.

b) Religion or belief

The Law on Equal Treatment states that belief, convictions or views and religion are among the protected grounds, but it does not provide their definitions. There is no state religion in Lithuania. Article 26(1) and (2) of the Constitution states:

‘Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion shall not be restricted.
Every person shall have the right to freely choose any religion or faith and, either individually or with others, in public or in private, to manifest his or her religion or faith in worship, observance, practice or teaching.’

The right to freely choose religion or belief is also described in the Law on Religious Communities and Associations, however it does not provide any definitions of belief, convictions or views and religion.⁴³ This leaves room for interpretation, because in the Lithuanian language these concepts are often treated as synonymous. In its annual report for 2021, the Ombudsperson refers to explanations of terms in the legal literature, in which certain views and attitudes formed in the process of observation and cognition are considered beliefs.⁴⁴ Beliefs can be political, religious, economic, aesthetic, cultural and so

⁴¹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2021), *Annual Report for 2020*, https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/03/lr_lygiu_galimybiu_kontrolieriaus_2020_m_veiklos_ataskaita.pdf.

⁴² Law on National Minorities presented to the Ministry of Culture on 16 July 2020; Law on National Minorities presented to the Council of National Minorities on 11 September 2020, <https://lt.efhr.eu/2020/07/16/patvirtintas-naujai-parengtas-tautiniu-mazumu-istatymo-projektas/>, <https://tmde.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/tautiniu-bendriju-tarybos-nariams-pristatytas-tautiniu-mazumu-istatymo-projektas>.

⁴³ Law on Religious Communities and Associations (*Religinių bendruomenių ir bendrijų įstatymas*), 1995, No. 89-1985, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.B4DBBD7C388A/asr>.

⁴⁴ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *Annual Report for 2021*.

on. They reflect the human views on the phenomena of social and state life, etc., formed in the environment of certain ideology, culture, morality, ethics and moral norms. The Constitutional Court has provided the following interpretation of convictions:

'Convictions are a broad and diverse constitutional notion, including political, economic convictions, religious feelings, cultural disposition, ethical and esthetical views etc.

The freedom to have convictions means that an individual is free to form his own convictions, to choose world-view values, he is protected from any coercion, it is not permitted to exert control over his convictions. The duty of state institutions is to ensure and protect this freedom of individuals. The content of convictions is a private matter of the individual.⁴⁵

Therefore, it can be argued that a wide spectrum of non-religious beliefs is covered by the Law on Equal Treatment.

In 2022, according to its annual report, the Ombudsperson's Office received 10 complaints on the grounds of belief, religion and convictions or views. This has decreased compared to 2021, when a total of 31 complaints were received on the grounds of belief, religion, convictions or views.

There was an increase in complaints, inquiries and consultations in 2021 due to the situation regarding the threat presented by the COVID-19 virus and the related restrictions. People's dissatisfaction had increased due to cancelled trips and flights, events and other leisure services being put on hold, restricted access to supermarkets and medical facilities, colleges, and so on. According to the annual report, most applicants, when claiming possible discrimination on the basis of beliefs or views, did not emphasise which of their views or beliefs had led to the potentially discriminatory treatment of them.

c) Disability

Lithuanian legislation uses and defines two different terms: 'disability' and 'disabled person'. There is no legal definition of disability provided in the Law on Equal Treatment. The only available legal definition of disability is provided in the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities. One of the main principles of social integration of persons with disabilities, as mentioned in the Law, is prevention of discrimination, therefore persons with disabilities are protected from all forms of discrimination or exploitation. However, the definition of disability that is provided in the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities is incompatible with the text of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD):⁴⁶

'Disability is a long-term worsening reduction of the state of health, diminution of participation in public life and possibilities for activity, resulting from disorder of the person's bodily functions and detrimental environmental factors.'⁴⁷

The definition does not necessarily affect the decisions of the Ombudsperson or the courts, but it is relevant in relation to the application of reasonable accommodation measures and the recognition of who is eligible for state-supported measures, as the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities and the Law on Equal Treatment are part of the

⁴⁵ Ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania No. 23/98, 13 June 2000, available in English at: <http://www.lrkt.lt/dokumentai/2000/r000613.htm>.

⁴⁶ The Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities has not been designed to transpose the EU non-discrimination directives into national legislation.

⁴⁷ Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities (*Lietuvos Respublikos Neigaliųjų socialinės integracijos įstatymas*), 2004, No. 83-2983, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.199156E4E004/vpJLLKhzKK>.

legal system and do not function separately within it. In other words, the Law on Equal Treatment does not define the concept of disability, so the definition contained in the Law on Social Integration is relevant in dealing with discrimination.

The legal definition in the national law does not explicitly make reference to physical, mental or psychological impairments and their interaction with outside barriers. Although mentioning environmental factors partly adds an element of a social model of disability, it focuses very much on the impairments of an individual and the extent to which that limits a person's activity, as well as his or her ability to fully participate in public life. In addition to this, the worsening of the person's state of health must be 'long term'. Such a definition established in Lithuanian law is not in line either with the concept of disability established by the UN CRPD or with the definition given by the Court of Justice of the European Union in its reasoning on joined cases C-335/11 and C-337/11, *Skouboe Werge and Ring*:

'A limitation which results in particular from physical, mental or psychological impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder the full and effective participation of the person concerned in professional life on an equal basis with other workers.'⁴⁸

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expressed its concern 'that the definition and understanding of disability in State party laws and regulations focuses on the individual impairment, thereby neglecting the social and relational dimension of disability, including, in particular, the barriers faced by persons with disabilities', and urged Lithuania to change that.⁴⁹

Lithuania is a party to the UN CRPD and, according to the Article 138 of the Constitution, ratified international treaties are an integral part of the national system. Theoretically, the concept of disability provided for in the CRPD should be applicable,⁵⁰ as, in the case of any clash, the provisions of the international treaties should be applied.⁵¹ Article 1 of the Convention states:

'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.'

In 2015 a group of NGOs working in the field of disability submitted its *Alternative Report on Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Lithuania*.⁵² According to this report, since medical definitions and a negative understanding of disability are deeply rooted in the mindset of Lithuanian society, the inconsistencies in definitions in different national laws are not beneficial and should be brought fully in line with the concept that is provided for in the CRPD.⁵³

⁴⁸ Judgment of 11 April 2013, *Skouboe Werge and Ring*, joined cases C-335/11 and C-337/11, EU:C:2013:222, available at: <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?num=C-335/11>.

⁴⁹ UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Concluding observations on the initial report of Lithuania (CRPD/C/LTU/CO/1), 11 May 2016.

⁵⁰ The CRPD definition has already been used in the reasoning for decisions by both the Ombudsperson and the courts (the author managed to find 10 decisions by the Ombudsperson and four decisions by the courts in which the CRPD definition was used).

⁵¹ Law on International Agreements (*Tarptautinių sutarčių įstatymas*), 1999, No. 60-1948, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter2/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=437697.

⁵² Lietuvos Neįgaliųjų forumas (2015), *Alternatyvi ataskaita dėl Jungtinių Tautų konvencijos įgyvendinimo Lietuvoje*, (Alternative Report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Lithuania), <http://www.negalija.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/JT-Neigaliuju-teisiu-konvencijos-Alternatyvioji-ataskaita.pdf>.

⁵³ Lietuvos Neįgaliųjų forumas (2015), *Alternatyvi ataskaita dėl Jungtinių Tautų konvencijos įgyvendinimo Lietuvoje*, (Alternative Report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Lithuania), p. 12.

In addition to this, however, the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities gives a definition of a 'disabled person',⁵⁴ stating that it is 'a person, who according to this law has been assessed to have a set level of disability or a level of 55 % (or less) of working efficiency'. Therefore, in order for a person to be considered disabled for the purpose of getting certain benefits, this must be officially recognised by a competent institution.

Such recognition leads to the allocation of particular aid and social benefits to persons with disabilities but does not prevent the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson or courts from using a wider interpretation of disability when enforcing the Law on Equal Treatment, because the Law on Equal Treatment does not provide an exact definition of disability. In practice, the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson interprets disability more widely and does not limit itself to the provisions of the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities. The author has not seen any interpretations of 'disability' by the courts. In most cases, the courts referred to provisions of the CRPD when examining claims on the ground of disability, including those regarding reasonable accommodation. The Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania referred to the CRPD in cases that it examined in 2020 and 2021.⁵⁵

In December, 2022, the Lithuanian Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities, implementing the disability reform which will enter into force in 2024. The new version of the law will define disability as follows:

'A disability is a long-term functional impairment of a person's body (an individual's congenital and/or acquired characteristics) which, because of environmental factors, prevents the person from participating fully and effectively in society on an equal basis with others.'

Along with the new disability definition, the term 'capacity to participate' was introduced. It will be used to assess the individual's needs in different areas of life. Until now, only the term 'capacity for work' was used in social security field.

In 2022, the Ombudsperson conducted 48 investigations into possible discrimination on the grounds of disability. This is linked to the still widespread inaccessibility of buildings and urban infrastructure, gaps in the provision of digital services and a lack of social services. The most complaints received, and the most infringements found, were in access to and the supply of goods and services. In this field, 24 complaints were received and 12 infringements were found. As many as 313 persons with disabilities contacted the Office by phone last year and were advised on the possible restriction of rights on this basis.

d) Age

National law does not provide definitions of 'age' and, to the knowledge of the author, these concepts have not been elaborated upon in the courts either. The Ombudsperson's report states that:

'Discrimination on the ground of age is often associated only with discrimination against older people. The age at which a person is considered to be of 'older age' depends on many aspects, but the set of circumstances outlined in the complaints suggests that younger and older people may suffer less favourable treatment.'

It should be noted that the Law on Equal Opportunities specifies quite narrowly that the only cases in which the indication of the age criterion is not considered to be direct discrimination are age restrictions provided for in the form of the law. Even in such cases,

⁵⁴ It is important to note that the definitions of 'disability' and 'disabled person' do not mean the same thing in principle. The courts use them both in different contexts.

⁵⁵ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania decision, case No. A-162-602/2020, 25 March 2020; Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, No. eA-2796-492/2021, 15 December 2021.

the restrictions must be justified by a legitimate aim pursued by appropriate and necessary means. Specific entities (employers, service providers, etc.) are not free to set age-based restrictions. The law therefore provides for a wider scope of protection than only employment.

In 2022, the Office received 26 complaints; initiated five investigations at the initiative of the Ombudsperson; and provided 98 consultations via phone on possible age discrimination.

e) Sexual orientation

National law does not provide definitions of 'sexual orientation' and, to the knowledge of the author, such concepts have not been elaborated upon in the courts either.

However, the Ombudsperson has stated in the past that, since the Law on Equal Opportunities does not define the concept of sexual orientation, it is interpreted according to the verbal interpretations in the public domain, dictionaries and encyclopaedias:

'Sexual orientation refers to the orientation of each individual towards sexual and other contact with people of a certain sex, and can refer to the desire, need and interest in sexual contact with people of the opposite sex (heterosexuality), with people of the same sex (gays and lesbians), with men and women (bisexual people of both sexes).'⁵⁶

In 2022, the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson received four complaints, initiated one investigation at the initiative of the Ombudsperson and received 32 inquiries in this field.

2.2 Multiple and intersectional discrimination

In Lithuania, multiple discrimination is not prohibited by law. Moreover, there is no case law dealing with multiple discrimination. However, the Ombudsperson mentions the examination of multiple discrimination cases in its annual reports.

In Lithuania, intersectional discrimination is not prohibited by law. Intersectional discrimination is not mentioned in the case law or the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson's reports.

In its *Annual Report for 2022*, the Ombudsperson notes that 28 requests that it received last year (13.53 %) concerned multiple discrimination.⁵⁷ The report mentions that possible discrimination based on social status is related to age (restriction of services to parents because of the age of their children, inaccessibility of smartphone apps for older and/or disadvantaged people) and that, quite often, age is also a factor in possible discrimination on the ground of disability, especially regarding the inaccessibility of the physical environment.^{58, 59}

However, there are no special rules or procedures regarding the investigation of multiple and/or intersectional discrimination cases by the Ombudsperson, nor there are instructions for the application of more severe sanctions or information on more severe sanctions in cases of multiple and/or intersectional discrimination.

⁵⁶ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson's Statement No. (16)SI-7)SP-26, 24 March 2016.

⁵⁷ There are no specific norms or procedures for investigating possible multiple discrimination. The Ombudsperson recognises such cases based on the number of grounds on which the person has applied. The courts have not ruled on multiple discrimination or on the concept of multiple discrimination.

⁵⁸ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2023), *Annual Report for 2022*, https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2023/03/d1_lgkt-2022-metu-veiklos-ataskaita_kovo-13-d_final.pdf.

⁵⁹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *Annual Report for 2021*.

The issue of multiple or intersectional discrimination in Lithuania was raised in 2014⁶⁰ and 2019 by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which stated that the committee was concerned:

'That there is no legislation specifically prohibiting intersectional forms of discrimination against women and no definition of the legal concepts of gender and sex',⁶¹

'No legislation specifically prohibiting intersecting forms of discrimination against women and no definition of the legal concepts of gender and sex.'⁶²

The committee urged the Lithuanian Government to amend its anti-discrimination and equal opportunities laws to ensure that they explicitly protect women from multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination. Therefore, there are plans to prohibit multiple discrimination under the Law on Equal Treatment. The Ombudsperson suggested certain amendments to the Law on Equal Treatment in its *Annual Report for 2018*.⁶³ The Draft Law on Equal Treatment, currently pending in the Parliament, would explicitly prohibit multiple discrimination. However, according to the pending provisions, no harsher sanctions would be established in cases of multiple discrimination.⁶⁴

2.3 Assumed and associated discrimination

a) Discrimination by assumption

In Lithuania, discrimination based on a perception or assumption of a person's characteristics is not explicitly prohibited in national law. However, Article 2(9) of the Law on Equal Treatment could be interpreted as prohibiting discrimination based on perception or assumption of what a person is.

Article 2(9) of the Law defines direct discrimination as follows:

'Direct discrimination means any situation where one person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on the grounds of gender, race, *nationality*, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion, except for the following cases'.

This definition corresponds to the wording of the directives and could be interpreted to include assumed discrimination as well. However, this issue has not yet been raised either in the courts or in the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson's decisions, according to the current information available to the author. Therefore, it would be meaningful to include discrimination by assumption explicitly in the Law on Equal Treatment.

Although the definition contains the singular (person), the interpretation of the national wording (either by the Ombudsperson or by the courts) does not imply that groups of persons would not come under the protection of the law.

⁶⁰ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2014), *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Lithuania* (CEDAW/C/LTU/5), adopted by the Committee at its 58th session (30 June-18 July 2014).

⁶¹ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2019), *Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Lithuania* (CEDAW/C/LTU/6), adopted by the Committee at its 1734th and 1735th meetings held on 31 October 2019.

⁶² CEDAW/C/LTU/5.

⁶³ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2019), *Annual Report for 2018*.

⁶⁴ Draft Law on Equal Treatment (new edition) (*Lygių galimybių įstatymo Nr. IX-1826 įstatymo projektas (nauja redakcija)*), introduced 30.05.2019, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/96f31cf082b411e98a8298567570d639?jfwid=rmpk3gwww>.

The author is not aware of any cases of discrimination by assumption that have been investigated by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson or by the courts in Lithuania.

b) Discrimination by association

In Lithuania, discrimination based on association with persons with particular characteristics is not explicitly prohibited in national law. The current definition of direct discrimination corresponds to the wording of the directives and could be interpreted in the light of Case C-303/06, *Coleman v. Attridge Law and Steve Law*.⁶⁵ Therefore, the wording should also be interpreted as has been established by Case C 83/14, *CHEZ Razpredelenie Bulgaria AD v. Komisia za zashtita ot diskriminatsia*, such that a person can suffer discrimination together with a certain group without belonging to it.

However, in the past, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson did not consider this wording to be sufficient. In 2012 it proposed adding the definition of 'associated discrimination' to the Law on Equal Treatment, stating that a person should not be discriminated against because of a certain characteristic of his or her parents or children, foster child or foster parent, other family members or other legal representatives.⁶⁶ The Ombudsperson did not elaborate on any proposed wording. This proposal has not been introduced as a draft law in the Parliament, however, and therefore it is uncertain whether it will be adopted in the near future.

In October 2022, the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court handed down a landmark decision recognising discrimination by association.⁶⁷ The applicant's daughter was disadvantaged by her association with her mother, who is visually impaired. The daughter was denied access to the swimming pool for safety reasons due to the mother's (alleged) inability to supervise her daughter. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson found discrimination, but the decision was appealed. The Court held that this situation constitutes associative discrimination, a situation in which a person is treated less favourably because of his or her association with a group of persons having a particular identifiable feature.

Legal amendments were drawn up in 2019 and were submitted for consideration by the Parliament. They are currently still going through a parliamentary procedure covering and defining discrimination by association.⁶⁸

2.4 Direct discrimination (Article 2(2)(a))

a) Prohibition and definition of direct discrimination

In Lithuania, direct discrimination is prohibited in national law. Article 2(9) of the Law on Equal Treatment defines direct discrimination as follows:

'Direct discrimination means any situation where one person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on the grounds of gender, race, *nationality*, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion, except for the following cases.'

Although the definition mentions 'a person', this does not imply that it could be interpreted as excluding groups of persons from protection. The definitions in the directives

⁶⁵ Judgment of 17 July 2008, *Coleman v. Attridge Law and Steve Law*, case C-303/06, EU:C:2008:415, available at: <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?language=en&num=C-303/06>.

⁶⁶ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2012), *Annual Report of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson for 2012*, <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/veikla/metines-ataskaitos/405>.

⁶⁷ Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, case No. eI2-4079-811/2022, 24 October 2022, <https://liteko.teismai.lt/viesasprendimupaiska/tekstas.aspx?id=d5a6405f-5151-441b-9fe2-01a8ecb50377>.

⁶⁸ Draft Law on Equal Treatment (new edition), introduced 30.05.2019, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/96f31cf082b411e98a8298567570d639>.

concentrate on the current, past or probable future difference of treatment in a comparable situation ('one person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation'). Therefore, the definition contained in the Law on Equal Treatment is in conformity with the definition in the directives, as are the grounds that are covered: a person's age, sexual orientation, disability, racial or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs. It is important to note that, in interpreting the Law on Equal Treatment, disability is a symmetrical ground, which means that persons without disability could be considered as being discriminated against in cases when jobs are reserved for persons with disabilities.

Under the heading 'Discriminatory Advertisements', Article 11 of the Law on Equal Treatment explicitly states that announcements that advertise job vacancies or civil service or education opportunities that give preference to candidates of a particular gender, race, 'nationality', citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion are prohibited, with the exception of those situations set out in Article 2 (a general clause on genuine occupational requirements).

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has been monitoring advertisements on a regular basis since 2016. Persons mostly submit information about discriminatory job announcements to the Ombudsperson via social media. According to the *Annual Report for 2021*, most of them concern discriminatory requirements on the basis of gender and/or age.

When it comes to defending rights in court, the situation is different. In 2013, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania issued a landmark decision stating that only those persons whose rights are or have been directly affected have a right to initiate proceedings in the court.⁶⁹ Therefore, a discriminatory job advertisement could only be challenged in court by a person who directly suffered discrimination; associations or other non-governmental actors cannot challenge such advertisements, because the law does not allow them to act in defence of the public interest. However, the Ombudsperson usually responds regarding any job announcement notified to them by NGOs without having an individual person or persons claiming that their rights have been violated. If there has been a refusal to change the wording of the announcement or to remove it, the Ombudsperson may start an investigation on their own initiative.

The situation with discriminatory public announcements or statements made by representatives of state or municipality institutions is rather unclear. According to case law, such general discriminatory oral statements would not fall under the scope of the Law on Equal Treatment. For example, previous case law has held that a mayor's oral statements do not fall under the scope of the national anti-discrimination law as the mayor of a municipality is not a municipal authority.⁷⁰ Even though the law has changed in recent years when the mayor became a directly elected municipal executive and not just a municipal politician, further judicial interpretation would be required. Article 5 of the Law on Equal Opportunities, which sets out the duties of state and municipal authorities in the field of equal opportunities, only covers legislative areas, not the implementation of equal opportunities, which could potentially include discriminatory public statements.

The courts took a very formal and narrow approach and did not go into the substance of the statements. No references to the jurisprudence of the CJEU were made, and the courts mainly focused on the issue of whether a mayor could be considered 'a municipal agency or institution' within the meaning of the Law on Equal Treatment and under administrative law. However, in previous years, the Ombudsperson had investigated oral statements by

⁶⁹ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, *Europos žmogaus teisių fondas v. Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba*, administrative case No. A⁴⁹²-2078/2013, 7 November 2013.

⁷⁰ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, case No. A⁶⁶²-665/2010, 19 April 2010.

civil servants (particularly on the ground of gender) and found them to be discriminatory.⁷¹ Therefore, in that respect, national jurisprudence is potentially non-compliant with the directives and needs to be clarified, especially taking into account clarifications of the EU anti-discrimination provisions in the more recent case law of the CJEU.⁷²

b) Justification for direct discrimination

The Law on Equal Treatment does not generally permit the justification of direct discrimination, but it provides an exhaustive list of exceptions, specifically adjusted to particular grounds. Specific exceptions to direct discrimination as established by the Law on Equal Treatment are set out in Chapter 4.

In 2022, certain exceptional justifications allowing for positive action in favour of persons with disabilities and persons of certain ages or with a certain social status were established in the Law on Equal Treatment.⁷³ For example, it will be possible to apply certain discounts or additional measures based on a person's low income and to offer some services free of charge for seniors or persons with disabilities. These benefits will have to be justified by a legitimate aim pursued by appropriate and necessary means. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of Lithuania has already recommended amending the Law on Equal Treatment to establish exceptions within the Law to allow for certain benefits for persons with disabilities, persons of certain ages or those in certain financial situations:

'In certain cases, based on the assessment of a person's age or disability or the material conditions of people belonging to a particular social group, limited legal capacity, need for financial support, the granting of preferences for the acquisition of goods and services could be justified, although the Law on Equal Treatment does not justify the provision of such benefits. Therefore, it is suggested that the Law on Equal Treatment be supplemented with provisions establishing exceptional situations in which the provision of goods and services exclusively (or primarily) to persons of certain characteristics can be justified by a legitimate aim, and the means to achieve that aim are appropriate and necessary, and such situations would not be considered a more favourable treatment.'⁷⁴

2.5 Indirect discrimination (Article 2(2)(b))

a) Prohibition and definition of indirect discrimination

In Lithuania, indirect discrimination is prohibited in national law. It is defined.

The definition of indirect discrimination for the grounds covered by the Racial Equality Directive and the Employment Equality Directive is provided in Article 2(5) of the Law on Equal Treatment, where indirect discrimination is defined as follows:

'Indirect discrimination means any act or omission, legal provision or assessment criterion, apparently neutral provision or practice that formally are the same but their implementation or application results or would result in de facto restrictions on the exercise of rights or extensions of privileges, preferences or advantages on the grounds of gender, race, *nationality*, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion, unless that act or omission, legal provision or assessment criterion, provision

⁷¹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2008), *Annual Report of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson 2008*, <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/veikla/metines-ataskaitos/405>.

⁷² Judgment of 25 April, *Asociația ACCEPT v. Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării*, case C-81/12, EU:C:2013:275, available at: <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?num=C-81/12>.

⁷³ Law amending the Law on Equal Treatment, No. IX-1826, Articles 2 and 7 and the Annex, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/36c56052f88011ecbfe9c72e552dd5bd?jfwid=ofw8pn7ak>.

⁷⁴ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2019), *Annual Report for 2018*.

or practice is justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.'

The definition of indirect discrimination provided in national law is sufficient to achieve the goals set out in the directives, but its implementation in practice has not yet been established. There is no definition of indirect discrimination in other laws (for example, the Law on Education, the Law on the Public Service or the Law on the State Defence Service). Furthermore, it is not clear how the provisions in the Law on Equal Treatment will be interpreted in the courts, since there is still very little case law on indirect discrimination.

In one of the complaints that was analysed by the Ombudsperson in 2021, discrimination on the ground of age was recognised. The Ombudsperson found that Lidl had indirectly discriminated against older customers, as promotions and discounts were only available via an app on a smartphone.⁷⁵ In its *Activity report for 2022*, the Ombudsperson noted that the company had not yet changed its conditions, and that the Office had also received enquiries from residents on this issue in 2022.

b) Justification test for indirect discrimination

The law provides a general exception test to justify indirect discrimination: treatment must be justified by a legitimate aim, and the means of achieving that aim must be proportionate and necessary. It is far from clear how the test would be implemented in practice, since indirect discrimination case law is scarce.

The existing jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court suggests that a 'legitimate aim' must be 'constitutionally justified'.⁷⁶ However, this interpretation did not consider the wording of the Law on Equal Treatment, which was not enacted at the time of the ruling.

It must also be mentioned that language is an explicitly mentioned discrimination ground, embodied in the Law on Equal Treatment. However, the Law also provides exceptions to this ground in the case of direct discrimination, where a requirement to know the official state language is enshrined in other laws. Where particular language requirements set by law could potentially have an indirect discrimination effect on the grounds of race or ethnic origin, the general justification test contained in the definition of indirect discrimination should be used by the courts or other judicial or administrative bodies in concrete cases.

So far, no cases of indirect discrimination regarding language have been adjudicated in the courts. However, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson clearly states the link between requirements to know a particular language and indirect discrimination based on ethnic origin.⁷⁷ The Ombudsperson explained that the requirement adopted by the Minister of Education and Science to increase the number of teaching staff with less than 20 years of experience constitutes indirect discrimination based on age. One of the reasons was that this requirement was not established by law and was neither justified nor necessary.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (21)SN-175)SP-62, 16 November 2021 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas Dėl galimos diskriminacijos amžiaus ir socialinės padėties pagrindais UAB „LIDL Lietuva“ sudarant galimybę pasinaudoti „LIDL Plus“ nuolaidų programėlės pasiūlymais*), <https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/11/sprendimas-21-62.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania of 13 December 2004 (*Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucinio Teismo 2004 m. gruodžio 13d. nutarimas 'Dėl kai kurių teisės aktų, kuriais reguliuojami valstybės tarnybos ir su ja susiję santykiai, atitikties Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijai'*).

⁷⁷ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2016), *Annual Report of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson for 2016*, <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/veikla/metines-ataskaitos/405>.

⁷⁸ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (18)SI-7)SP-86, 4 September 2018 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas Dėl galimos diskriminacijos amžiaus pagrindu Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ir mokslo ministro 2018 m. kovo 26 d. įsakymo Nr. V-267 "Dėl Lietuvos Respublikos 2018 metų valstybės biudžeto lėšų, skirtų išlaidoms, susijusioms su pedagoginių darbuotojų skaičiaus optimizavimu, apmokėti, paskirstymo tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo" nuostatų tyrimo*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2018/09/sprendimas-86.pdf>.

2.5.1 Statistical evidence

Section 2.5.1 has not been updated for 2022. Regarding both the legal framework and the practice, please see *Country report: Non-discrimination – Lithuania 2022: Transposition and implementation at national level of Council directives 2000/43 and 2000/78*, covering the reporting period 01.01.2021-01.01.2022.

2.6 Harassment (Article 2(3))

a) Prohibition and definition of harassment

In Lithuania, harassment is prohibited in national law. It is defined. Harassment explicitly constitutes a form of discrimination.

The Law on Equal Treatment (Article 2(1)) provides a general definition of discrimination which, among other things, specifies that harassment is a form of discrimination. In addition, Article 2(7) of the LET provides a definition of harassment in compliance with the definition outlined in the directives. Article 2(7) reads as follows:

‘Harassment means any unwanted conduct which occurs with the purpose, or effect, of violating the dignity of a person, and of creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment on the grounds of gender, race, *nationality*, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion.’

Although the definition contains the singular (person), the interpretation of the national wording (either by the Ombudsperson or by the courts) does not imply that groups of persons would not come under the protection of the law.

In 2022, the Lithuanian Parliament finally approved amendments to the Law on Equal Treatment, which expand protection against harassment to cover access to goods and services and in relation to membership of and involvement in workers’ or employers’ organisations. The amendments also increase compliance with EU directives. The changes in the law immediately confirmed the necessity for this. The Activity Report for 2022 notes that all of the complaints about possible harassment on the grounds of race, nationality, language, ethnic origin, nationality and citizenship, as well as violations, were found in relation to access to goods and services.⁷⁹

Codes of conduct are not widespread in Lithuania; however, diversity charters were launched in around 30 companies and organisations in 2018. Some government agencies (particularly those dealing with the implementation of EU-funded programmes) as well as larger companies operate under codes of conduct in their work. However, in most cases, such codes of conduct do not have detailed provisions on non-discrimination or harassment. Very often, non-discrimination is addressed only by the general provisions on equality and impartiality that are embodied in the codes. In some instances, harassment and sexual harassment are mentioned but not defined.

While investigating complaints regarding harassment in the field of employment in 2019, the Ombudsperson referred to the *Handbook on European non-discrimination law* by FRA, stating that there is no need for a comparator to prove harassment. This essentially reflects the fact that harassment in itself is wrong because of the form it takes (verbal, non-verbal or physical abuse) and the potential effect it may have (violating human dignity).⁸⁰ The

⁷⁹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2023), *Annual Report for 2022*, https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2023/03/d1_lgkt-2022-metu-veiklos-ataskaita_kovo-13-d_final.pdf.

⁸⁰ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2010), *Handbook on European Non-discrimination Law*, p. 32, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2011-handbook-non-discrimination-law-2011_en.pdf.

Ombudsperson also referred to the interpretation of harassment by the Constitutional Court, stating that it is one of the forms of discrimination forbidden under the equality clause established by Article 29 of the Constitution, even though no harassment was recognised in the specific investigation.⁸¹

The Constitutional Court set out its views on harassment in its landmark decision of 2017:

‘In the context of the constitutional justice case at issue, it needs to be emphasised that one of the forms of discrimination (including the degrading of human dignity), prohibited under Article 29 of the Constitution, is harassment, which is understood as offensive, unacceptable, or unwanted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity, or of creating a hostile, intimidating, humiliating, or offensive environment for him/her on the grounds of gender, race, *nationality*, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions, or views, as well as other attributes such as disability, age, or sexual orientation. It should be noted that harassment also inevitably encroaches on a person’s physical or psychological inviolability, *inter alia*, disturbs his/her physical, mental, or spiritual state, restricts the expression of his/her freedom of physical activity, of his/her intellectual and creative freedoms, thus, also the expression of his/her free personality, and can make his/her relations with other persons more complicated. Harassment can lead to long-term or even permanent consequences that adversely affect a person’s private and social life.’⁸²

b) Scope of liability for harassment

In Lithuania, where harassment is perpetrated by an employee, the employer is liable. The employee can be held liable in concrete situations, based on the law under which harassment is addressed.

The scope of liability would depend on the situation and the law under which it is addressed. If discrimination is addressed via provisions of criminal law, the liability is personal – only a direct perpetrator (whether a natural or legal person) could be liable. In contrast, the civil law provides for vicarious liability. For example, the Civil Code would allow a claim for damages against the employers for the actions caused by its employees (Article 6.264).

When applying administrative sanctions, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson issues them to the executive body of a legal person (a director, for example) but not to its employees. According to the Ombudsperson, the current wording of the Law on Equal Treatment does not suggest that it could be enforced against a broad spectrum of parties. Tenants, customers and employees cannot be held liable. In its earlier annual reports, the Ombudsperson recommended amending the Law on Equal Treatment with provisions explicitly extending the scope of liability of persons.⁸³ However, such recommendations have not been repeated in more recent reports. The same would apply for the actions of members of particular associations or trade unions – according to the Ombudsperson, the current wording does not suggest that individual members could be held liable.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (19)SN-198)SP-9, 28 January 2020 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos tautybės ir kilmės pagrindu teatre (duomenys neskelbtini) tyrimo*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2020/01/sprendimas-nr.-19sn-198sp-9.pdf>.

⁸² Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, Conclusion of 19 December 2017 on the compliance of the actions of Kęstutis Pūkas, a member of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, against whom an impeachment case has been initiated, No. KT20-11/2017 available in English at: <https://www.lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1778/content>.

⁸³ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2009), *Annual Report for 2009*.

⁸⁴ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2010), *Annual Report for 2010*, <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/veikla/metines-ataskaitos/405>.

The employee can be held liable only by an employer applying the Labour Code, as harassment based on gender or sexual harassment, discriminative actions or violations of the honour and dignity of other employees or third parties during work or at the workplace would be considered a grave violation of working duties and a reason to terminate the employment contract.⁸⁵

2.7 Instructions to discriminate (Article 2(4))

a) Prohibition of instructions to discriminate

In Lithuania, instructions to discriminate are prohibited in national law and explicitly constitute a form of discrimination. However, instructions are not defined.

The LET (Article 2(1)) defines discrimination as follows:

‘Discrimination means any direct or indirect discrimination, harassment, instruction to discriminate on the grounds of gender, race, *nationality*, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion.’

In addition, Article 2(10) of the LET explicitly states that instructions to discriminate are considered to be discrimination, as defined in Article 2(5) on indirect discrimination and Article 2(9) on direct discrimination. Therefore, instructions to discriminate directly or indirectly are considered to be discrimination, although the LET does not elaborate on or provide an explanation of what particular actions could be considered as instructions. No investigations on instructions to discriminate carried out by the Ombudsperson over the past five years are known to the author of this report.

b) Scope of liability for instructions to discriminate

In Lithuania, the instructor and/or discriminator is liable, i.e. the executive body of a legal person, but not the employee who instructs another employee.

As mentioned in section 2.6(b) above, there is both a lack of clarity and inconsistency in the case law. When applying administrative sanctions, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson issues them to the executive body of the relevant legal person (a director, for example) but not to its employees. According to the Ombudsperson, the current wording of the Law on Equal Treatment does not suggest that it could be enforced against a broad spectrum of parties. Tenants, customers and employees cannot be held liable. In its annual reports for 2009 to 2011, the Ombudsperson recommended amending the Law on Equal Treatment to introduce provisions explicitly extending the scope of liability of persons.⁸⁶ Therefore, it appears that an individual employee or representative of an education institution could not be held liable under the application of the Law on Equal Treatment.

The 2022 amendments to the Law on Equal Treatment on expanded protection against harassment in the field of access to or the supply of goods and services introduced liability for service providers for an instruction to discriminate.

⁸⁵ Labour Code, 2016.

⁸⁶ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Annual Reports for 2009 to 2011.

2.8 Reasonable accommodation duties (Article 2(2)(b)(ii) and Article 5 Directive 2000/78)

- a) Implementation of the duty to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities in the area of employment

In Lithuania, the duty to provide reasonable accommodation is included in the law, but the concept itself is not defined.

The duty to provide reasonable accommodation was initially contained in the Law on Equal Treatment, and the same wording was repeated in the Labour Code in Article 26(2).⁸⁷ In 2022, the Law on Equal Treatment was amended to ensure compliance with the EU directives. Article 7(9) of the LET states that, when applying equal treatment, employers must:

‘Take appropriate measures to provide conditions for persons with disabilities to obtain work, to work, to pursue a career or to study, including the provision of appropriate working conditions, provided that the employer would not be disproportionately burdened with duties as a result.’

The official translation of Article 5 (‘Reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities’) of Directive 2000/78 in Lithuanian is ‘Premises suitable for persons with disabilities’. Therefore, both the Law on Equal Treatment and the Labour Code initially included the duty to adapt premises, but not the duty to provide other forms of ‘reasonable accommodation’, which can differ depending on each person and the type of work. In 2022, the Labour Code was amended to include adaptation of working conditions, not just premises. Article 26(2) of the Labour Code states that, when applying equal treatment, employers must:

‘Take appropriate measures to provide persons with disabilities access to employment, work, careers or training, including the provision of appropriate working conditions, provided that the employer would not be disproportionately burdened with duties as a result.’

The legal framework does not provide any criteria for assessing the extent of the duty of the employer, nor does it give any explanation what ‘disproportionate burden’ for an employer means. Financial assistance from the state in this regard is not taken into account in the legislation.

In addition, the Law on Equal Treatment and the Labour Code neither define disability nor do they provide explanations about ‘reasonable accommodation’. The only occasion when some sort of reference to ‘reasonable accommodation’ is made is in the previously mentioned obligation to employers to ‘take appropriate measures to provide conditions for persons with disabilities ... including the provision of appropriate working conditions, provided that the employer would not be disproportionately burdened with duties as a result’ (Article 7, LET).

It can be supposed that the personal scope in the context of reasonable accommodation does not differ from the general prohibition of non-discrimination on the ground of disability.

However, since there is neither a definition of ‘disability’ nor one of ‘reasonable accommodation’ in the Law on Equal Treatment, there is a risk that too narrow an interpretation of the duty could mean that a person may only benefit from an employer making ‘reasonable accommodation’ in cases where the definition of ‘disability’ provided in the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities applies. Nevertheless, as

⁸⁷ Labour Code, 2016.

mentioned before, the definition of 'disability' within the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities has been criticised by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, it will be amended in 2024, when the new disability reform will enter into force.

There is no clear mechanism provided in national law for the enforcement of the duty to provide 'reasonable accommodation' in court practice. The law does not provide criteria for assessing an employer's duty or evaluating what can be considered as a proportionate burden – or when it can be considered disproportionate.

However, the Ombudsperson applies the concept of 'individualised assessment' instead of a general rule when examining complaints, and the court rulings from 2019 and 2020 seem to support the decisions made by the Ombudsperson, holding a view supported by the provisions of the CRPD.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an integral part of the national legal system. Article 5 of the Convention states that 'in order to promote equality and eliminate discrimination, States Parties shall take all appropriate steps to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided.'

It is important to note that the pending Draft Law on Equal Treatment uses the term 'reasonable accommodation'; it does not merely refer to the adaptation of premises. However, it still does not define the term, nor does it set out what could be considered as a disproportionate burden.

It is also important to note that, in 2020, the Ombudsperson produced the documents *Equal opportunities in the workplace: a guide for employers*;⁸⁸ 'Drafting Policies on Equal Opportunities in Organisations';⁸⁹ *Mental Health at Work*;⁹⁰ and 'Reasonable Accommodation for Persons with Disabilities – how to implement them in the workplace'.⁹¹

b) Case law

Since neither the Law on Equal Treatment nor other legislation provides more details on how reasonable accommodation should be implemented in practice, there is no mechanism in place to evaluate how the provisions are implemented in practice and what burden for the employer is disproportional.

In 2018, the Ombudsperson issued two landmark decisions that may contribute to the interpretation of the principle of 'reasonable accommodation'. Complaints were submitted by a person who had partial work ability, as established by a competent institution, and was applying for a position of a cashier/salesperson in two different shops. In both cases, the Ombudsperson found that there had been discrimination in the field of employment based on the person's disability, when the employers failed to provide reasonable accommodation.⁹² The applicant was unable, *inter alia*, to lift loads heavier than 10 kg by

⁸⁸ Adutavičiūtė M., Jurkutė M. (2020), *Lygios galimybės darbovietėje: Vadovas darbdaviams (Equal opportunities in the workplace: a guide for employers)*, Vilnius, https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/01/lygiu_galimybiu_vadovas_2020.pdf.

⁸⁹ 'Lygių galimybių politikos diegimas organizacijose' ('Drafting Policies on Equal Opportunities in Organisations'), https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/01/lygiu_galimybiu_politika_2.pdf.

⁹⁰ Levickaitė K. (2020), *Psichikos sveikata darbe (Mental Health at Work)*, https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/01/psichikos_sveikata_darbe.pdf.

⁹¹ Grigaitė U. (2020), 'Tinkamas sąlygų pritaikymas žmonėms su negalia – kaip tai įgyvendinti darbovietėje' ('Reasonable Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities – how to implement them in the workplace'), https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/01/salygų_pritaikymas.pdf.

⁹² Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (18)SN-175)SP-115, 13 November 2018 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos negalios pagrindu priimant į kasininko-pardavėjo pareigas tyrimo*), <https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2018/11/sprendimas-18sn-175sp-115.pdf>; Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (18)SN-176)SP-116, 13 November 2018 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos negalios pagrindu priimant į*

hand, to work overtime or to work at a height of more than 5 m. The employer did not agree to adapt the nature of the work, but did not prove that it was impossible to do so. The Ombudsperson stressed that the essential criteria in decision making by an employer should be an individualised assessment of a person's ability to perform a particular job.

The Ombudsperson emphasised that the 'international and national legal framework imposes an obligation on the employer to ensure that persons with disabilities would not be discriminated against when applying for a job, by ensuring that their workplace and conditions are adapted. Failure to comply with this obligation constitutes discrimination in the field of employment against persons with disabilities.'⁹³

The courts are contributing to the interpretation of reasonable accommodation. One of the complaints was questioned in court, and the court confirmed the decision made by the Ombudsperson in 2019. The court found that, by refusing to employ the person and failing to provide reasonable accommodation, the company had violated the Law on Equal Treatment.⁹⁴

In a landmark decision of 2020, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania held, on the basis of the CRPD, Council Directive 2000/78/EC and the Law on Equal Treatment,⁹⁵ that:

'Reasonable accommodation is not only understood as reasonable accommodation of premises suitable for persons with disabilities to work, it is a broader concept, which also includes other working conditions that must ensure the proper implementation of the right to work for persons with disabilities. It has been mentioned that Council Directive 2000/78/EC interprets reasonable accommodation not only as appropriate measures, that ensure the adaptation of premises, but also the patterns of working time, the distribution of tasks, etc. Thus, the establishment of a working time model is one of the important factors in ensuring proper reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities who want to exercise their right to work.'⁹⁶

Besides the abovementioned case law, legal uncertainty remains over how the definition should be interpreted and what would be considered a 'disproportionate burden' for an employer. Legal criteria for 'disproportionate burden' would contribute to clarity on what the term means. The 'Analysis of discrimination in cases of denial of reasonable accommodation' carried out in 2019 reached the conclusion, based on interviews with different stakeholders, that it is wrongfully imagined that reasonable accommodation always requires huge financial resources, as there is not always a need to adapt the premises or to purchase expensive equipment. However, according to this research, reasonable accommodation would be provided more often if the laws regulating subsidies for employers allowed them to use the subsidies for individualised cases and more flexible types of reasonable accommodation, rather than just for the physical establishment of the workplace or purchasing work equipment.⁹⁷

kasininko-pardavėjo pareigas tyrimo), <https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2018/11/sprendimas-18sn-176sp-116.pdf>.

⁹³ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2019), *Annual Report for 2018*.

⁹⁴ Vilnius Regional Administrative Court decision, case No. eI-2472-244/2019, 3 July 2019, (*Vilniaus apygardos administracinio teismo 2019 m. liepos 3 d. sprendimas administracinėje byloje*).

⁹⁵ Article 7(6,9) of the Law on Equal Treatment (Duty of the Employer to Implement Equal Treatment at the Workplace, in the Civil Service).

⁹⁶ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania decision, case No. A-162-602/2020, 25 March 2020, (*Lietuvos vyriausiojo administracinio teismo nutartis administracinėje byloje*), <https://eteismai.lt/byla/187295332148781/A-162-602/2020?word=tomas%20ryzgelis>.

⁹⁷ Lithuanian Disability Forum, Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights (2019), 'Galimos diskriminacijos dėl sąlygų nepritaikymo analizė' (Analysis of discrimination in cases of denial of reasonable accommodation), http://www.ndt.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019_Diskriminacijos_dėl_slygu_nepritaikymo_analize_visas-galutinis.pdf.

c) Definition of disability and non-discrimination protection

There is no separate definition of disability, either for claiming protection from discrimination or for the purpose of claiming a reasonable accommodation. The general definition of 'disability' is provided in the Article 2(8) of the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities:

'Disability is a long-term worsening reduction of the state of health, diminution of participation in public life and possibilities for activity, resulting from disorder of the person's bodily functions and detrimental environmental factors'.⁹⁸

Following the amendments in 2022, disability will be defined as follows from 1 January 2024:

'A long-term functional impairment (a person's innate and/or acquired characteristics) that, due to environmental factors, prevents the person from participating fully and effectively in society on an equal basis with others.'⁹⁹

d) Failure to meet the duty of reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities

In Lithuania, failure to meet the duty of reasonable accommodation in employment for persons with disabilities is recognised as a form of discrimination. This is enshrined in amendments to the Law on Equal Treatment and the Labour Code adopted in 2022, which both entered into force on 1 August 2022. Notwithstanding this development, failure to meet the duty of reasonable accommodation has been considered discrimination in accordance with established case law.¹⁰⁰ As analysed in section 2.8(b), the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has also considered that failure to ensure that the workplace and conditions are adapted/accommodated to ensure a person's access to that workplace constitutes discrimination in the field of employment against persons with disabilities.¹⁰¹

In 2020, the Ombudsperson issued a landmark decision concerning challenges faced by people with hearing impairments in finding employment.¹⁰² The person involved was not considered for a position at a bank because of her hearing impairment, which would, according to the bank, make it difficult for her to participate in various internal meetings and conferences. The Ombudsperson stated that the bank had not demonstrated that it had taken steps to ensure that applicants had equal access to a job interview, regardless of disability, i.e. that appropriate conditions were provided for the applicant to explain her abilities and competencies. The bank had also failed to provide evidence that it had taken the necessary steps to establish that the applicant would not be able to perform the job functions assigned to her due to her disability and that it would not have been possible to change or adapt the bank's working model to provide individualised and suitable working conditions. Therefore, discrimination was found on the basis of disability.

In 2014, the first case explicitly concerning a failure to provide reasonable accommodation was adjudicated in court.¹⁰³ Although the reasoning of the court did not elaborate on the

⁹⁸ Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities, 2004.

⁹⁹ Law on Amendment of the Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities No. I-2044, 20 December 2022, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/253a8e20720911ed8a47de53ff967b64?jfwid=1bduub3ckl>.

¹⁰⁰ Decision of the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, case No. A-162-602/2020, 25 March 2020, <https://eteismai.lt/byla/187295332148781/A-162-602/2020?word=tomas%20ryzgelis>.

¹⁰¹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2019), *Annual Report for 2018*.

¹⁰² Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (20)SN-44)SP-48, 26 May 2020 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos negalios pagrindu priimant į darbą „Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken AB“ Vilniaus filialą tyrimo*), https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2020/06/d1_sprendimas-20sn-44.pdf.

¹⁰³ Vilnius Regional Court decision, Case No. 2A-557-640/2014, 27 February 2014, (*Vilniaus apygardos teismo 2014 m. vasario 27 d. nutartis Civilinėje byloje Nr. 2A-557-640/2014*), <https://eteismai.lt/byla/276850064617444/2A-557-640/2014>.

concept extensively, it acknowledged that failure to provide reasonable accommodation is direct discrimination. The court held that the dismissal of an employee because of his state of health, without trying to provide reasonable accommodation, amounted to direct discrimination. This position was upheld by the higher court,¹⁰⁴ which stated that the employer did not provide any proof that it had tried to realistically evaluate the ability of the employee to work, nor had it considered adjusting working conditions, which amounted to discrimination on the basis of disability.

As noted in section 2.6(a) and (b), the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson examined complaints regarding reasonable accommodation in 2018 and found that such behaviour constituted harassment based on the person's disability.¹⁰⁵

e) Duties to provide reasonable accommodation in areas other than employment for persons with disabilities

In Lithuania, there is no duty to provide reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities outside the employment field according to the Law on Equal Treatment. However, discrimination resulting from failure to provide reasonable accommodation might be recognised in relation to the provisions of the CRPD. This is confirmed by the case law of both the Ombudsperson¹⁰⁶ and the courts.¹⁰⁷ However, the concept of 'disproportionate burden' with regard to providing reasonable accommodation is not known outside the field of employment.

The Law on Education imposes a duty on state and municipal institutions to ensure opportunities to accommodate students with special needs (special educational assistance, special study aids, and social and medical care). In Article 34(3), the Law on Education provides that 'Accessibility of education is ensured by adapting the school environment, providing psychological, special pedagogical, special and social pedagogical support, supplying with technical aid measures at school and special educational measures in other ways established by law.'¹⁰⁸ In addition, students with disabilities have the right to financial support granted by the state during their studies in further education establishments and universities. The concept of 'disproportionate burden' is not regulated in the field of education.

Even if the concept of 'reasonable accommodation' is not explicitly established in education and in the provision of goods and services by the Law on Equal Treatment, the duty to ensure access to education and goods and services can in some situations be interpreted as encompassing the concept. However, there is insufficient case law to draw any conclusion as to whether this duty is applied in the same manner as 'reasonable accommodation' in the field of employment.

f) Duties to provide reasonable accommodation in respect of other grounds

Section 2.8.f has not been updated for 2022. Please see Country report: Non-discrimination – Lithuania 2022: Transposition and implementation at national level of Council directives 2000/43 and 2000/78, covering the reporting period 01.01.2021-01.01.2022.

¹⁰⁴ Vilnius Regional Court decision, Case No. 2A-557-640/2014, 27 February 2014.

¹⁰⁵ In Lithuanian legislation, reasonable accommodation includes only the adaptation of the premises, so in some cases direct discrimination is recognised.

¹⁰⁶ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (22)SN-213)SP-14, 10 March 2022, (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos negalios pagrindu teikiant paslaugas "Girstučio" baseine tyrimo*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/03/21sn-213sp-14.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ For example, Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, Case No. eI2-4079-811/2022, 24 October 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Law on Education (*Lietuvos Respublikos Švietimo įstatymas*), 1991, No. I-1489, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.1480/asr>.

3 PERSONAL AND MATERIAL SCOPE

3.1 Personal scope

3.1.1 EU and non-EU nationals (Recital 13 and Article 3(2), Directive 2000/43 and Recital 12 and Article 3(2), Directive 2000/78)

In Lithuania, there are no residency or citizenship/nationality requirements for protection under the relevant national laws transposing the directives.

The protection from discrimination should be valid for irregular or undocumented migrants and for persons under 18 years old in all spheres. The protection from discrimination in employment or social benefits, however, might not be covered for adult irregular migrants, unless they are asylum seekers, because they do not have a right to work in Lithuania. There has been no case law to provide a more thorough interpretation.

The protection from discrimination on the ground of citizenship applies to EU and EEA citizens and their family members.

3.1.2 Natural and legal persons (Recital 16, Directive 2000/43)

a) Protection against discrimination

In Lithuania, the personal scope of anti-discrimination law covers natural and legal persons for the purpose of protection against discrimination.

The Law on Equal Treatment, in Article 12, does not explicitly distinguish between natural and legal persons, and the word 'persons' should be interpreted to encompass both legal and natural persons. This is supported by the findings of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson as well as by other provisions under the LET and by case law. For instance, on the provision on the shift of the burden of proof, Article 4 of the Law on Equal Treatment states that it should be applied while investigating complaints of discrimination submitted by natural and legal persons. Similarly, Article 24, which provides for the possibility to submit a complaint, states that any natural or legal person, any other organisation or its division shall have the right to submit a complaint to the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson about a violation of equal opportunities.

b) Liability for discrimination

In Lithuania, the personal scope of anti-discrimination law covers natural and legal persons for the purpose of liability for discrimination. Both natural and legal persons are liable for discriminatory acts according to the law. Natural persons can have administrative and criminal responsibility. Legal persons bear administrative liability (the obligation to pay a fine in the case of a violation of the Law on Equal Treatment), and criminal liability based on Article 170 of the Criminal Code (incitement of hatred or hatred). Criminal liability for natural persons is covered in Article 169 of the Criminal Code (in the article on 'Discrimination on Grounds of *Nationality*, Race, Sex, Descent, Religion or Belonging to Other Groups', where other grounds are also included).¹⁰⁹

When it comes to the scope of liability, there is a lack of clarity. The Law on Equal Treatment, in Articles 29 and 30, mentions persons but does not specify whether they are legal or natural persons to whom the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson can address a decision after analysing the complaint, although the law does mention that both natural and legal persons are obliged to submit the requested information, documents, etc.

¹⁰⁹ The grounds mentioned in Article 169 of the Criminal Code are: age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, race, 'nationality', language, descent, social status, religion, and convictions or views.

However, since natural persons can also be employers and providers of goods and services, the liability should also apply to them.

It is not very clear whether, in cases of discrimination in the occupational sphere, both the employer and the employee can be held liable for discrimination. The only available case law on the matter concerns the scope of liability for sex discrimination in employment relations and the decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (although the outcomes may also be applied to other grounds of discrimination). The Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania ruled in its landmark decision that, although the Law on Equal Opportunities did not *expressis verbis* provide a list of subjects who could be admonished, a systematic analysis of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and of the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court led the court to believe that not only employers but also their representatives could be held accountable for discrimination and could be admonished by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson.¹¹⁰ This means that managers or heads of administration and other personnel with the legal capacity to represent the employer can be held accountable according to the Law on Equal Opportunities. However, there is still a lack of clarity in national legislation that might lead to inconsistencies in almost identical situations, as the regional administrative court, just one month prior to the Supreme Administrative Court's decision, held that only employers, not their representatives, could be held liable.¹¹¹

3.1.3 Private and public sector including public bodies (Article 3(1))

a) Protection against discrimination

In Lithuania, national law covers the private and public sectors, including public bodies, for the purpose of protection against discrimination, as regulated by Articles 5 to 9 of the Law on Equal Treatment.

b) Liability for discrimination

In Lithuania, the personal scope of anti-discrimination law covers the private and public sectors, including public bodies, for the purpose of liability for discrimination.

The Law on Equal Treatment was designed with the particular purpose of transposing the requirements of the EU anti-discrimination directives into national legislation. The law does not make a distinction between the public and private sectors in the fields of employment, education and the provision of goods and services (Articles 6-9). In addition, it has a separate provision on public entities, Article 5, which states that:

'State and local government institutions and agencies must within the scope of their competence ensure that in all the legal acts drafted and passed by them, equal rights and treatment are laid down without regard to gender, race, *nationality*, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion.'

Although the law does not explicitly mention social protection, it does not exclude this field either. It can be interpreted as encompassing it but, as described below, court interpretation might be needed for clarification.

¹¹⁰ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, administrative case No. A⁸⁵⁸-403/2012, decision of 2 April 2012.

¹¹¹ Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, Case No. I-1278-624/2012, decision of 1 March 2012.

3.2 Material scope

3.2.1 Conditions for access to employment, to self-employment or to occupation, including selection criteria, recruitment conditions and promotion, whatever the branch of activity and at all levels of the professional hierarchy (Article 3(1)(a))

In Lithuania, national legislation prohibits discrimination in relation to conditions for access to employment, including selection criteria, recruitment conditions and promotion, whatever the branch of activity and at all levels of the professional hierarchy for the five grounds, as well as sex, and in both private and public sectors as described in the directives. Gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are not explicitly included in the law.

Article 7 of the Law on Equal Treatment has a general provision that all employers are bound by the principle of equality of persons, followed by a list of obligations. The same wording was repeated in the Labour Code, Articles 2 and 26.¹¹² In Article 11, the LET prohibits discriminatory advertisements offering job, civil service or education opportunities. Neither law explicitly includes self-employment or occupation. The Law on Income Tax,¹¹³ which provides a list of activities related to self-employment or occupation (artists, performers, designers, etc.), does not have any references to anti-discrimination. On the other hand, the Labour Code is a *lex generalis* in the occupational sphere, and therefore its principles would apply in the absence of specific rules in other legislation. Under Article 21(2) of the Labour Code, natural persons may be employers. However, it remains unclear whether the provisions apply in cases where the services of self-employed persons are declined because of discriminatory attitudes. Thus, it depends on how the Law on Equal Treatment is interpreted. For example, joint activity (partnership) contracts are not equated with a service or employment contract and therefore are not regulated by the Law on Equal Treatment, as stated by the Ombudsperson.¹¹⁴

According to the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners,¹¹⁵ foreigners granted refugee status and foreigners granted subsidiary protection are exempt from the obligation to obtain a work permit, and thus can start to work under an employment contract as soon as they receive a residence permit in Lithuania. However, before asylum status and a Lithuanian residence permit are granted, persons are not allowed to work in Lithuania. Since the asylum procedure takes months, in practice most of the people concerned were not allowed to work for a year or more after arrival.¹¹⁶ In 2022, as the wave of migration from Belarus continued, amendments to the law were adopted, making it more difficult for asylum seekers to work.¹¹⁷ The new amendments ensure that asylum seekers have the right to work only 12 months after their date of registration in the Lithuanian Migration Information System. In addition, asylum seekers do not obtain a work permit when they become eligible to work, and they are now required to make an additional application to the Employment Service. There are some exceptions in these cases: an employer does not have to specify the qualifications or work experience of a third-country national in order to

¹¹² Labour Code, 2016.

¹¹³ Law on Income Tax (*Lietuvos Respublikos Gyventojų pajamų mokesčio įstatymas*), 2002, No. 73-3085, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.C677663D2202/wVGhEHdaRq>.

¹¹⁴ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (18)SN-129)SP-77, 10 August 2018 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos kilmės, kalbos ir pilietybės pagrindais UAB "Dallis" vykdančią priėmimą į darbą tyrimo*), <https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2018/08/sprendimas-nr.-77.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners (*Įstatymas dėl užsieniečių teisinės padėties*), 29 April 2004, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.42837E5A79DD/asr>.

¹¹⁶ Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras (Lithuanian Social Research Centre) and Diversity Development Group (2016), *A Study of integration policy of foreigners, granted asylum in Lithuania*, available at: <http://www.diversitygroup.lt/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Refugee-Integration-EN.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ Law amending the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens No. IX-2206 (*Lietuvos Respublikos įstatymo „Dėl užsieniečių teisinės padėties“ Nr. IX-2206 pakeitimo įstatymas*) No. XIV-1277, 30 June 2022, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/db4df460fde511ecbfe9c72e552dd5bd?jfwid=-aspkcymkd>.

recruit him/her, and an employer can register a vacancy one day before recruiting an asylum seeker, instead of the usual five days. However, experts say that such regulations are problematic. Some employers who used to employ asylum seekers continue to do so, even though they pay taxes, but they do not require permits, which makes their employment seem illegal. Another point is that this amendment separates asylum seekers into two groups – before and after the migration crisis in 2021 – which results in unequal treatment.^{118, 119}

The laws relating to specific professions, such as the Attorney Law,¹²⁰ the Law on the Healthcare System,¹²¹ the Accountancy Law,¹²² the Audit Law¹²³ and the Dentistry Law,¹²⁴ do not contain non-discrimination clauses, definitions of discrimination or any regulations on protection against discrimination, nor do they include a direct prohibition of discrimination on the grounds covered by the directives. However, the general principles of non-discrimination established in the Constitution and in the Law on Equal Treatment should apply.

The findings of the Eurobarometer 2019 survey present worrying trends when it comes to accessing employment. The following criteria may put one candidate at a disadvantage when a company wants to hire someone and has a choice between two candidates with equal skills and qualifications: the candidate's age, if they are considered too young or too old (59 %), a disability (51 %), being Roma (41 %), looks (34 %) sexual orientation (being gay, lesbian or bisexual) (27 %), gender identity (being transgender) (22 %), gender or sex (21 %), sex characteristics (being intersex) (21 %), way of speaking or accent (19 %), skin colour (18 %), expression of religious belief (16 %) and ethnic origin (10 %).¹²⁵

3.2.2 Employment and working conditions, including pay and dismissals (Article 3(1)(c))

In Lithuania, national legislation prohibits discrimination in working conditions, including pay and dismissals, for all five grounds, as well as sex, and for both private and public employment. Gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are not explicitly included in the law.

According to Article 7 of the Law on Equal Treatment, the actions of an employer shall be deemed discriminatory if he or she applies less (or more) favourable terms of employment, payment for work or dismissal criteria to one employee or civil servant than to another. The same wording is repeated in the Labour Code under Article 26(2). The general equality principle is also mentioned in Article 2 of the Labour Code.¹²⁶

In its landmark ruling of 12 February 2021, the Constitutional Court noted that the establishment of the maximum age limit of 65 for researchers and lecturers is aimed at the constitutionally important goal of ensuring the quality of higher education by

¹¹⁸ Based on information received by the author from the humanitarian aid organisation *Sienos Grupė*, March 2023.

¹¹⁹ Law on the Amendment of the Law on the Legal Status of Foreigners No. IX-2206 (*Lietuvos Respublikos įstatymo "Dėl užsieniečių teisinės padėties", Nr. IX-2206 pakeitimo įstatymas*) No. XIII-3412, 10 November 2020, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/97fb0d202b2c11eb932eb1ed7f923910>.

¹²⁰ Attorney Law (*Lietuvos Respublikos Advokatūros įstatymas*), 2004, No. 50-1632, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.9F4371AB03A3/asr>.

¹²¹ Law on the Healthcare System (*Lietuvos Respublikos Sveikatos sistemos įstatymas*), 1994, No. 63-1231, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.E2B2957B9182/ykTupWhxcs>.

¹²² Accountancy Law (*Lietuvos Respublikos Buhalterinės apskaitos įstatymas*), 2001, No.99-3515, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.43178AA9832E/eGHQNZASDS>.

¹²³ Audit Law (*Lietuvos Respublikos Finansinių ataskaitų audito įstatymas*), 1999, No. VIII-1227, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.9845F775C518/npJADmsHoX>.

¹²⁴ Dentistry Law (*Lietuvos Respublikos Stomatologinės priežiūros (pagalbos) įstatymas*), 2004, No. 4-36, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.D9F7AA1AE41F/ORZTZCmqKw>.

¹²⁵ European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 493, 'Discrimination in the European Union', May 2019.

¹²⁶ Labour Code, 2016.

guaranteeing consistent and optimal turnover of scientists and lecturers, as well as encouraging younger highly qualified researchers and lecturers into work. According to the Constitutional Court, there are no grounds to state that the establishment of the maximum age limit of 65 for researchers and lecturers means disregarding the requirement arising from the constitutional principle of proportionality not to restrict the rights of a person beyond what is necessary to achieve the constitutionally justified goal.¹²⁷

The author of this report is aware of two court cases that ended in a settlement between the parties in 2019.¹²⁸ In one of the cases, a court ruled that dismissing a person because of an undisclosed disability amounts to direct discrimination.¹²⁹

3.2.3 Access to all types and to all levels of vocational guidance, vocational training, advanced vocational training and retraining, including practical work experience (Article 3(1)(b))

In Lithuania, national legislation prohibits discrimination in vocational training outside the employment relationship, such as in adult lifelong learning courses or vocational training provided by technical schools or universities, based on the prohibition of non-discrimination in education. Gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are not explicitly included in the law.

Article 7 of the Law on Equal Treatment obliges employers to 'provide equal working and civil service conditions and opportunities for vocational training, advanced vocational training, retraining, practical work experience, as well as provide equal benefits', although the law does not provide explanations as to what the concepts 'vocational training' or 'advanced vocational training' mean. The same wording is repeated in the Labour Code under Article 26(2)(2)).¹³⁰

The author is not aware of any case law on the matter. Therefore, judicial interpretation of the national legislation would clarify the application of the law.

3.2.4 Membership of, and involvement in, an organisation of workers or employers, or any organisation whose members carry on a particular profession, including the benefits provided for by such organisations (Article 3(1)(d))

In Lithuania, national legislation prohibits discrimination in relation to membership of and involvement in workers or employers' organisations, as formulated in the directives, for all five grounds, as well as sex, and for both private and public employment. Gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are not explicitly included in the law.

Article 9 of the Law on Equal Treatment repeats the wording of the directive. As there have not been any rulings on the matter, it is not clear how this provision would function in practice. However, according to the case law, different provisions related to the duration of annual leave applying to workers belonging to different trade unions or not belonging to any union has led to indirect discrimination.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, No. KT29-N1/2021, 12 February 2021 (*Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucinio teismo 2021 m. vasario 12 d. nutarimas dėl Lietuvos Respublikos Vilniaus universiteto statuto 15 straipsnio 9 dalies nuostatos atitikties Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijai*), <https://lrkt.lt/lt/teismo-aktai/paieska/135/ta2369/content>.

¹²⁸ Information received by the author from the Office of the Ombudsperson for Equal Opportunities, 13 December 2019.

¹²⁹ Vilnius District Court (Vilniaus apylinkės teismas), *Viešojoje įstaigoje "Šeimos medicinos ir paliatyvaus gydymo centras" v. E.V.G.*, Case No. e2-23430-727/2018, 6 November 2018, <http://litko.teismai.lt/viesasprendimupaieska/tekstas.aspx?id=f076a27-c3e1-4b09-988a-d28fef79d5b0>.

¹³⁰ Labour Code, 2016, Article 26.

¹³¹ Supreme Court of Lithuania, *VšĮ Greitosios medicinos pagalbos stoties darbuotojų profesinės sąjunga (Emergency Medical Service Station Trade Union) v. VšĮ Greitosios medicinos pagalbos stotis (Public*

3.2.5 Social protection, including social security and healthcare (Article 3(1)(e) Directive 2000/43)

In Lithuania, national legislation does not explicitly prohibit discrimination in social protection, including social security and healthcare, as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive. Gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are not explicitly included in the law.

Provision of housing is included under the provisions regulating prohibition of discrimination in the field of consumer protection (access to and supply of goods and services) (Article 8 LET). This article does not explicitly mention social housing, but it is applied in practice for the provision of public services.

The existing Law on Equal Treatment, in contrast to the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men,¹³² does not explicitly state that social protection, including social security and healthcare, falls under the scope of the law. There are no particular provisions on this in the LET, with the exception of a general duty to implement equal opportunities (Article 5), which reads as follows:

'State and local government institutions and agencies must within the scope of their competence ensure that in all the legal acts drafted and passed by them, equal rights and treatment are laid down without regard to gender, race, *nationality*, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion.'

However, the position of the Ombudsperson in this respect is not clear and consistent. In the past, the Ombudsperson considered that social security and social protection would not fall under the scope of the Law on Equal Treatment while healthcare did, since the wording of the law regarding goods and services was broad enough to include health services.¹³³ On one occasion in 2014, however, the Ombudsperson investigated a case comprising 32 complaints regarding the state pension and its reduction for a certain group of persons. The Ombudsperson started the investigation procedure on the basis of alleged discrimination on the ground of social status and did not reject the complaint with reference to material scope. Eventually the Ombudsperson closed the investigation without clearly stating that the regulation was discriminatory and issued a recommendation to the Parliament to enact laws that would compensate state pension recipients for their loss of income because of reduced pensions. Since then, there has been no case law on this matter.

In addition to this, social protection is mainly regulated by the Law on State Social Security Insurance.¹³⁴ However, this law does not have any anti-discrimination clauses either; it does not mention religion, belief, race or ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation or sex in terms of social protection. Social protection, social security and healthcare are governed by a number of other special laws that cover areas such as social state benefits,¹³⁵ but these laws also lack non-discrimination provisions. The Law on the Healthcare System¹³⁶ only provides a description of the principle of 'just healthcare' – as 'state-recognised healthcare conditions ensuring equal opportunities to seek health and as much as possible reducing the differences between those seeking it'. It also sets out the principles regulating

Institution Emergency Medical Service Station), 26 August 2021, <http://liteko.teismai.lt/viesasprendimupaijeska/tekstas.aspx?id=8c5fa0b3-1f7e-4369-ba1b-c40a2dd23ee1>.

¹³² Article 9 of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men explicitly states that discrimination on the ground of sex is prohibited in the field of social protection.

¹³³ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2010), *Annual Report for 2010*.

¹³⁴ Law on State Social Security Insurance (*Lietuvos Respublikos valstybinio socialinio draudimo įstatymas*), available at: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.0F9036415DBD/asr>.

¹³⁵ Law on Social State Benefits (*Valstybinių šalpos išmokų įstatymas*), 1994, No. 96-1873, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/f5ee93504a6e11e6b5d09300a16a686c/owltqajZQe>.

¹³⁶ Law on the Healthcare System, 1994.

healthcare activities, among which are: 'the rights of every individual to enjoy the best health possible regardless of their sex, race, ethnicity, citizenship, social status and profession'.¹³⁷ The Law on Support for the Purchase or Rental of Housing¹³⁸ only sets out a general equality principle, without mentioning specific grounds. The issue of social housing is also addressed in section 3.2.9 ('Housing'), under paragraph (a) on 'Trends and patterns regarding housing segregation for Roma'.

Based on the practice of the Ombudsperson, as well as court practice, it can be maintained that healthcare is considered as an example of accessing goods and services and as a public service.¹³⁹

This and other examples from the past complaints indicate that healthcare is considered to fall under the scope of the law according to the practice of the Ombudsperson. Nevertheless, it would be useful to have this explicitly regulated by the Law on Equal Treatment.

To conclude, there is a lack of clarity in the Law on Equal Treatment on the prohibition of discrimination in the field of social protection, including social security and healthcare. Lack of clarity causes inconsistencies and problems in the practical application of the law. There is no court case law that would help the interpretation of prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin. As mentioned above, the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sex within the social protection system. Therefore, uncertainty regarding race, ethnic origin and other equality grounds remains until the Law on Equal Treatment broadens its scope to the sphere of social protection.

a) Article 3(3) exception (Directive 2000/78)

National law does not seek to explicitly rely on the exception in Article 3(3), Directive 2000/78 in relation to particular grounds.

3.2.6 Social advantages (Article 3(1)(f) Directive 2000/43)

In Lithuania, national legislation does not prohibit discrimination regarding social advantages as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive. Gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are not explicitly included in the law.

Nevertheless, complaints regarding social benefits are likely to be investigated by the Ombudsperson, based on the duty of the state and municipal institutions and agencies to ensure that equal rights and opportunities are enshrined in all legal acts irrespective of gender, race, 'nationality', citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion, as established by Article 5 or Article 8 of the LET, which contains an obligation to ensure equal treatment in the field of consumer protection. These provisions could be interpreted as covering social benefits, since they are not mentioned among the exceptions.

In 2022, the Law on Equal Treatment introduced a provision allowing for the granting of social advantages on the grounds of age, disability and social status, when it is justified by a legitimate aim and if that aim is pursued by appropriate and necessary means.

¹³⁷ Law on the Healthcare System, 1994.

¹³⁸ Law on Support for the Purchase or Rental of Housing (*Lietuvos Respublikos paramos būstui įsigyti ar išsinuomoti įstatymas*), 2014, No. 15180, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/620cd9e0584311e49df480952cc07606/asr>.

¹³⁹ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (18)SN-115)SP-88, 12 November 2020, <https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2020/11/sprendimas-18sn-115sp-88.pdf>.

However, the Ombudsperson received and investigated complaints about social advantages even before the law was amended. In the past, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson issued decisions concerning the sale of reduced-rate tickets to pensioners by Vilnius City Municipality,¹⁴⁰ kindergarten benefit schemes according to which parents who sent their children to private kindergartens could get compensation,¹⁴¹ and benefits to people with type 1 diabetes.¹⁴²

3.2.7 Education (Article 3(1)(g) Directive 2000/43)

In Lithuania, national legislation prohibits discrimination in education as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive. Gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are not explicitly included in the law.

In general, all educational institutions, schools, and scientific and academic institutions (public and private) are obliged under Article 6 of the Law on Equal Treatment to ensure that the principle of non-discrimination is applied in admitting students to educational institutions, awarding study grants, drafting educational programmes, selecting curricula and assessing knowledge with regard to all the grounds listed in the Law on Equal Treatment. Furthermore, the Law sets out that 'Educational establishments, other education providers as well as research and education establishments must, within their competence, ensure that education programmes, textbooks and teaching aids do not contain or propagate discrimination' on all grounds, including on the basis of sex.

In addition, Article 5(1) of the Law on Education states equal opportunities as one of the principles of the education system. Jurisprudence on equality in education remains scarce since very few cases regarding discrimination in this field have been brought to court in recent years.

In its landmark decision of 2021, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania found that the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, which is responsible for vocational training and lifelong learning policy, violated the Law on Equal Opportunities by not ensuring that a person with individual educational needs can study in vocational education institutions.¹⁴³

In Lithuania, the general approach towards pupils with disabilities, combined with a lack of funding, gives rise to problems.

Significant developments have taken place in 2020. The Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Education, eliminating legal provisions that were discriminatory towards children with disabilities.¹⁴⁴ The new provisions of the Law will be implemented gradually and will enter into force from 1 September 2024. General schools will no longer be able to refuse to accept children with special educational needs or students with disabilities and refer them to special schools. Until then, municipalities and schools must gradually create the conditions for children with disabilities to be accepted at general schools, and the state must provide all the necessary funds. However, in the author's opinion, the impending reform is worrying due to the lack of specialists, inadequate funding and existing negative attitudes.

¹⁴⁰ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2011), *Annual Report for 2011*, <http://www.lygybe.lt/lt/metines-ataskaitos/405>.

¹⁴¹ Decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson with regard to social status, available (in Lithuanian) at: <http://www.lygybe.lt/lt/socialine-padetis-pazymos>.

¹⁴² Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (19)SN-92)SP-79, 20 June 2019 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos negalios pagrindu nustatant specialiuosius poreikius tyrimo*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2019/06/nr.-19sn-92sp-79.pdf>.

¹⁴³ The case was declared non-public by the court, therefore the decision is not publicly available. However, this case is mentioned in the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson's *Annual Report for 2021*.

¹⁴⁴ Law on the Amendment of Articles 5, 14, 21, 29, 30, 34 and 36 of the Law on Education and Supplementing it with Article 45-1 (*Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo įstatymo Nr. I-1489 5, 14, 21, 29, 30, 34 ir 36 straipsnių pakeitimo ir įstatymo papildymo 45-1 straipsniu įstatymas*), No. XIII-3268, 30 September 2020, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/a396c630c07711eaae0db016672cba9c?jfwid=8oekcj9c3>.

Until the Law fully comes into force, Article 29(10) of the Law on Education, which establishes an exception for schools that significantly affects children with disabilities and their ability to access schools providing compulsory education, remains valid:

‘The school that, for objective reasons, is unable to provide a student who is studying under compulsory education programmes with psychological, special pedagogical, special or social pedagogical assistance, in agreement with his parents (guardians, caregivers), pedagogical psychological and the child rights protection service, shall make a suggestion to study at another school.’

Under the Law on Education, parents have the right to choose a form of education for their child, but only to a certain extent. If special educational/psychological institutions identify severe special needs that make a child’s education in a mainstream school impossible, that child is placed in a special school or in a class for children with special needs in a mainstream school, or is educated at home. However, in many cases, education in general schools is barely possible due to the fact that many mainstream schools lack either the infrastructure or the specialists (or both) to accommodate children who have special needs and are in need of specialist support.¹⁴⁵ According to the investigation implemented by the Ombudsperson for Children’s Rights in 2016, 14 (out of 61) of the municipalities did not provide any type of further education opportunities for children with intellectual disabilities finishing compulsory basic education (on average, children usually finish their basic education at the age of 16).¹⁴⁶ According to a 2019 survey among children with disabilities and their parents, in response to a question about the best place for children with disabilities to be educated, the largest number of them (48 %) chose mainstream schools together with all other children, 32.9 % chose special schools and 17.8 % opted for special classes in mainstream schools, with 1.3 % choosing home education.¹⁴⁷ However, when a similar question was asked in a public opinion poll commissioned by the Ombudsperson for Children’s Rights in 2018, 37.6 % said special schools, 30.6 % said mainstream schools, 23.8 % said mainstream schools with special classes, and 1.7 % said that home would be the best place for children with special needs to be educated.¹⁴⁸ Parents of children with disabilities stated that they faced further problems when accessing schools: 58 % of them said there were no special schools available in their area, 25.8 % said there were no mainstream schools that would agree to accept their child with disability, and some said that the schools were not adapted to accept children with disabilities or that they had to wait for a long time.

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson examined one complaint regarding discrimination in the field of education in 2022, but the fact of discrimination was not confirmed. In 2020, the Ombudsperson declared that the current legal acts adopted by the Minister of Education, Science and Sports, which regulate the access to education of students studying according to an individualised basic education programme, prevent a person with a disability from choosing what education he or she wants to pursue and are in violation of Article 5(1) of the Law on Equal Treatment and Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Ombudsperson suggested that the Ministry should change the above-mentioned regulations with the involvement of organisations representing persons with disabilities. According to the Table for Monitoring the

¹⁴⁵ According to a survey carried out in 2010, 78 % of schools said that they significantly lacked educational materials for children with special needs.

¹⁴⁶ Certificate of investigation at the initiative of the Ombudsperson for Children’s Rights on the situation of children with disabilities in municipalities (2016), <http://vtaki.lt/lt/teisine-informacija/vaiko-teisiu-padeties-vertinimas/atlikti-tyrimai-ir-apibendrinimai>.

¹⁴⁷ Lithuanian Association of Persons with Disabilities, ‘Research on Access to Education, Special Education and Education Assistance for Children, evaluating Effectiveness in Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ (2019), http://www.ndt.lt/wp-content/uploads/%C5%A0vietimo-tyrimo-ataskaita-2019_12_31.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ Society’s attitude to inclusive education of children with special needs, public opinion poll, 2018, Vilimorus, ordered by the Ombudsperson for Children Rights, <http://vtaki.lt/uploads/documents/files/apklausa%20Vilimorus%20SUP%202018%2012.pdf>.

Implementation of the Decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, this recommendation is still in the process of implementation.¹⁴⁹

One of the provisions of Article 3 of LET states that the Law does not apply to the admission of persons to study at schools of religious communities and associations, schools established by them or their members, as well as establishments, enterprises and organisations whose main activity is other than academic education, which have been established with the purpose of education in an environment fostering the values of a religious community or association where refusal to admit a person is necessary in order to maintain the ethos of the said organisations. The same rules apply to the process of education as well as to the selection of staff by these establishments, and also to the content of education programmes, textbooks and education tools when teaching the religion of traditional religious communities and associations. It is not clear which schools would be exempted from applying the law and in which cases, since there have not been any rulings on the issue yet. However, the debate on these exceptions in Parliament focused largely on the issue of sexual orientation. Conservative politicians stated that such provisions could be used to 'protect' schools from homosexuals. The present wording is very broad, leaving room for interpretations that could breach the requirements of the Employment Equality Directive (Directive 2000/78/EC) and the Racial Equality Directive (Directive 2000/43/EC).

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted some of the difficulties faced by children in education. After the introduction of distance learning in 2020, it became clear that about 35 000 pupils lack the necessary equipment (a proper computer and internet connection) for distance learning. The state purchased and distributed 35 000 devices for distance learning to Lithuanian pupils, but this was not enough. The development of a distance learning system has shown that some children do not have access to such opportunities due to a lack of appropriate skills on the part of parents or their work commitments. For children with disabilities or other individual needs, distance learning may not be possible at all or may require additional specialist help.¹⁵⁰

The Ombudsperson for Children's Rights found that the closure of schools had had a significant impact on children's education. Although the education of children is still taking place thanks to technology, it cannot completely replace in-person teaching in the classroom. Children with disabilities can also face difficulties, as they are particularly sensitive to changes in their normal activities, making it harder for them to concentrate on their computer, especially if assistive technology is not available.¹⁵¹

a) Trends and patterns regarding Roma pupils

In Lithuania, there have been specific patterns in education regarding Roma pupils, such as segregation. However, according to a nationwide investigation conducted in 2014 by the Institution of the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights, nationwide segregation policies could not be identified.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Table for Monitoring the Implementation of the Decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimų vykdymo stebėseną*), https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NP38IHq2nzKzs-bbM2bnZBVFTL5_FVxhDqiR5oRXHo0/edit#gid=0.

¹⁵⁰ Manoteises.lt (2020), *Nevyriausybininkai: jei nepasiruošime, antra koronaviruso banga sukels didelį išbandymų mūsų vaikams*, 01.06.2020, <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/nevyriausybininkai-jei-nepasiruosime-antra-koronaviruso-banga-sukels-dideliu-isbandymu-musu-vaikams/>.

¹⁵¹ Decision of the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights (*LR Vaiko teisių apsaugos kontrolieriaus pažyma Dėl vaikų ugdymo(si) kontaktiniu būdu atnaujinimo*), 24 September 2021, No. (6.1/6.7-2021-36/30)PR-121.

¹⁵² Decision of the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights (*LR Vaiko teisių apsaugos kontrolieriaus pažyma Dėl Romų tautybės vaikų teisės į mokslą užtikrinimo*), 19 August 2014, No. (6.1- 2013-329) PR-156, <https://www3.lrs.lt/docs2/VAQOPBJE.PDF>.

Even though the Ombudsperson receives a few requests every year regarding discrimination against Roma, among others, in the field of education, no official complaints have been registered in 2022 or during the past few years.¹⁵³

When addressing Roma education issues, it is important to note the structure of the Roma community – children and young people under 19 comprise 41 % of the total Roma population, in contrast with the national average: children and young people up to the age of 19 make up only around 20 % of the total population.¹⁵⁴ Some meaningful developments were recorded in education in relation to a piece of research carried out in 2020. Compared with 2015, more Roma children attended kindergartens and pre-school education, a more even distribution of Roma students was recorded by classes in general education schools, and the number of students over 16 had increased.¹⁵⁵ The number of pupils rose from 419 in 2015/2016¹⁵⁶ to 432 in 2019/2020 in general education schools.¹⁵⁷

It is important to note that, according to the total survey sample for 2020, educational indicators were slightly lower than they were in 2015. However, educational indicators risen among the younger age groups (10-19 and 20-29). The number of Roma children who had not completed primary education or who were still in primary school decreased among the youngest age group (from 36 % in 2015 to 28 % in 2020). The number of illiterate persons or those without primary education decreased (from 11 % to 4 %) in the young adults group (20-29 years), and there had been increases in the numbers of persons with basic education (from 22 % to 30 %) and with secondary education (from 8 % to 18 %). The report noted that only a small proportion of Roma children (about 24 %) attended non-formal education activities, such as day centres or after-school activities.¹⁵⁸ These concerns have been confirmed in discussions among persons working directly with Roma children. It was noted that the need for non-formal education is high, but due to the economic situation, parents are unable to pay for children's extracurricular activities. In addition, following the demolition of the Kirtimai settlement and the relocation of families to various parts of Vilnius, some children find it difficult to attend day care centres,¹⁵⁹ especially children of primary school age.¹⁶⁰

Despite positive developments, the acquisition of primary and secondary education remains a challenge for the majority of Roma pupils, especially if they do not have any support network. The reasons why Roma children face difficulties with learning in schools (which are often simplified to 'unwillingness to learn') are complex. Many Roma children already face learning difficulties at primary level. The lack of preparation for school (weak motor skills and an absence of pre-school education), a lack of social skills and weak Lithuanian language skills are often referred to as the main causes of the complicated adaptation of Roma children in school. These factors, together with the limited ability of parents to help a child at home (a large proportion of Roma parents are illiterate or only completed primary school), determine the falling behind of Roma children at school – children start to lag behind their classmates quite quickly and cannot do their homework independently. Unsuccessful learning experiences begin to emerge quickly (such as

¹⁵³ Information received by the author on 30 December 2020 from the Department of National Minorities, confirmed by information contained in the draft Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2021-2023, received by the author on 11 January 2021.

¹⁵⁴ 2021 census data, available (in Lithuanian) at: <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize?hash=a098178d-71c2-43f0-807c-3765725d7ded#/>

¹⁵⁵ Kontvainė and Diversity Development Group (2020).

¹⁵⁶ Petrušauskaitė V. (2016), *Romų situacijos Lietuvoje apžvalga* (Overview of the situation of Roma people in Lithuania), <https://duomenys.ugdome.lt/?veikla/migr/med=9/128>.

¹⁵⁷ Information obtained on the Roma Platform, <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/svietimas/>.

¹⁵⁸ Kontvainė and Diversity Development Group (2020).

¹⁵⁹ Children come to day care centres after school, do their homework, eat, take part in educational activities and play.

¹⁶⁰ Based on information received by the author from the Padėk pritapti branch of the Lithuanian Young Falcon Union and the Roma Community Centre, 26 February 2022.

missing lessons and behavioural problems), and unresolved problems often make it more difficult to involve children in the educational process.¹⁶¹

Pre-primary education is compulsory for everybody from the age of five (sometimes six). However, according to the legislation, compulsory kindergarten education (from birth until six years of age) can be assigned to a child who is raised in a family at risk, or when parents lack social and/or positive parenting skills; to children with an established disability whose parents are not able to meet their special needs; or when parents are experiencing difficulties that prevent them from meeting the child's natural, cultural, social and cognitive needs.¹⁶² The author does not have any information on how or if these provisions are applied among members of the Roma community.

Worrying trends were observed in the preparation of the draft Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society for 2021-2023, as no specific measures were envisaged. The Action Plan for 2022-2023 was adopted in mid-2022, with no budget allocated for educational measures.¹⁶³

The data from 2008 indicated that pre-schooling was rare, and most Roma children (69 %) did not attend pre-school establishments or groups and did not participate in after-school activities. The number of children attending kindergartens (1-6 years) increased between 2015 and 2020 (from 25 % to 34 %), as did the number attending pre-school education. There is no comparison to be made here, as pre-school education was made compulsory only from 2016. This is a meaningful development as, based on the research carried out in 2008, a third (32 %) of Roma pupils started education when they were 10 or older.

An integration programme for Roma people was adopted in 2020 in Vilnius, the capital, where the biggest share (around 38-39 %) of the Roma community live. According to information on the implementation of the action plan in Vilnius City Municipality, attendance by Roma pupils increased by 65 % during 2018/2019. In 2022, 44 pupils attended pre-school (13) and school (31) establishments. However, based on the information held by non-governmental organisations, distance learning during lockdown very much affected the school attendance rates of Roma pupils, for several reasons – limited access to technical resources, no support group at home to help with distance learning, and poor living conditions – which resulted in a more pronounced sense of isolation.¹⁶⁴

Non-governmental organisations working with Roma children and the Roma community indicate that segregation of Roma children is sometimes invisible, as different rules are applied when a child stops coming to school. Sometimes no action is taken, or it is taken too late. According to these NGOs, some schools transfer a child from one grade to another without the child actually attending the school for months or even years, as enrolling a child in a specific school brings with it the funding attached to that pupil. Another form of segregation has been noticed in some regions of Lithuania (such as Naujoji Akmenė and Joniškis region and Klaipėda city), where the majority of Roma children are sent to special schools. According to the schools, this is done in accordance with the decisions of parents

¹⁶¹ Education Development Centre (2017), *Rekomendacijos dėl romų vaikų įtraukiojo ugdymo stiprinimo* (Recommendations on strengthening inclusive education of Roma children), <https://duomenys.ugdome.lt/?veikla/migr/med=9/128>.

¹⁶² Order of the Minister of Science and Education and the Minister of Security and Labour on the Adoption of the Description of Establishing and Assigning Compulsory Pre-School Education, 26 April 2012, No. V-735/A1-208, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.423753/asr>.

¹⁶³ Action Plan for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society 2022-2023, <http://www.romuplatforma.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/%C4%AEsakymas-d%C4%97l-Rom%C5%B3-integracijos-%C4%AF-Lietuvos-visuomen%C4%99-priemoni%C5%B3-plano-2022%E2%80%932023-patvirtinimo-%C4%AEV-33-2022-07-01.pdf>.

¹⁶⁴ Based on information received by the author from the Padėk pritapti branch of the Lithuanian Young Falcon Union and the Roma Community Centre, 23 February 2021.

themselves, but the NGOs say that schools should evaluate the needs of the children and direct them to the appropriate schools.¹⁶⁵

The Ombud institutions have dealt with complaints from the Roma community in the field of education. In 2011, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson recommended that Saulėtekis secondary school integrate children attending segregated class 3C with other classes in the school.¹⁶⁶ In 2014, the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights carried out an investigation¹⁶⁷ that discovered that at least 50 Romani children who did not demonstrate severe special needs were placed in special schools, despite there being no need for their placement in a special school.

Some Roma parents, however, were satisfied with the decision to put their children into specialised institutions, because the lower number of pupils in the classes of special schools ensures greater attention from the teachers (the parents of Romani children are often illiterate and are unable to help their children with homework), the children experience less bullying due to their educational problems than they would in regular schools, and the relationship between parents and the school administration is more cooperative.

3.2.8 Access to and supply of goods and services that are available to the public (Article 3(1)(h) Directive 2000/43)

In Lithuania, national legislation prohibits discrimination in access to and the supply of goods and services as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive. Article 8 of the Law on Equal Treatment explicitly states that providers of goods and services must ensure equal access to all customers, and the prohibition of discrimination extends to all anti-discrimination grounds, as well as sex. Gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are not explicitly included in the law.

Article 8(1) of the Law on Equal Treatment states:

'When implementing equal treatment, a seller or producer of goods or a service provider ... must provide consumers with equal access to the same products, goods and services, including housing, as well as apply equal conditions of payment and guarantees for the same products, goods and services or for products, goods and services of equal value.'

On the basis of the practice of the Ombudsperson, it can be concluded that the Ombudsperson interprets the duty to 'ensure equal access to all consumers' as also being a duty to make goods and services accessible to persons with disabilities. It has been noted in earlier reports that not ensuring access to goods and services for persons with disabilities has previously been recognised as discrimination in the practice of the Ombudsperson. It was recognised that providers of goods and services had to ensure access to buildings and premises and to improve accessibility within buildings. This responsibility applied to café owners,¹⁶⁸ events organised by the Lithuanian Music and Theatre Academy,¹⁶⁹ Kaunas District Court and health service providers, for example.

In 2022, the Ombudsperson conducted a few investigations that are worth mentioning in this report. One of them concerned the inaccessibility of a grocery store for persons with reduced mobility. The investigation found that the shop's premises were not adequately

¹⁶⁵ Based on information received by the author from the Padėk pritapti branch of the Lithuanian Young Falcon Union and the Roma Community Centre, 23 February 2021.

¹⁶⁶ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2011), *Annual Report for 2011*.

¹⁶⁷ Decision of the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights, 19 August 2014 No. (6.1- 2013-329) PR-156, <http://www3.lrs.lt/docs2/VAQQPBJE.PDF>.

¹⁶⁸ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (19)SN-134)SP-98, 27 September 2019 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos negalios pagrindu teikiant paslaugas restorane "Ararat" tyrimo*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2019/10/sprendimas-19sn-134sp-98.pdf>.

¹⁶⁹ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (20)SN-48)SP-43, 7 May 2020.

accessible to persons with reduced mobility. In particular, persons with reduced mobility were unable to access the shop to purchase goods and services. The Ombudsperson found that the failure to provide a suitable environment for persons with disabilities restricted their access to services on an equal basis with all clients, indicating indirect discrimination under the Law on Equal Treatment (Article 2(5)).¹⁷⁰

Another investigation concerned the accessibility of a swimming pool for a person with a visual disability. The investigation revealed that the staff of the Girstutis swimming pool refused to allow the applicant and her daughter to enter the pool because of her blindness. The reason given by the staff was that the applicant, being visually impaired, could not look after her child and therefore could not be admitted to the pool. In this case, the situation was not only about the use of the swimming pool by a person with a disability, but also about the ability of a child of a person with a disability to use the swimming pool. The applicant's daughter was disadvantaged and discriminated against by association because of her mother, who has a visual disability, as was subsequently confirmed by the court.¹⁷¹

There are no exceptions in the Law on Equal Treatment that would allow differences in treatment on the grounds of age and disability in the provision of financial services. However, the Law on Insurance¹⁷² does allow differential treatment on the grounds of age as well as state of health when calculating insurance risks, adding that there should not be discrimination within a group at a particular risk level.

Religious communities or associations, as well as associations established by these religious communities or their members, are not obliged to follow the Law on Equal Treatment in providing goods and services when the purpose of this provision is of a religious character. The author is not aware of situations when this exception has been applied in practice. However, since the wording of this provision is rather broad and vague, there is enough room for interpretations that could be used to justify discrimination against LGBT+ persons. For example, a same-sex couple might be refused service at a community centre run by a religious community, or a child of a same-sex couple might not be accepted at a children's day care centre as these would count as providing services of a religious character. However, as has already been stated, the author of this report is not aware of any such situations in practice.

As described above, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson proposed to amend the Law on Equal Treatment with provisions covering exceptions whereby the provision of goods and services exclusively (or primarily) to persons with certain characteristics would be justified as a legitimate aim, to be achieved by appropriate and necessary measures, such that these cases would not be considered as less favourable treatment.¹⁷³ These provisions are included in the Draft Law on the Law on Equal Treatment, which was introduced in the Parliament in 2019 and is still pending in early 2023.

a) Distinction between goods and services available publicly or privately

In Lithuania, national law does not distinguish between goods and services available to the public (e.g., in shops, restaurants or banks) and those that are only available privately (e.g., limited to members of a private association).

¹⁷⁰ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (22)SI-1)SP-43, 4 July 2022 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos negalios pagrindu įsigyjant prekes parduotuvėje „IKI Ekspres 24/7“ tyrimo*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/09/sprendimas-nr.-22si-1sp-432.pdf>

¹⁷¹ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (22)SN-213)SP-14, 10 March 2022, <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/03/21sn-213sp-14.pdf>.

¹⁷² Law on Insurance (*Draudimo įstatymas*), 2003, No. 94-4246, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=386840.

¹⁷³ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2019), *Annual Report for 2018*.

3.2.9 Housing (Article 3(1)(h) Directive 2000/43)

In Lithuania, national legislation prohibits discrimination in the area of housing as formulated in the Racial Equality Directive. Along with the other grounds, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are not explicitly included in the law.

The Law on Equal Treatment mentions housing within the scope of consumer rights. Article 8 of the Law on Equal Treatment states:

'when implementing equal treatment, a seller or producer of goods or a service provider, without regard to gender, race, *nationality*, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion, must: provide consumers with equal access to the same products, goods and services, *including housing*, as well as apply equal conditions of payment and guarantees for the same products, goods and services or for products, goods and services of equal value.'¹⁷⁴

The law does not distinguish between citizens and third country nationals; therefore, protection is applied to all.

One investigation was carried out by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson in 2022 regarding discrimination in housing. The applicant, who is HIV-positive, was given the opportunity to stay in an independent living home, but was refused space in a twin room (to be shared with another resident) by the municipality's administrative officer and the administration of the independent living home. They were given the option of waiting for a single room. The Ombudsman found that being placed on the waiting list for a single room extended the applicant's waiting time to be accommodated in the independent living home. The decision was based on diagnoses of the applicant's illnesses, without taking into account the specific circumstances of the applicant's wishes and the possibility, after the collection of objective data (such as the recommendations of doctors and public health specialists), of accommodating the applicant in an independent living home for the shortest possible time. A breach of Article 8 of the LET was therefore established.¹⁷⁵

The author has been informed of a number of instances when refugees and migrants have been discriminated against by local property owners when trying to rent accommodation. According to an organisation providing assistance to migrants and refugees, the people who most often face discrimination are those with darker skin colour than average for Lithuanians, those wearing any religious clothing (most commonly, the hijab), or those who speak Lithuanian poorly or not at all. The same situation was reported by organisations working with Roma persons. On at least a few occasions, landlords have refused to rent their accommodation out to refugees, migrants or Roma people. No cases have been reported to the Ombudsperson, however. According to non-governmental organisations, this raises many concerns, as landlords do not want migrants, refugees or Roma persons, especially those with children, to declare their place of residence in rented housing. Without alternative mechanisms in place, people without a declared place of residence cannot apply for rent compensation or for a place in kindergarten or school, and they cannot claim child benefit or any other social benefits or services.¹⁷⁶

Unfortunately, the national anti-discrimination measures do not specifically address the issue of migrants being discriminated against in relation to housing. Despite the lack of

¹⁷⁴ Law on Equal Treatment, 2003, entry into force 01.01.2005; latest amendments: 11.12.2018, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.0CC6CB2A9E42/asr>. Our emphasis.

¹⁷⁵ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (22)SN-70)SP-49, 29 July 2022 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos negalios pagrindu apgyvendinant savarankiško gyvenimo namuose tyrimo*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/08/sprendimas-22sn-70.pdf>.

¹⁷⁶ Based on information received by the author from the VA Caritas Foreigners Integration Programme, 11 March 2021, and from the Padėk pritapti branch of the Lithuanian Young Falcon Union and the Roma Community Centre, 23 February 2021.

case law or formal complaints, preventive work and assistance would be beneficial. Such assistance has been organised by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Lithuania, together with initiatives to provide alternative housing by NGOs, but these ended in 2020.

The Law on Equal Treatment includes a general duty to implement equal opportunities (Article 5), which could be interpreted to include housing provided by local government institutions. It reads as follows:

‘State and local government institutions and agencies must within the scope of their competence ensure that in all the legal acts drafted and passed by them, equal rights and treatment are laid down without regard to gender, race, *nationality*, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion.’

It is not yet clear if the court would accept the interpretation of Article 8 as also encompassing social housing. No court cases with regard to discrimination in the field of housing have been brought to court.

a) Trends and patterns regarding housing segregation for Roma

In Lithuania, there are patterns of housing segregation and discrimination against the Roma.

In general, Lithuanian Roma live a settled life. In 2008, over half of Roma indicated that they had been living in their current city, town or village for over 20 years.¹⁷⁷ Under the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2015-2020, approved by the Ministry of Culture in 2015,¹⁷⁸ sociological research was carried out among Roma, and this has provided a more reliable overview of their housing situation in 2015 and 2020.¹⁷⁹

The situation of Roma households improved slightly from 2015 according to the research carried out in 2020, but an absolute majority of Lithuanian Roma (96 %) still lived below the risk-of-poverty threshold, and 61 % lived in households that experienced severe material deprivation.

Housing conditions improved over recent years, and the number of people living in problematic housing reduced (from 72 % to 55 %), while the number of households able to heat their homes sufficiently increased (from 48 % to 75 %). Household size increased. Despite the positive developments, Roma housing was still of a lower quality compared to the national average.

In contrast to the general population, a small percentage of Lithuanian Roma lived in premises that they owned (26 %, in comparison to a national average of 85 %), and 43 % lived in housing where they paid rent that was lower than the market price (either social housing or with rent compensation) compared to the national average of 2 %). About a quarter of the Lithuanian Roma population lived in premises without paying rent (in illegal housing, staying with relatives, etc.), in contrast to a national average of 6 %. Not

¹⁷⁷ Institution for Social Research, Centre for Ethnic Studies (*Socialinių tyrimų instituto etninių tyrimų centras*) (2008), *Romų padėties tyrimas: Romai švietimo ir darbo rinkos sankirtoje*, http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/STI_TMID_Romu-padetis-tyrimas-2008_ataskaita.pdf.

¹⁷⁸ Order of the Minister of Culture No. IV-48 of 29 January 2015 on the Approval of the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2015–2020 (*Lietuvos Respublikos Kultūros ministro 2015 m. sausio 29 d. įsakymas Nr. IV-48 Dėl romų integracijos į Lietuvos visuomenę 2015–2020 metų veiksmų plano patvirtinimo*), <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/4a774b20a7c711e4a82d9548fb36f682>.

¹⁷⁹ VšĮ Diversity Development Group (2015), *Sociologinio tyrimo 'Romų padėtis lyginant su kitais šalies gyventojais' tyrimo ataskaita* (Report on the situation of Roma in comparison to other residents of the country), <http://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2015/12/romu-tautybes-asmenu-padetis-lyginant-su-kitais-salies-gyventojais.pdf>.

surprisingly, therefore, living standards among Roma were much lower than the national average: the Roma lived in much more crowded accommodation (14.6 m² per person, in contrast to an average of 35.5 m²), and around half of households were not equipped with a bathtub or shower (47 %, compared with a national average of 12 %) or toilet (40 % compared with a national average of 13 %). Compared with 2015, the quality of Roma housing had improved by 2020 – the number of households without a bathtub or shower had fallen from 56 % to 47 %, and the proportion of homes without a flushing toilet had gone down from 51 % to 40 %. Many Roma households still faced housing quality issues, however: 56 % of households had problems such as a leaking roof, damp walls, floors or foundations, or rotten windows or floors (compared with 68 % in 2015 and a national average figure of 15 % in 2018).¹⁸⁰

The Roma community living in Kirtimai (a district of the Vilnius City Municipality) was the most obvious example of segregation. The number of Roma residents in this slum-like settlement had been steadily decreasing in recent years. According to data from 2020, no Roma persons were left residing in the segregated Kirtimai settlement, and the last families had to demolish their houses in the summer of 2020. In comparison, there were 100 houses with approximately 500 residents in 2001, the absolute majority of them being Roma. Nevertheless, Roma persons still face housing problems.

¹⁸⁰ Kontvainė and Diversity Development Group (2020).

4 EXCEPTIONS

According to Article 2(9) of the Law on Equal Treatment, the following are not considered direct discrimination:

- 1) 'restrictions on the grounds of age as established by law where it is justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary;
- 2) requirement to know the state language, as established by law;
- 3) prohibition of participation in political activities in cases specified by law;
- 4) different rights applied on the basis of citizenship, as established by law;
- 5) special measures in the field of healthcare, safety at work, employment and the labour market as established by law with the view of creating and applying conditions and opportunities guaranteeing and promoting integration into the working environment;
- 6) special temporary measures, established by law, which are taken to ensure equality and prevent violation of equal treatment on the grounds of gender, race, *nationality*, citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion;¹⁸¹
- 7) where, by reason of the nature of the particular occupational activities concerned or of the context in which they are carried out, a particular human characteristic constitutes an essential [*genuine* – author] and determining occupational requirement, provided that the aim is legitimate, and the requirement is proportionate;
- 8) where the legal regulation of restrictions, special requirements or conditions with regard to a person's social status are justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary;
[According to Article 2(8), 'social status' is defined as the status of a person based on his/her past or present education, qualifications, income or property ownership, dependence on social assistance schemes as well as any other characteristics related to the financial situation of a person.]
- 9) organisation of special sports competitions for persons with disabilities.
- 10) granting benefits on the basis of age, disability and social status, where it is justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.'

In addition to this list, Article 3 of the Law on Equal Treatment states that the Law does not apply to a wide range of activities in relation to ethos-based organisations (membership, employment, educational activities) and/or education materials providing traditional religious teaching, and that it also does not apply in the spheres of family and private life. These provisions are described in section 4.2 below.

In most cases, the Law on Equal Treatment requires that exceptions regarding particular grounds must be established by law and objectively justified by a legitimate aim, and that the means of achieving that aim must be appropriate and necessary.

4.1 Genuine and determining occupational requirements (Article 4 Directive 2000/43, Article 4(1) Directive 2000/78)

In Lithuania, national legislation provides for an exception for genuine and determining occupational requirements.

The provision on genuine and determining occupational requirements is contained in the Law on Equal Treatment in the form of a list of exceptions to direct anti-discrimination

¹⁸¹ However, special temporary measures are not defined in any other laws, except for those identified in relation to a person's disability. It is also unclear whether all of them could be identified as temporary measures.

provisions (Article 2(9)). The national provision repeats the wording of the directive and does not elaborate on it.

The Ombudsperson investigated several complaints regarding alleged discrimination in 2022 regarding gender and age, but none concerned genuine and determining occupational requirements. A landmark decision was made in 2019, in which the Court recognised, as per the request of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, that a special requirement for the director of the Park Directorate to ride a bike constituted a violation of equal opportunities. According to the court, the ability to ride a bicycle cannot relate to the performance of functions. Therefore, for persons with disabilities, this requirement would establish a restriction on the exercise of their rights equally.¹⁸²

4.2 Employers with an ethos based on religion or belief (Article 4(2) Directive 2000/78)

In Lithuania, national law provides an exception for employers with an ethos based on religion or belief.

According to Article 3 of the Law on Equal Treatment, the law would not apply to teachers, employees or members of religious communities, associations or centres, nor would it apply to associations or legal persons (whose ethos was based on a religion or belief and that had been established to serve its purposes) established by these religious communities or their members where, by reason of the nature of the activities of these entities, or of the context in which they are carried out, a person's religion or belief constitutes a genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement with regard to the organisation's ethos. Additionally, the LET provides these organisations and institutions with the right to require individuals working for them to act in good faith and with loyalty to the organisation's ethos, as allowed by the directive.

Similar wording is repeated in Article 26 of the Labour Code.¹⁸³

The first version of the Law on Equal Treatment did not contain such an exception, and there is no case law or interpretation on the matter. There is also no information available about whether such practices existed before the country adopted the directive, and in which organisations and to what extent they were used, since none of this was discussed in Parliament when the amendments were passed.

It is not clear which organisations can take advantage of this exception. There are a few non-profit organisations directly established by the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference (Lithuanian Caritas, Family Centre of Lithuania), as well as shelter homes, children's day centres, cultural and youth organisations, media portals and educational institutions (school and pre-school educational establishments) that are linked to the Catholic church or that claim to represent Christian values. Other religious communities also have schools, centres and other organisations that they have established. The wording of the national provisions is very broad and can be interpreted widely. This is hardly compatible with the goals of the directive, and could eliminate LGBT people from certain areas of public life. Some members of Parliament who are notorious for opposing homosexuality and protecting 'traditional values' identified the connection between these provisions and the issue of sexual orientation during discussions of the amendments to the Law, stating that the exception could be used as a 'self-defence tool' for eliminating people of a 'non-traditional' sexual orientation from schools and the education system in general.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Vilnius Regional Administrative Court (Vilniaus apygardos administracinis teismas), *Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson v. Vilnius City Municipality*, administrative case No. I-4523-789/2019, decision of 3 October 2019.

¹⁸³ Labour Code, 2016.

¹⁸⁴ Transcript of the plenary session of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania of 18 September 2007, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=304466.

A similar exception under the Law on Equal Treatment is included for the provision of goods and services (Article 3(3)).

- Conflicts between rights of organisations with an ethos based on religion or belief and other rights to non-discrimination

In Lithuania, there are no specific provisions and/or case law in this area relating to conflicts between the rights of organisations with an ethos based on religion or belief and other rights to non-discrimination.

However, conflicts can be observed in the positions of different members of Parliament when considering exceptions under the LET, in the various petitions organised by church-affiliated organisations against the Istanbul Convention¹⁸⁵ and same-sex partnership, and in the public positions adopted by the Catholic church.¹⁸⁶ On May 15 2021, the Big Family Defence March (*Didysis šeimos gynimo maršas*) took place in Vilnius, which gathered about 10 000 people from across Lithuania. The main purpose was to resist 'aggressive genderist propaganda' and plans to ratify the Istanbul Convention, as well as to stand against 'extremist minorities intent on imposing an unacceptable lifestyle on society, defiling national traditions and values'.¹⁸⁷ Some Lithuanian Catholic priests expressed support for the event. However, the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference issued a statement, saying that church leaders had been invited to the Family March but would not attend. During the event, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said that a family is between a man and a woman, as stated in the Lithuanian Constitution.¹⁸⁸

The initial debate on the amendment to the Law focused on homosexuality rather than on religion or belief. The Catholic Church played a significant role in the introduction of the provisions.¹⁸⁹ The openly negative attitude of church-affiliated organisations towards the LGBT community in Lithuania should be borne in mind.

According to Article 31(5) of the Law on Education, in order to become a religious education teacher, a person must have a permit (appointment), issued by the traditional religious community or by the community leadership.¹⁹⁰

In the case of the Catholic Church, this is also regulated by an agreement with the Holy See,¹⁹¹ which states that a person wishing to teach religion must have a written appointment letter from the local bishop (*missio canonica*). This applies to all schools (state and private), as well as other institutions in the formal education system. So far, this issue has not been raised in the courts. However, as was proven in the 2017 landmark decision by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, the content of religion classes and educational

¹⁸⁵ The petition against the Istanbul Convention was initiated by the Free Society Institute (Laisvos visuomenės institutas). One of the arguments relates to the introduced definition of 'gender': that also introducing non-discrimination on the ground of gender would force persons to recognise their required 'social gender identity'. The petition was initiated on 8 March 2020, and is available in Lithuanian at: <https://laisvavisuomene.lt/veiklos/pilietines-iniciatyvos/stambulo-konvencijai-ne/>.

¹⁸⁶ Lithuanian Bishops' Conference, 'The Church urges the new Government not to hold same-sex partnerships equal to family', *LRT.lt*, 8 December 2020, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1294027/baznycia-ragina-valdzia-tos-pacios-lyties-zmoniu-partnerystes-neprilyginti-seimai>.

¹⁸⁷ See <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1407354/planned-rally-against-genderist-propaganda-electrifies-lithuania>.

¹⁸⁸ See <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1410566/lithuanian-president-addresses-rally-against-genderist-propaganda-backs-traditional-families>.

¹⁸⁹ The Minister of Social Security and Labour publicly admitted that the inclusion of these provisions was discussed with the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference, and that the draft law and these particular provisions were approved by the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference. Transcript of the plenary session of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania of 18 September 2007, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=304466.

¹⁹⁰ Law on Education, 1991.

¹⁹¹ International Agreement between Lithuania and Holy See (*Lietuvos Respublikos ir Šventojo Sosto sutartis 'Dėl bendradarbiavimo švietimo ir kultūros srityje'*), 9 August 2000, No. 67-2024, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.106813>.

material used by particular church-approved teachers may be recognised as discriminatory towards the LGBT community and as violating the Law on Equal Treatment.¹⁹²

Therefore, some quite broad provisions may be used as justifications to discriminate on grounds other than religion and belief.

Besides these aspects, the above-mentioned national law provides for many more exceptions in relation to religion and beliefs. For example, it is not applied in relation to admission to schools established by religious communities or schools fostering certain values, and it does not apply to the content of education programmes, textbooks and teaching aids where religious instruction is provided to traditional religious communities and associations (Article 3(4,5)).

However, these exceptions might cause problems, as some educational materials provided by religious education teachers have been recognised as discriminatory on the ground of sexual orientation (as in the above-mentioned case regarding Telšiai Žemaitė Gymnasium).¹⁹³ Therefore, in the case of Telšiai Žemaitė Gymnasium, no exceptions in relation to religion and beliefs as provided by law were applied. The Ombudsperson recognised such behaviour as violating the Law on Equal Treatment.

In the opinion of the author, the Law on Equal Treatment could be amended, as the current exception is broader than that provided in the directive, where a 'person's religion or belief constitute a genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement'. Moreover, it is important to note that, in compliance with the directive, 'difference of treatment shall be implemented taking account of Member States' constitutional provisions and principles, as well as the general principles of Community law, and should not justify discrimination on another ground', therefore it would be useful to review the Law on Equal Treatment and to consider adding that 'difference in treatment should not justify discrimination on another ground'. The Draft Law on Equal Treatment has been introduced in the Parliament; however, it is unclear what provisions will finally be adopted. One of the issues criticised by some members of Parliament and the Government was the removal of certain exceptions. This particularly applies to ethos-based exceptions in the provision of goods and services, and suggestions have been submitted accordingly.¹⁹⁴

4.3 Armed forces and other specific occupations (Article 3(4) and Recitals 18 and 19, Directive 2000/78)

In Lithuania, the Law on Equal Treatment does not explicitly provide an exception for the armed forces in relation to age or disability discrimination. In this case, the general rule on genuine occupational requirements would apply.

However, other national legislation provides an exception for the armed forces in relation to age or disability discrimination (Article 3(4), Directive 2000/78). Even though it is not mentioned as an exception in relation to discrimination, the laws include different age and health requirements for statutory professions and include disability as a reason for dismissal of a person serving in the military.¹⁹⁵

When it comes to laws governing particular statutory professions, there are a number of exceptions concerning age and health requirements. According to the Law on the

¹⁹² Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of 13 June 2017, <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2017/06/sprendimas-telsiu-gimnazija-nr.-58.pdf>.

¹⁹³ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of 13 June 2017.

¹⁹⁴ Draft Law amending the Law on Equal Treatment No. IX-1826 (new edition), <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/96f31cf082b411e98a8298567570d639>.

¹⁹⁵ Law on the Organisation of the National Defence System and Military Service (*Krašto sistemos organizavimo ir karo tarnybos įstatymas*), 1998, No. 49-1325, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.15C705E93776/asr>.

Organisation of the National Defence System and Military Service,¹⁹⁶ the minimum age of acceptance for military service is 18 years (upon request of the person; the usual age is 19). Retirement ages vary, depending on the rank and status acquired by the person in armed service (Article 45), from 40 to 65 (for a military chaplain).¹⁹⁷ The law provides rules for dismissal when a person is not able to perform the duties of a soldier due to disability. This is mentioned in the same sentence as established dependence on alcohol or narcotic, toxic or psychotropic substances (Article 38(1)(8)) and health conditions (Article 38(2)(5)). Article 45(2) states:

‘When a contract on professional military service is terminated due to disability (Article 38(1)(9)) of this Law) or due to a health condition (Article 38(2)(5)), a serviceman shall be dismissed from his position and transferred from professional military service to the reserve not later than within 28 days’.

In Lithuania, the scope of the exception is not limited to safeguarding the combat effectiveness of the armed forces. Even though the Law on the Organisation of the National Defence System and Military Service mostly regulates age limits and dismissal for persons due to their disability, it also mentions servicemen in professional military service being appointed to diplomatic positions. It is unclear whether they would be able to keep their status as servicemen beyond the age limit and take up such positions for a set period of time or whether they could temporarily be appointed as civil servants to serve in state institutions where knowledge of warfare is needed, even though they are not considered able to carry out the other functions of a serviceman in professional military service, as the Law only covers the temporary appointment of professional military service personnel.

The scope of the exception does not extend to other non-combat staff, such as civilians employed in administrative positions in the army.

Other laws provide special requirements for persons joining certain statutory institutions. According to the Law on the Internal Service Statute,¹⁹⁸ the general age range for persons willing to join the internal service system (which includes the police, customs and emergency services) is from 18 to 60. Retirement ages vary from 50 to 65, depending on seniority (rank), and it can be postponed by up to five years.

In order to be accepted into and serve in the internal services, certain health requirements must be fulfilled. An extensive list of health criteria (from a person’s height and body index to particular diseases) has been adopted by order of the Minister of Health and the Minister of the Interior.¹⁹⁹ However, the Minister of the Interior or the head of a particular institution, acting on behalf of the Minister, has the power to set additional requirements relating to a person’s physical or intellectual abilities or practical skills, depending on the requirements for specific positions in a particular institution.

¹⁹⁶ Law on the Organisation of the National Defence System and Military Service, 1998, No. 49-1325, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.15C705E93776/asr>.

¹⁹⁷ Members of the professional military service are released to the reserve: soldiers and sailors from the age of 40, junior and senior officers from 56, general officers from 58, and military chaplains from 65.

¹⁹⁸ Law on Amendment of the Internal Service Statute (*Vidaus tarnybos statuto pakeitimo įstatymas. Vidaus tarnybos statutas*), 29 June 2018, No. XIII-1381, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/96842d9088f511e8af589337bf1eb893/asr>.

¹⁹⁹ Order of the Minister of Interior and Minister of Health of 21 October 2003, No. 1V-380/V-618, on the approval of health requirements for persons being admitted to statutory internal service (*Lietuvos Respublikos Vidaus reikalų ministro ir Lietuvos Respublikos Sveikatos apsaugos ministro įsakymas Dėl Sveikatos būklės reikalavimų asmenims, pretenduojantiems į vidaus tarnybą, pageidaujantiems mokytis vidaus reikalų profesinio mokymo įstaigose, kitose švietimo įstaigose Vidaus reikalų ministerijos siuntimu, bei vidaus tarnybos sistemos pareigūnams sąvado patvirtinimo*, 2003 m. spalio 21 d. Nr. 1V-380/V-618), <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.220127/asr>.

4.4 Nationality discrimination (Article 3(2))

a) Discrimination on the ground of nationality

In Lithuania, national law includes exceptions relating to difference of treatment based on nationality (citizenship).

Article 2(9)(4)) of the Law on Equal Treatment provides an exception to direct discrimination: 'different rights applied on the basis of citizenship as established by law'.

Since the requirement for citizenship needs to be established by law, there are other laws that mention the requirement of nationality. For instance, Lithuanian nationality is required to join the civil service, compulsory military service, the armed forces, the intelligence services or any of the internal services (police, customs, probation officers, etc.).

In Lithuania, nationality (as in citizenship) is explicitly mentioned as a protected ground in national anti-discrimination law. Citizenship was added to the list of protected grounds in Article 2 of the LET in 2017 as a result of the transposition of Directive 2014/54/EU on measures facilitating the exercise of rights conferred on workers in the context of freedom of movement for workers. However, the ground of citizenship is explicitly defined as only applying to citizens of EU and EEA countries and their family members.

Since 2017, when citizenship was added to the list of protected grounds, 14 decisions have been presented on the website of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson analysing complaints on the ground of citizenship. Six decisions was issued in 2022 related to the provision of services and family reunification. The Ombudsperson found no violations.

Potential problems might arise because of the requirements that indirectly discriminate against persons on the grounds of nationality.

In 2022, the Ombudsperson investigated a complaint regarding possible discrimination related to the provision of services. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Lithuanian Railways announced that train travel would be free for Ukrainian citizens. A Lithuanian citizen complained to the Ombudsperson about discrimination on the grounds of her nationality, asking her to order the Company to stop discriminatory advertising and to initiate administrative proceedings. The Ombudsperson pointed out that unfavourable treatment is relevant in establishing discrimination where it affects persons in a similar situation. In assessing these circumstances, it was noted that persons fleeing Ukraine and unable to return to their country and Lithuanian citizens residing in the Republic of Lithuania are not in similar circumstances (conditions), and therefore no violation had been established.²⁰⁰

b) Relationship between nationality and 'racial or ethnic origin'

The term 'nationality' can have two meanings in the Lithuanian language, and this is reflected in the Law on Equal Treatment. One meaning – *tautybė* – translated as 'nationality' as one of the protected grounds in the Law in addition to origin (*kilmė*) or ethnic belonging (*etninė priklausomybė*). In this context it means 'ethnicity' and refers to belonging to a national minority.

Another meaning of nationality – *pilietybė* – refers strictly to citizenship only. As mentioned previously, it was added among the protected grounds to the Law on Equal Treatment only

²⁰⁰ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (22)SN-40)SP-33, 31 May 2022 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas Dėl galimos diskriminacijos pilietybės pagrindu UAB LTG LINK teikiant paslaugas ir informaciją tyrimo*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/06/sprendimas-22sn-33.pdf>.

in 2017, protecting only EU and EEA citizens and their family members from discrimination. This mixture of terms can cause some confusion.

Very often, complaints on the ground of citizenship are also investigated based on other grounds, such as language, 'nationality' (ethnicity) or ethnic origin. In the reports of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, race, 'nationality', citizenship, language, origin and ethnic origin are summarised under the same headline and are dealt with as interrelated concepts. The Ombudsperson refers to the definition of racial discrimination provided in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

The concepts of 'nationality' (as in ethnicity) and racial and ethnic origin have not been developed in the decisions of the Ombudsperson and, as mentioned above, have been treated as interrelated concepts. There were complaints investigated in the past on the grounds of origin, language and citizenship or 'nationality' (ethnicity) and citizenship, which were often evaluated as inter-related concepts.

4.5 Health and safety at work (Article 7(2) Directive 2000/78)

In Lithuania, there are exceptions in relation to disability and health and safety at work (Article 7(2), Directive 2000/78). These are not established directly for measures in relation to disability in the Law on Equal Treatment, however such a conclusion can be made taking different legislative provisions into consideration.

Article 2(9)(5)) of the Law on Equal Treatment provides a general exception to direct discrimination, not mentioning disability separately, when:

'Special measures in the field of healthcare, safety at work, employment and the labour market as established by law with the view of creating and applying conditions and opportunities guaranteeing and promoting integration into the working environment.'

The Law on Equal Treatment does not elaborate on this in detail, except for the reasonable accommodation clause, as described above in section 2.8.

The Labour Code ensures that persons with disabilities are covered by health and safety considerations at work. From 2020, this has taken a person's health status into account. Article 38(3) of the Law on the Safety and Health of Workers also provides that a person with disability can be appointed to work overtime or night shifts only if this is not forbidden by the healthcare institution and only with the agreement of the employee; Article 38(2) states that the conclusion of the healthcare institution regarding the abilities of a person with a disability to work in a specific job is binding on the employer and the employee.²⁰¹

The Labour Code does not legislate on other grounds.

4.6 Exceptions related to discrimination on the ground of age (Article 6 Directive 2000/78)

4.6.1 Direct discrimination

a) Exceptions to the prohibition of direct discrimination on grounds of age

In Lithuania, national law provides for specific exception(s) for direct discrimination on the ground of age.

²⁰¹ Law on the Safety and Health of Workers (*Darbuotojų saugos ir sveikatos įstatymas*), 31 July 2003, No. IX-1672, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.95C79D036AA4/vumbtbwaKN>.

Article 2(9)(1)) of the Law on Equal Treatment repeats the wording of the directive regarding the age exception.

Most of the complaints analysed by the Ombudsperson address a lack of justification for setting age limits for awarding certain scholarships or receiving support.

b) Justification of direct discrimination on the ground of age

In Lithuania, national law provides for justifications for direct discrimination on the ground of age. Article 2(9)(1)) of the Law on Equal Treatment repeats the wording of the directive regarding the age exception, and states that restrictions on the grounds of age have to be justified by a legitimate aim where the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary and do not constitute direct discrimination. The Law on Equal Treatment sets out a wider criterion that all the exceptions have to be established under a law (primary legislation), not any other legal act. This raises potential issues in some cases for granting certain discounts, allowances or even awards to certain age groups that might be justified by a legitimate aim.

However, the Law does not explicitly list the potential legitimate aims and is silent on this issue. Article 2(9)(5) includes a general exception to direct discrimination that is partially similar to that under Article 6(1)(a) of the Directive 2000/78. This does not relate exclusively to exceptions on the ground of age, and the wording refers to the setting of 'special measures in the field of healthcare, safety at work, employment and the labour market as established by laws with the view of creating and applying conditions and opportunities guaranteeing and promoting integration into the working environment'.

These restrictions are usually addressed in decisions of the Ombudsperson. In recent years, the Ombudsperson found that a requirement at one institution to increase the number of teaching staff with less than 20 years of experience constituted indirect discrimination based on age,²⁰² and that the compensation procedure for assisted reproduction, where the service is subsidised only for women younger than 42, constituted a discriminatory practice and a violation of the Law on Equal Treatment.²⁰³ In 2022, the Ombudsperson found that an order of the Minister of Health, which does not have the force of law, restricted the access of people aged 70 and over to a publicly funded prostate cancer diagnostic programme. The Ombudsperson noted that this was a violation of the Law on Equal Treatment, specifically the provision obliging state and municipality institutions to ensure equal opportunities in all legal acts.²⁰⁴

c) Permitted differences of treatment based on age

In Lithuania, national law permits differences of treatment based on age for any activities within the material scope of Directive 2000/78, provided that the restrictions on the grounds of age are established by law, are justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary (Article 2(9) of the Law on Equal Treatment).

Most of the age-based exceptions concerning minimum and maximum age requirements for entry to certain professions are set by other laws (as discussed below in section 4.6.3).

²⁰² Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (18)SI-7)SP-86, 4 September 2018.

²⁰³ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (21)SN-83)SP-36, 19 August 2021 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos amžiaus pagrindu Lietuvos Respublikos sveikatos apsaugos ministro 2016 m. gruodžio 20 d. įsakymu Nr. C-1452 patvirtintame pagalbinių apvaisinimo paslaugų teikimo ir jų apmokėjimo privalomojo sveikatos draudimo fondo biudžeto lėšomis tvarkos apraše*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/08/sprendimas-21-39.pdf>.

²⁰⁴ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (22)SN-69)SP-42, 4 July 2022 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos amžiaus pagrindu nustatant amžiaus ribą atlikti priešinės liaukos vėžio ankstyvąją diagnostiką*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/07/sprendimas-nr.-22sn-69.pdf>.

There are also prohibitions on access to some goods and services in order to protect minors.

Age-based exceptions have been challenged in the past. For example, 2012 provisions setting an age limit for university lecturers and heads of department under the Law on Higher Education were amended following a recommendation of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson.²⁰⁵

In 2022, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson found that the funding programme for the early diagnosis of prostate cancer, approved by Order of the Minister of Health, according to which the service of prostate-specific antigen detection is provided and paid for by the Compulsory Health Insurance Fund only for persons aged 50 to 69, was in violation of the Law on Equal Opportunities.²⁰⁶

d) Fixing of ages for admission to occupational pension schemes

In Lithuania, national law allows occupational pension schemes to fix the ages for admission to the scheme, taking up the option provided for by Article 2(9) of the Law on Equal Treatment.

Generally, the question of occupational pensions is not of great relevance in a national context, since such pensions are not popular and no occupational pension funds have been established under the Law on Accumulation of Occupational Pensions.²⁰⁷ According to this law, a person may, from the age of 16, be a part of an association establishing an occupational pension fund and may be entitled to a professional pension from the age established by the professional pension fund requirements, but that age cannot be more than five years lower than the general state pension age established by the Law on State Social Insurance Pensions (Article 32(1)). According to the Law on Social Insurance Pensions, the state pension age will be 65 for everybody from 2026. As of 2023, the retirement age for women is 64 years; for men, it is 64 years and six months.

4.6.2 Special conditions for younger or older workers

In Lithuania, there are special conditions set by law for older and younger workers in order to promote their vocational integration.

Article 48 of the Law on Employment states that special programmes to increase employment can be organised for the prevention of unemployment and the integration of immigrants and national minorities into the labour market, with special programmes envisaged for a number of groups, among other measures. The Law specifies the groups to which special programmes can be addressed, among which are persons over 40 years old. The Law also sets conditions under which special subsidies can be provided to employers to employ persons falling into certain categories, based on their age, disability level, duration of unemployment, qualifications, etc. Among the groups mentioned are unemployed persons up to the age of 29, or those over 45.²⁰⁸ Amendments to the Law on Employment were adopted in 2020. Among other changes, the age from which the

²⁰⁵ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2013), *Annual Report for 2012*, <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2015/12/lqkt-ataskaita-2012.pdf>.

²⁰⁶ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (22)SN-69)SP-42, 4 July 2022 (*Dėl galimos diskriminacijos amžiaus pagrindu nustatant amžiaus ribą atlikti priešinės liaukos vėžio ankstyvąjį tyrimo*), <https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2021/08/sprendimas-21-39.pdf>

²⁰⁷ Law on Accumulation of Occupational Pensions (*Lietuvos Respublikos profesinių pensijų kaupimo įstatymas*, 2006, No. X-745), <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.103565D95E60/asr>.

²⁰⁸ Law on Employment (*Lietuvos Respublikos užimtumo įstatymas*) 21 June 2016, No. XII-2470, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/b9ca8ad03de611e68f278e2f1841c088/asr>.

employment of a person can be subsidised for six months or through one-off support for creating a workplace in a very small company was lowered from 50 to 45.²⁰⁹

Several special provisions for young people and older people are embodied in the Labour Code. Under Article 57, in the event of a reduction in the number of employees, the following employees have priority in retaining their job: those who are raising more than three children (including adopted children), those who are raising children (including adopted children) under 14 years of age or a child with a disability up to 18 years old on their own; persons whose continuous length of service at that workplace is at least 10 years, with the exception of employees who have become entitled to the full old-age pension or are in receipt thereof; and those who will be entitled to the old-age pension in not more than three years' time.

Some persons are guaranteed a longer warning time should their employment contract be terminated by their employer: persons who have less than five years left before retirement age have double the usual time, and persons who have less than two years left to retirement age are guaranteed triple the length of warning time (Article 57).

In 2021, the Ombudsperson found that equal rights and opportunities to receive a scholarship for filmmakers and a prize for teachers had not been assured, as the age criterion (up to the age of 35) had been set unreasonably and unjustifiably.²¹⁰

In 2022, the Ombudsperson investigated a complaint about the conditions imposed by the Ministry of Agriculture for small farms to receive EU support. Under the rules, farmers under 40 were awarded an extra 10 points in the competition. It was found that there was no violation of equal opportunities as the procedures provided for in the rules, which are more favourable to persons under 40 years of age, do not unduly restrict the ability of older persons to apply for and receive an application. The criterion contributes to the objectives of social inclusion, and the legislation providing for more favourable modalities is a law or legislative act (EU Regulations).²¹¹

4.6.3 Minimum and maximum age requirements

In Lithuania, there are exceptions permitting minimum and maximum age requirements in relation to access to employment (notably in the public sector) and training.

Children younger than 16 are generally forbidden from working, except in certain straightforward jobs consistent with their physical abilities, and in jobs that would not have a negative impact on a child's safety, health or physical, mental, moral or social development under the conditions established by the Law on the Safety and Health of Workers and the resolution adopted by the Government.²¹²

Such jobs must not jeopardise the child's education, school attendance or attendance at educational programmes (Article 36), and work may not be undertaken in the mornings before school, etc. A number of limitations are also set for employees aged 16 to 18 (reduced working hours, prohibition of night shifts, etc.).

For specific professions, the age of competency differs, with the minimum age often set at 18; this is usually dependent on a material condition for carrying out the work in question.

²⁰⁹ Law on Amendments to Articles 1, 8, 10, 22, 24, 25, 37, 44, 47 and 49 of the Law on Employment No. XII-2470 (*Lietuvos Respublikos užimtumo XII-2470 1, 8, 10, 22, 24, 25, 37, 44, 47 ir 49 straipsnių pakeitimo įstatymas*), 30 April 2020, No. XIII-2878, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/legalAct.html?documentId=75959960906011ea9515f752ff221ec9>.

²¹⁰ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2021), *Annual Report for 2020*.

²¹¹ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (22)SN-90)SP-53, 23 August 2022 (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos amžiaus pagrindu Lietuvos Respublikos žemės ūkio ministerijai teikiant paramą smulkiesiems ūkininkams tyrimo*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/08/22sn-90sp-53.pdf>.

²¹² Law on the Safety and Health of Workers (*Lietuvos Respublikos darbuotojų saugos ir sveikatos įstatymas*), 31 July 2003, No. IX-1672, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.215253/asr>.

The general minimum age for self-employment is 18, but in specific cases it can differ, according to the special requirements for various types of self-employment, for example requirements for training or experience for the proper performance of the activity. Besides this, self-employment is also possible from the age of 14 if the child has the permission of their parents or legal guardians.

Most of the current, specific, age-based exceptions concerning the minimum and maximum age requirements for accessing employment are set for certain statutory bodies (customs, the state security department, etc.), specific professions (ship captains, pilots, members of the armed forces, etc.) or state services (judges, bailiffs, notaries, the Prosecutor General, members of Parliament, members of municipal councils, etc.).

4.6.4 Retirement

a) State pension age

In Lithuania, there is a state pension age at which individuals must begin to collect their state pensions.

If an individual wishes to work beyond the state pension age, the pension cannot be deferred.

An individual can collect a pension and still work.

As of 2023, the retirement age for women is 64 years; for men, it is 64 years and six months. It will reach 65 years for both women and men in 2026.²¹³ Reaching the pension age does not preclude a person from continuing working. According to the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court on the matter, gaining one constitutional right (to a pension) cannot deprive a person from exercising another constitutional right, such as the right to work or the right to own property.²¹⁴

During the period of economic crisis in Lithuania (2009-2011 in particular), state pensions were reduced for most pensioners. However, the reduction for pensioners who were still working was more substantial than it was for others. This regulation was subsequently declared as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, which stated that, when there is an especially grave economic and financial situation in the state and when, due to this, there is a necessity temporarily to reduce the pensions that are awarded and paid in order to secure the vitally important interests of society and the state and to protect other constitutional values, it is not permitted to establish any such legal regulation whereby the old-age pension or disability pension awarded and paid to the persons who have a certain job or conduct a certain business may be reduced due to this to a greater extent compared with those people who do not have any job and do not conduct any business.²¹⁵ According to the Constitutional Court, having created (by means of the disputed legal regulation) the

²¹³ Law on State Social Insurance Pensions (*Lietuvos Respublikos socialinio draudimo pensijų įstatymas*), *Valstybės žinios*, 3 August 1994, No. 59-1153, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.5901/asr>.

²¹⁴ Ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania No. 113-5057, 25 November 2002 (*Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucinio teismo 2002 m. lapkričio mėn. 25 d. nutarimas Dėl Lietuvos Respublikos diplomatinės tarnybos įstatymo 69 straipsnio 2 dalies, Lietuvos Respublikos valstybinio socialinio draudimo įstatymo 4 straipsnio (2000 m. kovo 16 d. redakcija) 1 dalies 9 punkto ir Lietuvos Respublikos valstybinių socialinio draudimo pensijų įstatymo 2 straipsnio (1999 m. gruodžio 16 d. redakcija) 1 dalies 5 punkto bei 23 straipsnio (1994 m. gruodžio 21 d., 2000 m. gruodžio 21 d., 2001 m. gegužės 8 d. redakcijos) atitikties Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijai*), *Valstybės žinios*, available in English at: <http://lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1213/content>.

²¹⁵ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, decision of 20 April 2010 (*LR Konstitucinio Teismo 2010 m. balandžio 20 d. sprendimas Dėl Konstitucinio Teismo 2002 m. lapkričio 25 d., 2003 m. gruodžio 3 d., 2006 m. sausio 16 d., 2007 m. rugsėjo 26 d., 2007 m. spalio 22 d., 2007 m. lapkričio 22 d., 2008 m. gruodžio 24 d. nutarimų ir 2009 m. sausio 15 d. sprendimo nuostatų, susijusių su pensijų ir atlyginimų mažinimu per ekonomikos krizę, išaiškinimo*), available in English at: <http://lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta932/content>.

preconditions for reducing the state pensions of state pension recipients who have a certain job or who conduct a certain business to a greater extent than for those state pension recipients who do not have any job or do not conduct any business, due to the fact that the former group have a certain job or conduct a certain business, the legislator restricted their right to freely choose a job or business, which is enshrined in Article 48(1) of the Constitution.²¹⁶

b) Occupational pension schemes

In Lithuania, there is an age at which people can begin to receive payments from occupational pension schemes and other employer-funded pension arrangements.

If an individual wishes to work longer, payments from such occupational pension schemes cannot be deferred. An individual can collect a pension and still work.

Occupational pensions cannot be realised in practice yet, as no occupational pension funds have been established since the introduction of the first version of the Law on the Accumulation of Occupational Pensions. It is clear from articles in the media that discussions were opened about the need to establish occupational pension funds after the private funds reform carried out in 2019.²¹⁷ As of the beginning of 2023, occupational funds have not been established, and the current system has been criticised by professionals as hindering the migration of members of the pension accumulation system to pension funds in other countries. According to experts, the second pillar pension funds in Lithuania and other countries are very different, therefore persons accumulating pensions in Western countries cannot change the accumulation company by changing their place of residence.²¹⁸

In theory, a person could be entitled to a professional pension from the age established by the professional pension fund requirements, but that age cannot be more than five years lower than the general state pension age established by the Law on State Social Insurance Pensions (Article 32(1)).

Again, there has been no practical application of occupational pensions.

c) State imposed mandatory retirement ages

In Lithuania, there are state-imposed mandatory retirement ages, which are only applied to particular professions and public service.

The general rule is that compulsory retirement is not imposed. However, there are requirements for particular professions (mostly public sector or state officials), which set a maximum age of employment. For instance, in general, the maximum retirement age for civil servants is 65, although it can be extended for a period of up to two years if the civil servant signs a fixed-term employment contract for mentoring (transfer of work experience).²¹⁹ This age limit does not apply to civil servants of political (personal)

²¹⁶ Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, ruling on the recalculation and payment of pensions upon the occurrence of an especially difficult economic and financial situation in the state, 6 February 2012, available in English at: <http://lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1073/content>.

²¹⁷ Deveikis J., 'Lietuvoje siūloma naujovė: antrąją pensijų pakopą galėtų pakeisti profesiniai fondai' (Innovation proposed in Lithuania: the second pillar pensions could be replaced by an occupational pension fund), LRT, 2019, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/247089/lietuvoje-siuloma-naujove-antraja-pensiju-pakopa-galetu-pakeisti-profesiniai-fondai>.

²¹⁸ Deveikis J., 'It is possible abroad, but not in Lithuania: a woman who has returned from emigration is surprised that pension funds do not accept her accumulated money' (*Užsienyje galima, o Lietuvoje – ne: iš emigracijos grįžusi moteris nustebė, kad pensijų fondai nepriima jos sukauptų pinigų*), LRT, 2021, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/1342775/uzsienyje-galima-o-lietuvoje-ne-is-emigracijos-grizusi-moteris-nustebo-kad-pensiju-fondai-nepriima-jos-sukaupu-pinigu>.

²¹⁹ Law on Public Service (*Valstybės tarnybos įstatymas*), *Valstybės žinios*, 30 July 1999, No. 66-2130, available at: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.D3ED3792F52B/asr>.

confidence (defined as 'a civil servant recruited for a term of office of the appointing state politician or the appointing collegiate state institution or for a term specified in other laws'), nor does it apply to acting public servants.

There is a compulsory maximum age limit for particular professions. For example, according to the Law on Courts, judges are appointed until the age of 65, with the possibility of continuing their term to complete the hearing of a case or until the hearing is postponed.²²⁰ According to the Law on the Diplomatic Service, the maximum age of a diplomat is 65, and this can only be extended by two years. Again, the limit does not apply to civil servants of political confidence.²²¹ Prosecutors must retire at the age of 65,²²² and bailiffs must retire at the age of 70.²²³

Similar rules apply to other state officials and to particular professionals such as pilots and ship's captains, as well as the chief administrators of universities and other educational and scientific institutions. Whether all these requirements are necessary, proportionate and seek a legitimate aim is questionable.

In its landmark ruling of 12 February 2021, the Constitutional Court noted that the establishment of the maximum age limit of 65 for researchers and lecturers is aimed at the constitutionally important goal of ensuring the quality of higher education by guaranteeing consistent and optimal turnover of scientists and lecturers, as well as encouraging younger highly qualified researchers and lecturers into work. According to the Constitutional Court, there are no grounds to state that the establishment of the maximum age limit of 65 for researchers and lecturers means disregarding the requirement arising from the constitutional principle of proportionality not to restrict the rights of a person beyond what is necessary to achieve the constitutionally justified goal.²²⁴

At the end of 2021, the provision that only persons under the age of 29 have the right to enter into voluntary traineeship agreements was repealed.²²⁵ Persons undergoing voluntary traineeships shall be covered by the social insurance of health and accidents at work and occupational diseases at the cost of the state, according to Lithuanian law.

d) Retirement ages imposed by employers

In Lithuania, national law does not permit employers to set retirement ages (or ages at which the termination of an employment contract is possible) by contract and/or collective bargaining and/or unilaterally.

e) Employment rights applicable to all workers irrespective of age

The law on protection against dismissal and other laws protecting employment rights apply to all workers irrespective of age, even if they remain in employment after attaining pensionable age or any other age.

Age cannot be a legitimate reason for an employer to unilaterally terminate a working contract. The Labour Code provides people who have no more than five years until they

²²⁰ Law on Courts (*Lietuvos Respublikos teismų įstatymas*), Valstybės žinios, 17 June 1994, No. 46-851, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.522B3E415B52/asr>.

²²¹ Law on the Diplomatic Service (*Lietuvos Respublikos diplomatinės tarnybos įstatymas*), Valstybės žinios, 15 January 1999, No. 7-140, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.70992/asr>.

²²² Law on the Prosecutor's Office (*Lietuvos Respublikos prokuratūros įstatymas*), Valstybės žinios, 19 October 1994, No. 81-1514, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.3EB53577EFCA/asr>.

²²³ Law on Bailiffs (*Valstybės žinios*), 29 May 2002, No. 53-2042, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.94F5702CA0F1/asr>.

²²⁴ Ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, No. KT29-N1/2021, 12 February 2021, <https://lrkt.lt/lt/teismo-aktai/paieska/135/ta2369/content>.

²²⁵ Law on Amendments to Article 10 of the Law on Employment No. XII-2470 (*Lietuvos Respublikos užimtumo įstatymo Nr. XII-2470 10 straipsnio pakeitimo įstatymas*), 21 December 2021, No. XIV-811, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/f2432410626811ecb2fe9975f8a9e52e?jfwid=-wwknhdfx4>.

reach pension age with additional guarantees. There are some additional guarantees, such as a longer warning period. When the employment contract is terminated at the initiative of the employer, this period can be doubled to two months for those who have five years until they reach the pension age, or tripled to three months for those who have three years until pension age. In the event of a reduction in the number of employees on economic or technological grounds or due to the restructuring of the workplace, employees who are entitled to receive the old-age pension in no more than three years' time will enjoy a priority right to job retention, unless they have reached retirement age (Article 57).

Thus, when a person reaches the age when they are entitled to a state pension, this cannot be considered as a legitimate reason to terminate their employment. The anti-discrimination provisions in Article 56 of the Labour Code explicitly state that an employment contract can be terminated upon the request of the employee if they reach the old-age pension age. According to Article 2 of the Labour Code, discrimination on the basis of age is prohibited in principle. Article 26 repeats a number of provisions on the prohibition of discrimination that were previously contained only in the Law on Equal Treatment.

However, as mentioned above, there is a compulsory maximum age limit for particular professions in the public sector. This can be extended only by a limited time or cannot be extended in certain cases. These rules mostly apply to state officials and pilots (and those in other military or statutory institutions), as well as to chief administrators of universities and other educational and scientific institutions.

f) Compliance of national law with CJEU case law

In Lithuania, national legislation is in line with the CJEU case law on age regarding mandatory retirement.

As was mentioned above, the general rule of the Labour Code is that mandatory retirement upon reaching pension age is not allowed, given that age alone cannot be considered as a legitimate reason to terminate an employment contract. Some laws fix certain age limits for particular professions (judges, diplomats, prosecutors, etc.), but it remains for the national courts to decide whether such provisions are justified.

4.6.5 Redundancy

a) Age and seniority taken into account for redundancy selection

In Lithuania, national law permits age or seniority to be taken into account in selecting workers for redundancy.

The general rule of the Labour Code is that age alone cannot be considered as a legitimate reason to terminate a labour contract (Article 26).

However, the Labour Code provides additional guarantees related to a person's acquisition of the right to a pension. Under Article 57, in the event of a reduction in the number of employees, some employees have a right of priority in retaining their jobs. Among other persons with caring responsibilities, one of the groups who have such a priority are those entitled to the old-age pension in not more than three years' time. However, persons who have reached the age when they are entitled to the old-age pension are not among those who have priority in retaining their jobs.

b) Age taken into account for redundancy compensation

In Lithuania, national law provides compensation for redundancy. Such compensation is not affected by the age of the worker.

Although age is taken into account to the extent that the amount of compensation depends on the length of time that the worker has been employed in the company or institution concerned, compensation does not vary for those who have worked in the same place for more than a year (Articles 56, 57 and 60 of the Labour Code). The additional long-term employment redundancy compensation is paid by the State Social Fund if the contract is terminated at the initiative of the employer. The long-term employment redundancy compensation varies, depending on the number of years for which the person has worked in the same place: they receive 77.58 % of their average monthly salary if they have worked for 5 to 10 years, 77.58 % of their average salary for two months if they have worked for 10 to 20 years, or 77.58 % of their average salary for three months if they have worked for 20 years or longer.

Employees who have reached the permitted pension age are also entitled to compensation when their contract is terminated at their initiative (Article 56(1)).

4.7 Further exceptions necessary in a democratic society: Public security, public order, criminal offences, protection of health, protection of the rights and freedoms of others (Article 2(5), Directive 2000/78)

In Lithuania, national law does not include exceptions that seek to rely on Article 2(5) of the Employment Equality Directive

4.8 Any other exceptions

In Lithuania, other exceptions to the prohibition of discrimination in national law (on any ground covered by this report) are as follows:

The requirement to know the state language and a prohibition on participation in political activities are listed as exceptions (see, for instance, Article 9 of the Law on Public Service),²²⁶ and exceptions are elaborated in other laws. For example, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has to suspend their membership in a political party (Article 18(4) of the Law on Equal Treatment), and persons serving in the armed forces cannot be members of a political party (Article 36 of the Law on the Organisation of the National Defence System and Military Service).²²⁷ However, there are no specific exceptions in the field of private employment.

²²⁶ Law on the Civil Service (*Lietuvos Respublikos valstybės tarnybos įstatymas*), 30 July 1999, No. VIII-1316, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.D3ED3792F52B/asr>.

²²⁷ Law on the Organisation of the National Defence System and Military Service (*Lietuvos Respublikos krašto apsaugos sistemos organizavimo ir karo tarnybos įstatymas*) 27 May 1998, No. VIII-723, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.56646>.

5 POSITIVE ACTION (Article 5 Directive 2000/43, Article 7 Directive 2000/78)

a) Scope for positive action measures

In Lithuania, positive action is permitted in national law in respect of disability, gender, race, 'nationality', citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion.

Article 2(9) of the Law on Equal Treatment provides exceptions to direct discrimination legislation that could be interpreted as allowing positive action:

- 1) special measures applied in healthcare, safety at work, employment and the labour market when striving to create and implement conditions and opportunities guaranteeing and promoting the integration of persons with disabilities into the work environment;
- 2) special temporary measures applied in an attempt to ensure equality and prohibit violation of equal treatment on the basis of gender, race, 'nationality', citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion;
- 3) granting benefits on the basis of age, disability and social status, where it is justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.

The concept of positive action is not widely discussed at national level. Although different measures, which vary in scope and form, exist in practice, a consistent legal/political approach is lacking. This issue was highlighted by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson.²²⁸ The Ombudsperson identified the need for a comprehensive approach to positive action measures, as well as highlighting the fact that the country lacks a clear mechanism for the implementation of positive measures. The Ombudsperson recommended that a law on positive action be passed.

There is no legislation that deals with positive action measures, and a definition of such measures is not provided in national law. A landmark ruling of the Constitutional Court²²⁹ made some time before the Law on Equal Treatment was passed gives some idea as to how positive action measures may be applied in practice. According to the Constitutional Court, a legal regulation that treats certain groups of people differently in order to achieve positive and socially meaningful goals is not regarded as discrimination. In addition, special requirements or certain conditions relating to a group that are linked to the specificities of a particular employment position do not constitute discriminatory restrictions – for example, the laws that set out certain requirements in respect of the education, qualifications, health or work experience of citizens who enter the civil service.

The Law on Equal Treatment requires state and municipal institutions to draft measures ensuring equal opportunities:²³⁰

'Public authorities are obliged to draft measures to ensure equal opportunities in their strategic planning documents. The municipal authorities are obliged to draft measures to ensure equal opportunities in their strategic municipal development and (or) strategic action plans.'

This might be considered as some sort of equality mainstreaming obligation; however, it is brief, it is not elaborated upon, and no control mechanism has been put in place. In 2020

²²⁸ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2009), *Annual Report for 2009*.

²²⁹ Ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania No. 100-2791, 11 November 1998, <https://lrkt.lt/lt/teismo-aktai/paieska/135/ta384/content>.

²³⁰ Law on Equal Treatment (*Lygių galimybių įstatymas*, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.0CC6CB2A9E42/asr>).

the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson presented a developed initiative for different entities to self-evaluate the level of implementation of equal opportunities among them – if they have special measures. The initiative is called the Equal Opportunities Ruler.²³¹

In 2022, the Ombudsperson investigated a complaint about the conditions imposed by the Ministry of Agriculture for small farms to receive EU support. Under the rules, farmers under 40 were awarded an extra 10 points in the competition in order to provide support measures to young farmers. It was found that there was no violation of equal opportunities as the procedures provided for in the rules, which are more favourable to persons under 40 years of age, do not unduly restrict the ability of older persons to apply for and receive an application. The criterion contributes to the objectives of social inclusion, and the legislation providing for more favourable modalities is a law or legislative act (EU Regulations).²³²

The Labour Code sets an obligation on public and private entities employing more than 50 employees to adopt measures aimed at promoting and implementing equality policies in the workplace (Article 26).²³³ Following these legislative amendments, and noting its duty to carry out preventive educational activities and activities encouraging the implementation of equal opportunities, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson introduced recommendations, with training for companies and employers on how to create equality plans.²³⁴ This may be found at www.lygybesplanai.lt.²³⁵

The Law on Employment creates a system of additional support measures to ensure employment for persons with disabilities, unqualified workers, long-term unemployed persons, unemployed persons over 45 and under 29, unemployed persons starting their first job according to their qualifications, and persons with refugee status or subsidiary or temporary protection.

b) Quotas in employment for persons with disabilities

In Lithuania, national law does not provide for quotas for persons with disabilities in employment.

In 2018, a draft amendment to the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities was registered in the Parliament (Seimas), according to which it would be recommended that persons with disabilities be employed as at least 4 % of the total annual number of employees in public sector organisations with an average number of employees of 25 or more. In 2019, the Government endorsed the proposal, but also proposed the provision of a three-year transitional, rather than mandatory, model of employment quotas for persons with disabilities, according to which employers would be encouraged to employ persons with disabilities. However, the bill has not yet been adopted.

²³¹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2021), *Annual Report for 2020*.

²³² Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (22)SN-90)SP-53, 23 August 2022, <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/08/22sn-90sp-53.pdf>.

²³³ Labour Code, 2016.

²³⁴ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, '2018 – the year of promoting equality in the Labour Market', <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/naujienos/2018-ieji-ir-lygybes-darbo-rinkoje-skatinimo-metai/1026>.

²³⁵ See: www.lygybesplanai.lt.

6 REMEDIES AND ENFORCEMENT

6.1 Judicial and/or administrative procedures (Article 7 Directive 2000/43, Article 9 Directive 2000/78)

a) Available procedures for enforcing the principle of equal treatment

In Lithuania, the following procedures exist for enforcing the principle of equal treatment before the civil and administrative courts. Criminal procedure is also possible in cases of discrimination, but this is rarely or never applied. There is also the quasi-judicial procedure of filing a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, which is considered to be an administrative procedure.²³⁶

The Constitution guarantees the right of every person to appeal to a court for the protection of the constitutional rights that have been violated. The general principle of equality of persons is embodied in a number of laws, including the Civil Code and the Labour Code. According to Article 12(1) of the Law on Equal Treatment, each person whose equal opportunities have been violated has a right to file a complaint to the Ombudsperson. This does not preclude the person from having the right to defend his or her rights in court. Therefore, in cases of violation of the principle of equal treatment, any person can address the court (under administrative or civil jurisdiction, depending on the matter at hand). The court offers the only option for a person to receive some sort of compensation for discriminatory actions and suffered harm, because none of the other available procedures provides compensation to the victims.

In the event of a labour dispute, a person must use the compulsory pre-court procedure and apply to the labour dispute commission, which is free of charge. A labour dispute commission is a mandatory institution for hearing labour disputes and resolving individual and collective labour disputes on points of law. Labour dispute commissions function under the territorial divisions of the State Labour Inspectorate. They consist of three members: the chairman (a state official, appointed by the State Labour Inspectorate), a representative of an employer organisation, and a representative of a trade union. In cases of unfair dismissal, the commission can award the payment of salary for the duration of forced absenteeism (but for no more than one year) and pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages, as well as compensation worth a maximum of six times the average salary (Article 218). Labour dispute commissions can also function as a mediator.

According to the information provided by the State Labour Inspectorate on its website, the labour dispute commissions received 5 873 requests in 2022 (compared with 5 404 in 2021). Of the 5 792 requests that have been analysed (including those continued from last year), 12 concerned or partially concerned discrimination in employment (compared with 10 in 2021).²³⁷

People who believe that their rights have been infringed by individual administrative actions or by the actions (or omissions) of civil servants or municipal employees in the sphere of public administration – including in relation to social protection, social advantages, education and access to and the supply of goods and services available to the public – have the right to file a complaint with the Administrative Disputes Commission under the Law on Administrative Disputes Commissions, or with the administrative courts under the Law on Administrative Procedure. Actions (or omissions) by civil servants or municipal

²³⁶ There are further theoretical options that are not used in practice, such as filing a complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman when human rights violations have been committed by state officials or institutions, or to the State Labour Inspectorate in cases of labour law violations. However, the Parliamentary Ombudsman would not duplicate the function of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson.

²³⁷ Lithuanian State Labour Inspectorate, 'An Overview of Activity of Labour Dispute Commissions in 2022', https://www.vdi.lt/Forms/Tekstas1.aspx?Tekstai_ID=3902.

employees in the sphere of public administration can also be challenged at the Seimas (Parliamentary) Ombudsperson's Office. According to the Constitution:

'The Seimas Ombudsperson shall examine complaints of citizens concerning the abuse of powers by, and bureaucracy of, State and local government officers. The Ombudsperson shall have the right to submit proposals to the court to dismiss guilty officers from their posts.'

According to the Law on the Seimas Ombudsperson, the purpose of the activities of the Ombudsperson is to protect a person's right to good public administration securing human rights and freedoms and to supervise the fulfilment by state authorities of their duty to properly serve the people. In reality, therefore, most cases investigated by the Ombudsperson relate to bureaucracy and maladministration.

However, the most widely used option in practice is to file a complaint to the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. It was established by the Law on Equal Treatment, which expanded the mandate of the previous institution (the Office of the Equal Opportunities for Men and Women) by including additional grounds of discrimination and expanding the competence of the Ombudsperson. Since 2005, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is considered to be the national equality body in terms of Article 13 of the Racial Equality Directive (Directive 2000/43/EC). Complaints should be made in writing: the complainant or her or his representative may send a complaint to the Ombudsperson by post or email, bring it to the office in person or fill in an electronic form online.²³⁸ If a complaint has been received orally or by telephone, or if the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has found indications of a violation of equal rights in the mass media or other sources of information, the Ombudsperson may also initiate an investigation. In addition, Ombudsperson may decide to investigate anonymous complaints. The general rule is that complaints must be investigated within three months after being received, although an extra month can be added if the case is complicated and the Ombudsperson decides that this is necessary.

Decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson to apply administrative sanctions are binding, although they can be overruled by a court. Within 30 days of receiving the decision of the Ombudsperson, the party is obliged to provide information about measures that have been taken with regard to the implementation of the Ombudsperson's decision. This does not mean that the recommendation is mandatory, although it gives the Ombudsperson a right to monitor its recommendations. Applying to the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson does not prevent a complainant from lodging a claim with a court on the same matter (although the Ombudsperson cannot investigate a complaint that is pending in court). It is also possible to submit a complaint to the Administrative Disputes Commission regarding the decisions of the Ombudsperson. In its *Annual Report for 2021*, the Ombudsperson recommended that the legal acts should be amended to include a provision that decisions by the Ombudsperson of a non-obligatory nature should not be questioned in court.²³⁹

The Ombudsperson often acts as a mediator in practice as, according to the Office, peaceful resolution of discrimination is one of its main objectives.²⁴⁰ On the other hand, such activities by the Ombudsperson have never provided compensation to the victim. In the absolute majority of cases, the Ombudsperson chooses to issue opinions, which are not binding. In practice, according to the Ombudsperson, most opinions are followed. The Ombudsperson's Office publicly provides information about the follow-up of decisions. Since May 2017, a table of recommendations and the status of their implementation (a

²³⁸ The complaint form can be found at: <https://lygybe.lt/lt/skundu-tyrimas/skundu-pateikimas-ir-tyrimas/410>.

²³⁹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *Annual Report for 2021*.

²⁴⁰ See the annual reports of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson from 2008 to 2019, available in Lithuanian at: <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/veikla/metines-ataskaitos/405>.

monitoring report) have been available on the website of the Ombudsperson.²⁴¹ Of the 11 decisions mentioned in the table for monitoring in 2022, five are in the process of implementation (in addition to 10 decisions that have been implemented since 2019) and six decisions have been implemented. It is not clear, however, if the table is comprehensive and provides all the Ombudsperson's decisions where a violation of the Law on Equal Treatment was recognised.

Although the Ombudsperson has a right to impose administrative sanctions (fines), they are very rarely imposed. According to the annual reports of the institution, the Ombudsperson has issued a fine on only a few²⁴² occasions since its creation as, in the opinion of the Ombudsperson, the imposition of an administrative fine is not the most effective sanction to prevent discrimination and does not resolve the conflict completely. There might have been more cases when fines were given, judging from information from media articles, but they are not mentioned in the annual reports. One of the cases when an administrative fine of an unspecified amount was imposed in 2008 concerned discrimination in the field of employment – a person did not receive a job because of discrimination based on their age.²⁴³

b) Barriers and other deterrents faced by litigants seeking redress

First of all, it must be emphasised that the only way for victims of discrimination to get some sort of compensation for the harm that they have suffered is to pursue the case in court or before a labour dispute commission. In practice, a person who wishes to initiate court proceedings will have to consult a lawyer. Legal services are relatively expensive, thus the issue of unequal access to justice by different social groups does exist. Although there is a system of state-supported legal aid, only a limited number of persons can receive it, and there are few independent legal aid clinics (where legal aid is provided by volunteering law students), so the legal aid mechanism needs to be strengthened in order to provide more opportunities for vulnerable groups to defend their rights in court. Furthermore, when filing complaints to courts, applicants need to pay a court fee, although applicants may get this back should their trial be successful.

In addition to this, the Code of Civil Procedure and other procedural laws do not include special judicial, administrative or conciliation procedures specifically for cases of discrimination. Thus, in civil or administrative cases, victims of discrimination must rely on general procedures of civil procedure, and therefore a qualified and experienced legal consultant is necessary. As yet, only a couple of cases concerning some forms of discrimination are brought to court each year, and national jurisprudence in this respect is rather limited.

No special conciliation procedures for cases of discrimination exist at national level. Although it could be a useful tool, mediation in discrimination disputes is not covered in national law either, thus limiting the ways of resolving a dispute. In practice, however, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson sometimes acts as a mediator, but this procedure is not formalised, and therefore the outcome of the mediation is neither binding nor compensatory. Labour dispute commissions can also function as mediators. The Law on Mediation entered into force on 1 January 2019.

²⁴¹ See the website of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson at: <https://www.lygybe.lt/index.php/lt>. Clicking on 'Monitoring the implementation of decisions' (*Sprendimų vykdymo stebėseną*) leads to the Google document: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NP38IHq2nzKzs-bbM2bnZBVfTL5_FVxhDqiR5oRXHo0/edit#gid=0.

²⁴² The administrative penalties imposed are mentioned in the annual reports of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson for 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2012.

²⁴³ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2009), *Annual Report for 2008*, <https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2015/12/lgkt-ataskaita-2008.pdf>.

In Lithuania, only persons whose rights have been directly infringed by particular decisions have the right to appeal to the Ombudsperson.²⁴⁴ In practice, associations often initiate administrative proceedings with the Ombudsperson, although case law on the issue has denied such a possibility. It must be recognised that the Office of the Ombudsperson has not been consistent in this approach in the past. However, recent practice is that, when the complaint is received from an NGO and the rights of the organisation have not been directly infringed, the Ombudsperson may start an investigation 'on its own initiative'.

In addition, the procedure at the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, which is the one most commonly used, has a time limit for filing complaints of three months after the commission of the acts in question. Complaints lodged after the expiry of this time limit are not investigated unless the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson decides otherwise.

It is also worth mentioning that not all groups feel safe to report discrimination. According to the Ombudsperson, when evaluating public surveys and other data, it is necessary to emphasise that 'the very low number of complaints about unfavourable behaviour based on sexual orientation (especially homosexuality) does not in any way confirm the fact that people do not actually face discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation'.²⁴⁵ The Ombudsperson notes that the low number of complaints can be explained by the fact that sexual orientation is a specific feature of identity that is not clearly visible. To lodge a complaint about a possible violation of equal opportunities, one would have to come out, but not all LGBTIQ people in Lithuania feel safe to do so.

c) Number of discrimination cases brought to justice

In Lithuania, there are no available statistics on the number of cases related to discrimination that are brought to justice.

Exact statistics on the number of cases relating to discrimination are not available. According to the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, in 2022 the Office was involved in 23 legal proceedings. In 12 administrative cases, the Office participated as a defendant; in one as an applicant or appellant; and in four as a third party. The Ombudsperson has issued conclusions or participated as a third party in six civil cases.²⁴⁶ In addition, several cases were brought before the courts in which the Ombudsperson did not take part that were related to violations of the Labour Code, without clear reference to the Law on Equal Treatment. However, it is impossible to have a clear view of all discrimination-related cases through a search engine, as some of the decisions cannot be found on the database, although the author has received information about them through civil society organisations, the media and the Ombudsperson's Office.²⁴⁷

The Labour Inspectorate provides an overview of information regarding labour disputes in courts, noting that 12 cases of discrimination in employment were heard in 2022.²⁴⁸

d) Registration of national court decisions on discrimination cases

In Lithuania, court decisions on discrimination are not registered as such by the national courts.

²⁴⁴ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, Case No. A⁶⁶²-665/2010, decision of 19 April 2010; Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, *Europos žmogaus teisių fondas v. Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba*, administrative case No. A⁴⁹²-2078/2013, decision of 7 November 2013.

²⁴⁵ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2023), *Annual Report for 2022*.

²⁴⁶ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2023), *Annual Report for 2022*, https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2023/03/d1_lgkt-2022-metu-veiklos-ataskaita_kovo-13-d_final.pdf.

²⁴⁷ See the website of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson at: <http://www.lygybe.lt/lt>.

²⁴⁸ See information provided by the Labour Inspectorate for 2022 (in Lithuanian): https://www.vdi.lt/Forms/Tekstas1.aspx?Tekstai_ID=3902.

Discrimination cases are not recorded separately; cases are not categorised as such by the national courts, so one has to search for them in the available databases by entering key words, and any such search cannot be considered complete. Therefore, it is difficult to find all the cases of discrimination that have been heard.

6.2 Legal standing and associations (Article 7(2) Directive 2000/43, Article 9(2) Directive 2000/78)

a) Engaging in proceedings on behalf of victims of discrimination (representing them)

In Lithuania, associations, organisations and trade unions are entitled in principle to act on behalf of victims of discrimination. However, legal provisions on the matter need judicial interpretation.

In practice, the Lithuanian human rights NGO scene is rather weak, in that most of the organisations that deal with non-discrimination issues or vulnerable groups are engaged in preventive work, education and awareness raising, and very few of them engage on behalf of victims. There is not a single NGO specialising in litigation, and only a few organisations have occasionally been involved in court cases during the last decade, with one organisation systematically trying to get involved in strategic litigation.

Article 12(2) of the Law on Equal Treatment states that associations whose field of activity, as stated in their founding documents, encompasses the representation of victims of discrimination on a particular ground of discrimination in court have the right to engage on behalf or in support of the complainant, with his or her approval, in judicial and administrative procedures, in a manner prescribed by law. However, procedural legislation is not consistent with this wording.

The latest amendments to the Law on the Proceedings of Administrative Cases do not mention associations among the list of possible representatives of persons in an administrative procedure, unless they are representing the association itself or its members.²⁴⁹

When it comes to civil proceedings, a similar provision in the Code of Civil Procedure has a narrower wording. Article 56(1)(6) states that such associations may engage in judicial proceedings on behalf of their members only and that they must be represented by a person holding a law degree or by a member of the Bar. Although this particular provision has not been tested in the courts in any civil cases yet, an unofficial interpretation provided by the Ministry of Justice²⁵⁰ suggested a narrow interpretation of this provision as well, in that a victim can be represented by an association only if he or she is formally a member of that organisation. Hence it seems that there is an inconsistency between the wording of the Law on Equal Treatment and that of the Code of Civil Procedure.

According to Article 56(1)(5)) of the Code of Civil Procedure, trade unions can engage in a civil procedure only on behalf of their members and in labour disputes only. According to the Law on Trade Unions,²⁵¹ a trade union is established if it has no less than 20 founders, or if the founders in the enterprise, establishment or organisation would comprise not less than one tenth of all the employees (and one tenth of all the employees would account for not less than three employees), the articles of association are approved and the governing bodies have been elected at a meeting of the trade union. In addition to this, it must have elected governing bodies and must have adopted a decision on its registered office.

²⁴⁹ Law on the Proceedings of Administrative Cases (*Lietuvos Respublikos Administracinių bylų teisenos įstatymas*), 1999, No. 13-308, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.67B5099C5848/IThvemJyiH>.

²⁵⁰ Official Letter from the Ministry of Justice, 10 November 2011, No. (1.11) 7R-9117, replying to an inquiry dated 18 October 2011.

²⁵¹ Law on Trade Unions (*Lietuvos Respublikos Profesinių sąjungų įstatymas*), No. 34-933, 21 November 1991, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.ABF3AEE57087/asr>.

In the past, it was fairly common for associations to initiate administrative proceedings with the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson in cases where their rights were not directly affected by particular actions or omissions, and the Ombudsperson would start an investigation of their complaint. However, the Supreme Administrative Court issued a landmark decision in 2010, ruling that only persons whose rights were directly affected by particular decisions had the right to appeal to the Ombudsperson.²⁵² According to the court's interpretation, associations can thus lodge a complaint with the Ombudsperson only when their rights have been directly violated. In practice, however, such situations are handled in a less formal way. Four complaints on the ground of disability in 2020 and one complaint in 2021 were submitted by organisations representing persons with disabilities. In some situations, associations are involved in legal court actions as third parties, even when they try to initiate a legal action in support of victims of discrimination.

b) Engaging in proceedings in support of victims of discrimination (joining existing proceedings)

In Lithuania, associations, organisations and trade unions are entitled to act in support of victims of discrimination.

The wording of Article 12(2) of the Law on Equal Treatment states that associations whose field of activity, as stated in their founding documents, encompasses the representation of victims of discrimination on a particular ground of discrimination in court have the right to engage on behalf or in support of the complainant, with his or her approval, in judicial and administrative procedures, in a manner prescribed by law.

However, how this right might be implemented in practice is not clear. The Code of Civil Procedure allows an association, as a third party, to get involved in both civil and administrative proceedings in support of a victim (Article 47 of the Code of Civil Procedure), and to provide certain evidence and expert opinion (Article 61 of the Code of Civil Procedure). Under the Code of Civil Procedure (which is also applied in labour disputes), an association could be involved in a discrimination case in support of the victim if the case concerned the rights and responsibilities of the association. In all cases it is up to the court to decide whether the organisation has a legitimate interest in participating as a third party in support of the complainant.

According to the interpretation by the Supreme Administrative Court, associations can take part in an administrative procedure only when their rights have been directly violated.²⁵³

There have been very few cases when equality and non-discrimination NGOs have started judicial proceedings on behalf of a particular victim and, in general, national equality organisations lack sufficient resources and legal skills. If the rights of a particular person have been violated, NGOs would usually provide assistance, such as help to find a lawyer, and would participate in support of the victim (applicant).

c) *Actio popularis*

In Lithuania, national procedural legislation does not clearly allow associations, organisations or trade unions to act in the public interest on their own behalf without a specific victim to support or represent (*actio popularis*). However, further judicial interpretation on this is required, as no other provisions have been adopted allowing associations to submit complaints to courts in representing a public interest.

Article 49(2) of the Code of Civil Procedure mentions that, in cases prescribed by law, a prosecutor, state institutions or 'other persons' do have a right to pursue *actio popularis*.

²⁵² Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, decision in case No. A⁶⁶²-665/2010, 19 April 2010.

²⁵³ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, *Europos žmogaus teisių fondas v. Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba*, administrative Case No. A⁴⁹²-2078/2013, decision of 7 November 2013.

The same can be said of the administrative procedure. Article 55(1) of the Law on the Proceedings of Administrative Cases mentions that, in cases prescribed by law, a prosecutor, state institution or natural person has a right to pursue *actio popularis*. However, no additional law that would allow associations to act in the public interest exists at national level, therefore these provisions remain theoretical and need judicial clarification.

A landmark decision from 2013 gives a fairly good example of the possible challenges. The European Foundation of Human Rights (EFHR), a Vilnius-based organisation, filed a complaint to the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson in September 2012 regarding a discriminatory job advertisement in an online job search portal. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson started an investigation but then stopped it due to the 'lack of objective data about a violation of anti-discrimination legislation', as the company in question did not respond to queries. The EFHR appealed to the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, which ruled that the decision of the Ombudsperson was not objectively justified. However, the Supreme Administrative Court stated that an administrative act that does not affect the rights of any person may not be the subject of administrative procedure. The court emphasised that the Law on the Proceedings of Administrative Cases does allow specific subjects to act in the public interest, however this right may only be exercised by specific subjects, as defined by law, and only in cases outlined in specific legislation. Neither the Law on the Proceedings of Administrative Cases nor anti-discrimination legislation explicitly allows associations to act in defence of the public interest, therefore the complainant did not have legal standing in the case.²⁵⁴

d) Class action

According to the Code of Civil Procedure (Article 441⁴(2)),²⁵⁵ associations or trade unions are allowed to act directly in the interests of more than one individual victim for class action claims that are directly related to the aims and scope of activities of an association or trade union if at least 10 parties to the class action are members of an association or trade union. The Code allows class action through the representation of a lawyer.²⁵⁶ A group of claimants must consist of no less than 20 natural or legal persons and they must be represented in court by a lawyer. An organisation (association or a trade union) may act on behalf of a group of claimants if (1) the matter of the class action is consistent with the goals and interest of the organisation, (2) no less than 10 members of the group pursuing the class action are members of the organisation, and (3) it hires a lawyer who will represent the group in court. However, while the provisions on class action entered into force in 2015 (and were amended in 2020), there have still only been a few cases (on the protection of consumer rights), and none concerning discrimination.

Lithuania has chosen an opt-in model of class action, meaning a person has to express a will to join the group.

The Law on the Proceedings of Administrative Cases (Article 126⁸) allows associations and trade unions to act in the interests of a class action together with a lawyer acting for the group concerned.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, *Europos žmogaus teisių fondas v. Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba*, administrative Case No. A⁴⁹²-2078/2013, 7 November 2013.

²⁵⁵ Code of Civil Procedure (*Lietuvos Respublikos civilinio proceso kodeksas*), 2002, amendments related to class action made mainly in 2014, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.2E7C18F61454/AISJIVkyji>.

²⁵⁶ The amendments came into effect on 1 January 2015.

²⁵⁷ Law on the Proceedings of Administrative Cases, 1999.

6.3 Burden of proof (Article 8 Directive 2000/43, Article 10 Directive 2000/78)

In Lithuania, national law requires a shift of the burden of proof from the complainant to the respondent.

The current wording of Article 4 of the Law on Equal Treatment repeats the provision of the directives and does not go into details. A similar provision (although restricted to cases in the field of employment) with regard to the shift in the burden of proof is repeated in Article 26(5) of the Labour Code.

The Code of Civil Procedure sets out the general rule that the burden of proof falls upon the applicant. However, Article 182(4) of the Code contains a provision that states that parties are not obliged to prove circumstances that are presumed by law. Since there is a provision on the shift of the burden of proof in the Law on Equal Treatment, these provisions are used together to convince the court to shift the burden of proof. There were attempts to include a shift in burden of proof in the Code of Civil Procedure in the past, but they were dismissed by the Parliament.²⁵⁸ Nevertheless, court cases reaffirm that the courts generally do accept the shift in the burden of proof in discrimination cases.²⁵⁹ The Law on the Proceedings of Administrative Cases does not explicitly mention burden of proof in discrimination cases, but it contains a clause referring to presumptions regulated by other provisions in Article 57(3).

The Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania elaborated on the burden of proof in a landmark decision in 2021 concerning a decision by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson that found discrimination on the grounds of disability.²⁶⁰ The Supreme Administrative Court referred to the burden of proof in discrimination cases in general and held that ‘the rules on the burden of proof must be adjusted in the event of a *prima facie* case of discrimination, and in order to effectively implement the principle of equal treatment, the burden of proof must be returned to the respondent when evidence of such discrimination is presented’

In 2022, Vilnius Regional Administrative Court followed this position, noting that, in discrimination cases, there is a burden of proof rule, according to which the applicant must identify the factual circumstances leading to the presumption of direct or indirect discrimination. Once the applicant (employee) has met this burden, the respondent (employer) bears the burden of proving that the principle of equal treatment has not been infringed.²⁶¹

6.4 Victimisation (Article 9 Directive 2000/43, Article 11 Directive 2000/78)

In Lithuania, there are legal measures of protection against victimisation.

Article 7(7) of the Law on Equal Treatment repeats the wording of the directives, saying that an employer is obliged to take necessary measures to ensure that employees are protected against dismissal or other adverse treatment that could occur as a reaction to a complaint or to any legal proceedings aimed at enforcing compliance with the principle of equal treatment. In 2022, the national legislation was expanded to include protection from victimisation in other fields such as education (Article 6(4)) and the provision of goods and services (Article 8(3)).

The Labour Code requires an employer to take measures to ensure that employees are not subjected to harassment, hostile behaviour or negative consequences when they submit a

²⁵⁸ Transcript of the plenary session of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania of 27 June 2007, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=300811.

²⁵⁹ Vilnius Regional Administrative Court (Vilniaus apygardos administracinis teismas), ‘Eglės sanatorija’ v. *Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba*, Case No. I-2531-643/2018, 9 July 2018.

²⁶⁰ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, No. eA-2796-492/2021, 15 December 2021.

²⁶¹ Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, Case No. e2A-2013-936/2022, 25 August 2022.

complaint regarding discrimination or participate in a case regarding discrimination (Article 26(2)(5))). Article 59(2) protects a person from dismissal when they start proceedings against an employer regarding discrimination.

The shift in the burden of proof would also apply in cases of victimisation, since the national provision of the shift in the burden of proof is broad enough to interpret it in a way that can be applied in all disputes with regard to the breach of equal opportunities, as outlined in the Law on Equal Treatment.

6.5 Sanctions and remedies (Article 15 Directive 2000/43, Article 17 Directive 2000/78)

a) Applicable sanctions in cases of discrimination – in law and in practice

In Lithuania, there are two procedures for imposing sanctions for discriminatory behaviour: judicial proceedings in administrative or civil courts (mostly for claiming compensation, as the national law does not accept the concept of punitive damages) as well as in criminal courts, or an administrative procedure at the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, who can issue warnings (admonish the perpetrator) or impose a fine under the Administrative Violations Code, although they cannot compensate the victim in any way.

Under Article 6.250(2) of the Civil Code, non-pecuniary damages can be claimed in a civil case only in cases prescribed by law; Article 6.263(3) establishes that, 'In cases established by laws, a person shall also be liable to compensation for damage caused by the actions of another person or by the action of things in his custody.' A person has the right to bring a civil action against an employer and to claim compensation in the case of discrimination in a workplace or can claim pecuniary or non-pecuniary damages by submitting a complaint to a labour dispute commission. Therefore, the claimant is able to seek compensation in two ways – either by claiming violation of the Labour Code (in the field of employment) or by claiming violation of the Law on Equal Treatment (in employment and other fields). Article 13 of the Law on Equal Treatment explicitly states that persons have the right to claim pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages if they have suffered from discrimination.

Although only the courts can compensate for damages, the procedure at the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson remains much more widely used in practice. According to Article 29(2) of the Law on Equal Treatment, having completed an investigation, the Ombudsperson may take the following decisions:

- to refer relevant material to the public prosecution authorities if indications of an offence have been established;
- to address a recommendation to an appropriate person or institution to discontinue the actions that are violating equal opportunities;
- to recommend that a person or an institution change or repeal an administrative act (or part of it) related to such violations;
- to begin proceedings on administrative violations;
- to declare the complaint unfounded if the alleged violations referred to in the complaint have not been established;
- to admonish those who have committed a violation (in such cases, the Ombudsperson issues a warning or recommendation to halt the discriminatory practices, although these are not essentially binding);
- to issue binding decisions to stop discriminatory advertising campaigns, establishing the applicable terms and conditions;
- to address an application to the administrative court, asking it to establish whether a normative administrative act (or a part of it) or a rule adopted by a religious community, a political party, a political organisation or an association complies with the Law on Equal Treatment or the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

When the Ombudsperson examines cases of administrative offences, they can impose a fine for violations of the Law on Equal Treatment and the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in accordance with Article 81 of the Administrative Violations Code. Decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson are binding, so they can therefore be challenged in court or at the Administrative Disputes Commission.

Although the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has been given the authority to investigate complaints of discrimination, the decisions of the Ombudsperson do not include granting any form of compensation (including reinstatement) to the victim of discrimination for the damage caused. In practice, the Ombudsperson usually issues a recommendation (which is essentially non-binding) to stop discriminatory actions or occasionally warns those who have committed violations. According to the annual reports of the institution, during the past 10 years of its operation, the Ombudsperson issued only a few fines;²⁶² other instances can be found, however, via media articles. Fines can range from EUR 40 to EUR 560 (or from EUR 560 to EUR 1 200 for repeat offences) and are provided for in the Administrative Violations Code (Article 81).

In the past, the former Ombudsperson stated numerous times in the Office's annual reports that they did not consider a fine to be an effective solution to discriminatory situations. The author notes, however, that, if the Ombudsperson issued fines, they could be challenged in court, which would result in litigation, thus placing an extra burden on the Ombudsperson's staff. However, other decisions of the Ombudsperson are currently being challenged in court.

The administrative procedure allows for injunctive relief measures under Article 70 of the Law on Administrative Procedure, such as the prohibition of certain activity, the temporary suspension of the validity of an individual administrative act, the suspension of recovery of enforcement or other measures applied by the court. The Code of Civil Procedure also allows injunctive relief measures under Article 145.

Finally, Lithuanian criminal law provides protection from severe discriminatory acts amounting to crimes, and also provides sanctions. Article 169 of the Criminal Code provides sanctions for severe discriminatory behaviour comprising (a) community service; (b) a fine; (c) detention; or (d) imprisonment for up to three years. However, it is not clear from the vague wording of the Criminal Code exactly which discriminatory actions amount to crimes and, to the knowledge of the author, only a few investigations on the basis of this Article have been initiated since 2003, and the Supreme Court of Lithuania has examined two cases in which it did not find the acts discriminatory; therefore, no sanctions have been brought. A criminal case of discrimination against Roma women regarding access to goods and services was opened in 2022, but is still pending at the beginning of 2023.²⁶³ Consequently, the criminal provisions are not used in practice to sanction perpetrators; they lack clarity and need judicial interpretation.

b) Compensation – maximum and average amounts

Since there have been only a handful of successful discrimination cases (most of them on the basis of gender discrimination and only a few on other grounds), it is still too early to provide a comprehensive overview of general trends. The Labour Code sets limits for compensation in cases of unlawful dismissal, and these limits are different in cases when a person can be reinstated and in those when a person cannot be reinstated. When unlawful dismissal has been recognised, the competent body shall make an order to reinstate an employee and to pay them an average wage for the period of involuntary damage starting from the date of dismissal (but for no longer than one year), as well as pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages (Article 218(2)). When a person cannot be reinstated in their

²⁶² The staff of the institution claim that fines have in fact been issued at least on a few occasions.

²⁶³ For more details, please see section 7.11 (Roma and Travellers).

employment for reasons established in the Labour Code, the competent body shall order the payment of an average wage for the period of involuntary damage starting from the date of dismissal (but for no longer than one year), as well as pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages. There is also compensation equal to the average salary for every two years of employment, but for no more than the average salary of six employees (Article 218(4)). Therefore, the compensation can vary, from the average salary for 12 months to that of 18 months, together with the other pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages.

According to the law, there is no limit on compensation for non-pecuniary damages suffered because of discriminatory behaviour, and therefore decisions depend on individual cases. According to the practice of the Supreme Administrative Court, the set of criteria must be assessed altogether, including the significance of the protected values (discrimination in upholding the right to full participation in an election), the vulnerability of the applicants (persons with reduced mobility), and the negative experiences that were engendered (emotional depression, a feeling of inferiority, frustration and despair, and the degrading treatment), as well as the duration of the violation.²⁶⁴ Besides this, in determining the amount of compensation for non-pecuniary damages and losses, the case law takes into account the material living standards in society, which is reflected by the minimum monthly salary.

Judicial compensation for victims of discrimination currently ranges from EUR 579 (for discriminatory dismissal on the basis of disability – although the court of first instance had awarded EUR 2 027²⁶⁵) to EUR 3 000 (also for discriminatory dismissal on the basis of disability). The variation in compensation amounts and the lack of consistent guidelines for assessing damages highlight the need for clearer and more consistent standards.

The author of this report is aware of legal cases concerning discrimination that ended in amicable settlements. The compensation in such cases can be twice as high as compensation awarded by the courts, or even higher.

c) Assessment of the sanctions

In the opinion of the author of this report, the system of sanctions for discriminatory acts in Lithuania cannot be considered effective, proportionate or dissuasive. Firstly, they are very rarely issued. However, even if the Ombudsperson did issue fines, such administrative sanctions can hardly be considered effective, proportionate and dissuasive, even though they have been increased. They do not depend on the revenue of the offender, for instance, and they are also rather limited in their nature. In addition, the decisions of the Ombudsperson do not seek to compensate the victim.

In 2014, this issue was raised by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which stated that the limited application of administrative sanctions by the Ombudsman in cases of sex- and gender-based discrimination was causing great concern.²⁶⁶ In 2014, the temporary substitute Ombudsperson identified the issue of sanctions in its annual report. The Ombudsperson also recommended that the Parliament should expand the current list of sanctions and allow multiple sanctions, to ensure the discontinuation of discriminatory acts and also to serve as dissuasive sanctions.²⁶⁷ This was also highlighted by an in-depth report published in 2017 on the status of the national equality body, which was based on interviews with key stakeholders (such as decision

²⁶⁴ Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, case No. eA-113-492/2020, 18 February 2020.

²⁶⁵ Vilnius Regional Court decision, Case No. 2A-557-640/2014, 27 February 2014.

²⁶⁶ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Lithuania ([CEDAW/C/LTU/CO/5](#)), 24 July 2014.

²⁶⁷ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2009), *Annual Report for 2009*.

makers and representatives of civil society, academia and state and municipal institutions).²⁶⁸

²⁶⁸ Andriukaitis, G., Sabatauskaite, B. and Lietuvos žmogaus teisių centras (2017), 'The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson as a National Equality Body: Legal Regulation and Activities' (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba, kaip nacionalinė lygybės institucija: teisinis reglamentavimas ir veikla*), Vilnius, Lietuvos žmogaus teisių centras, http://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2017/04/lygiu_galimybu_kkontrolieriaus_tarnyba_kaip_nacionaline_lygybes_institucija_teisinis_reglamentavimas_ir_veikla.pdf.

7 BODY FOR THE PROMOTION OF EQUAL TREATMENT (Article 13 Directive 2000/43)

7.1 Body designated for the promotion of equal treatment irrespective of racial/ethnic origin according to Article 13 of the Racial Equality Directive

The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is the main national institution dealing with equality and non-discrimination and is the national anti-discrimination body established in order to fulfil the requirements of the Racial Equality Directive. When the Law on Equal Treatment came into force in 2005, it expanded the mandate of the previous Ombudsperson for Equal Opportunities of Men and Women, which was functioning on the basis of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Thus, a new institution – the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson – covering all grounds of discrimination contained in Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC as well as the ground of gender, started operating on 1 January 2005.

Services of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson are accessible on an equal basis for all, without costs. The premises are accessible to people with disabilities and the services are also available in sign language.

Although the Office does not have regional branches, it covers the whole of the country and offers remote access to consultations. Social campaigns are broadcast on national radio and television, reaching a wide range of people.

The Ombudsperson's activities are governed by the Law on Equal Treatment and the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

7.2 Political, economic and social context of the designated body

The institution of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson was initially established based on international commitments to the UN regarding gender equality, and was further expanded in 2005 based on the requirements of the Racial Equality Directive and, most recently, in 2019 in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Therefore, the existence of the institution is widely seen by politicians as a commitment to international human rights standards and obligations, rather than resulting from a genuine need for development in equality from within the country. Open hostility to the existence of the institution has been avoided for a considerable time. However, in 2018, the Ombudsperson received a written request and was invited to the Parliament to provide answers regarding the 'Support' campaign, which had been implemented by the institution with the aims of inspiring the public to support women who open up about the experience of abuse and violence and of avoiding victim-blaming attitudes. Various different people (a friend, a mother, a judge, a police officer, a children's rights protection service and a priest) were depicted in a campaign video as blaming the victim, using the words victims said they had heard during research.²⁶⁹ The Ombudsperson was invited to a plenary session in the Parliament and had to answer questions on whether, through its campaign, the Ombudsperson was not undermining state institutions, discrediting society's trust in state institutions and the state itself or violating the rights of religious persons.²⁷⁰ During the campaign, the Ombudsperson was widely criticised by church-affiliated groups and NGOs for violating 'traditional values'. However, following the criticism, the Ombudsperson has received support from around 50 specialised centres, women's organisations and human

²⁶⁹ 'Support' campaign, video by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=15&v=2KrHsqiwnQY.

²⁷⁰ Transcript of the plenary session of the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania of 13 November 2018, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAK/91184541e7f911e894a78279b4c56611>.

rights organisations,²⁷¹ and a number of politicians, including both Opposition and Government-supporting members of the Parliament, expressed their support.

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has been concerned for years about the increasing volume of work and functions, but the budget remains insufficient.²⁷² For example, according to the annual reports for 2019 and 2020, after introducing a new role of the Ombudsperson's Office from July 2019 to monitor the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, no sufficient funding was granted for the implementation of this new function.

Public support for the national equality body remains rather limited. It is certain that most of the human rights NGOs support the existence of the institution as such, but the general public still lack knowledge and understanding of its role, as reported in previous reports. In 2019, almost a third of the population in Lithuania said that, if they were discriminated against or harassed, they would exercise their rights and would report the discrimination to the police (30 %) and less than a fifth to the national Equal Opportunities Office (16 %).²⁷³ On the other hand, when people are actually discriminated against, they rarely report the fact: according to a public opinion poll, 95 % of individuals who said they had been victims of human rights violations did not complain to any institution.²⁷⁴

The figures are different according to surveys commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson in recent years, and still contradictory. The *Annual Report for 2022* presented the results of a public opinion poll showing that 78 % of respondents had heard of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, and 42 % (compared with 28 % in 2018 and 46 % in 2021) responded that they would contact the Ombudsperson in the event of experiencing discrimination. Only 36 % said they had trust in the Ombudsperson (compared with 45 % in 2020 and 39 % in 2021).²⁷⁵

However, the efficiency of the institution has improved (in 2021, the highest number of complaints was received in the history of the Office), its work has become much more open to the public, its role has become much more visible in the media and, during the last few years, it has instigated a few widely discussed awareness-raising campaigns and has spoken out against discriminatory attitudes expressed by high-level politicians.

7.3 Institutional architecture

In Lithuania, the designated body forms part of a body with multiple mandates.

Equality and non-discrimination on all grounds listed in the directives and on the ground of gender are the main areas of work of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson.

In 2010 the Government issued a decision to assign an additional function to the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson,²⁷⁶ obliging it to 'monitor the implementation of the provisions of the UN CRPD related to safeguarding equal opportunities'.

²⁷¹ Letter from NGOs to the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 13 November 2018, <http://manoteises.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/D%C4%97I-LR-Lyqi%C5%B3-galimybi%C5%B3-kontrolieriaus-tarnybos-vykdytos-kampanijos-%E2%80%9EPalaikyk%E2%80%99C.pdf>.

²⁷² See the annual reports of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson 2016 to 2022, available in Lithuanian at: <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/veikla/metines-ataskaitos/405>.

²⁷³ European Commission, Eurobarometer survey, 'Discrimination in the EU in 2019', available online at: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2251>.

²⁷⁴ Human Rights Monitoring Institute, public opinion poll on how society evaluates the situation of human rights in Lithuania, conducted by Vilnius from 3 to 12 October 2014, available online at: http://hrmi.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Visuomenes-nuomones-apklausa_2014.pdf.

²⁷⁵ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2023), *Annual Report for 2022*.

²⁷⁶ Government of the Republic of Lithuania, Decision No. 1739 on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, 8 December 2010, available online at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.388475?jfwid=-wwknhce4u>.

Organisations representing the interests of persons with disabilities criticised the decision and described the mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the CRPD in Lithuania as inefficient, given that no sufficient human and financial resources had been allocated for monitoring adherence to the Convention. Recommendations 67 and 68 of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities²⁷⁷ stated that the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and the Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, which had been appointed to function as Lithuania's independent monitoring mechanisms, were 'not in full compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights'.

Amendments to the Law on Equal Treatment were made in 2018, adding the monitoring of the CRPD to the mandate of the Ombudsperson, as well as establishing a Monitoring Commission on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Commission is composed of five members, four of whom are representatives of associations of people with disabilities and one of whom is a representative of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson.

In its concluding observations, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted that there was a low number of complaints by women and girls with disabilities.²⁷⁸

7.4 Status of the designated body – general independence and resources

a) Status of the body

- Separate or other legal status or personality:

Lithuania took the decision to establish the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson under a separate law, thus providing it with the status of a separate entity and a full legal person, with independence from the executive branch. As an ombudsman-type institution, it is accountable to the Parliament only and is run by the chief officer of the institution – the Ombudsperson.

- Selection of governing body:

The Ombudsperson is appointed by Parliament for a term of five years. The current head of the institution advocated placing a limit of two consecutive terms, and amendments made in 2017 introduced the provision that the same person cannot be appointed for more than two terms in a row. The current appointment procedure does not involve civil society. Since there is no duty to follow the principle of pluralism or to consult any board or body when appointing the Ombudsperson, the Speaker of the Parliament suggests a candidate for Parliament to vote on, without consulting civil society. According to the jurisprudence, the Parliament is entirely autonomous when deciding upon the candidate, and the decision of the Parliament cannot be overruled by a court.²⁷⁹

The requirements for the candidate, as set out in the Law on Equal Treatment, are that they have an impeccable reputation, a university degree in law and a minimum of 10 years' experience in law. The requirement of 'impeccable reputation' is not explained in detail in the Law on Equal Treatment. However, it is elaborated upon in detail in Article 4 of the Law on Public Service, which states that a person would not be considered as having an 'impeccable reputation' if he or she had a current conviction record for a serious crime, a crime of corruption or crimes against the state service, had previously been dismissed from

²⁷⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Concluding observations on the initial report of Lithuania ([CRPD/C/LTU/CO/1](#)), 11 May 2016.

²⁷⁸ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Lithuania ([CRPD/C/LTU/CO/6](#)), 12 November 2019.

²⁷⁹ Vilnius Regional Administrative Court (Vilniaus apygardos administracinis teismas), Case No. eI-9300-811/2015, *D.G.-K. v. Lithuanian Parliament, Lithuanian State*.

a state office or work or had lost the ability to carry out independent activities due to particular violations and a period of three years from that dismissal has not passed, if he or she had been dismissed or removed from an appointed office having breached an oath or pledge, was a member of an organisation forbidden by law, etc.²⁸⁰ Therefore, the requirement is not entirely subjective.

Before the Ombudsperson takes up office, she or he is obliged to take an oath to honour the Lithuanian state, impartiality and the rule of law. In addition, the candidate must end his or her membership of any political party before taking the oath. The independence of the Ombudsperson is also ensured by the provision that prohibits the Ombudsperson from having any other job or involvement in any profit-making activities, with the exception of creative or educational work. The term of the Ombudsperson can be terminated by Parliament only if the Ombudsperson is ill for a certain period of time, as specified by law, if the Ombudsperson breaches the Constitution or if the Ombudsperson is convicted of a criminal offence. Previously, the Parliament could dismiss the Ombudsperson if he or she failed to pass a confidence vote, but this provision was removed from 1 January 2017, thus strengthening the Ombudsperson's independence.

The work of the institution, as well as its political independence, largely depends on the position of the head of the institution – the Ombudsperson themselves. 2016 marked an important turning point in moving towards increased efficiency and strengthening the Office's institutional structure. The institution was re-structured with three internal divisions (a legal division, an equal opportunities mainstreaming division and an operational management division), with a communication division formed in 2017, in addition to a financial adviser and the Ombudsperson herself. Therefore, until the end of 2022, it consisted of four internal divisions.

- Sources of funding:

The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is financed from its pre-approved budget; thus, its financial independence is also ensured by law. Moreover, every year, the Parliament votes for the budget proposed by the Government, and thus the Parliament may cut the budget of the Office.

Part of the budget is raised through EU-funded project activities.

- Powers to recruit and manage staff:

The Ombudsperson has a right to use its general funding according to its needs and priorities, and neither the Government nor the Parliament has any control over this. The Ombudsperson is fully in charge of the institution and has a right to use the allocated funding according to the needs of the institution as well as to manage staff, to hire or fire personnel, etc.²⁸¹ However, the number of civil servants and employees of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson working under employment contracts and receiving salaries from the state budget and state monetary funds must be approved by the Board of the Seimas. In order to change this number, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson must apply to the Seimas Board. The current maximum number of staff is 21, of which 14 are civil servants and 7 are employed under contracts.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Law on Public Service, 30 July 1999.

²⁸¹ Decision of the Seimas (Parliament) of the Republic of Lithuania on the approval of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson's Internal Procedure Act (*Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo nutarimas Dėl Moterų ir vyrų lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnybos pavadinimo pakeitimo ir Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnybos nuostatų patvirtinimo*), *Valstybės žinios*, 26 November 2003, No. 111-4930.

²⁸² Decision of the Board of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania on the maximum number of posts for civil servants and employees working under employment contracts and receiving salaries from the state budget and state monetary funds in the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, No. 2347, 11 July 2008, latest amendment 26 August 2015, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.324502/asr>.

- Accountability:

As previously mentioned, the institution is accountable to Parliament and must deliver an annual report by the middle of March each year. In the past, the Seimas used to approve activity reports, but in order to ensure the independence of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, it has been decided to hold hearings in committee instead of approval. Therefore, the annual activity reports are being heard by the Human Rights Committee of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, which, in accordance with its competence, can recommend to various state institutions the implementation of the recommendations of the Ombudsperson. However, it is being considered whether the annual activity report should not be presented on the floor of the Seimas, so that all Members of the Seimas, and not just the members of the Human Rights Committee, can have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with it.

According to the Statute of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, the Human Rights Committee may make proposals to the Board of the Seimas on the number of staff and the funding, but the Ombudsperson's recommendations are not binding on the Committee or the Seimas.

b) Independence of the body

From the legal perspective, the independence of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is stipulated by the Law on Equal Treatment as well as being ensured by its separate legal personality and institutional structure. However, the process of appointment, which does not involve any consultation with experts or civil society, is considered as lacking transparency and could potentially be an obstacle to the Office's independence. Despite its formal independence, the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has not been able to avoid an institutional crisis: there was a failure to appoint an Ombudsperson at the end of the regular term of office in 2020, and two failed attempts to appoint respected experts in the field to the post gave rise to doubts concerning the independence and impartiality of the institution from 2013 to 2015. Both attempts gave rise to doubts concerning the transparency of the appointment procedure as well as the candidate selection criteria. When experienced and highly principled candidates were rejected without any explanation, people got the message that the institution was politicised and that principled individuals who did not accommodate a specific political ideology would not be appointed despite their professional qualifications. The appointment procedure cast a shadow over the status of the Office as an independent equality body and potentially dissuaded several competent experts from even considering the position of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. The current statutory procedure and its practical implementation make the impartiality of the appointment of any new Ombudsperson open to question (even when doubt about the impartiality of the Ombudsperson is unfounded).

In 2021, the Parliament (Seimas) appointed the new Ombudsperson, who has many years of experience in the field of human rights and non-discrimination law. However, some opponents were suspicious of her activities promoting LGBTQ+ rights, insisting that she would 'prioritise this group over others'. Negative attitudes and resistance stemmed from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation: the candidate did not hide her belonging to the LGBT community. Nevertheless, the candidate received strong public support and support from NGOs, and was appointed.

A similar situation arose in 2014 when appointing a new Ombudsperson. During the hearing at the Parliament, the candidate was deliberately asked questions about her views on same-sex marriage and partnerships, her relationship with LGBTQ+ organisations, her attitude towards 'genderism ideology', and her views on 'homosexual propaganda' and abortion. The candidate demonstrated a firm commitment to the institution's mandate (including the protection against discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation) as well as expressing her understanding of Lithuania's international commitments with regard to

fundamental rights. Although no doubts regarding her professional qualifications were raised at the hearing, unlike in 2021, the candidacy was not approved.

The question of impartiality was highlighted by an in-depth report published in 2017 on the status of the national equality body, which was based on interviews with key stakeholders (such as decision makers and representatives of civil society, academia and state and municipal institutions).²⁸³ Respondents were asked to evaluate the independence of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson on a scale of 1 to 10. The average score given by the 29 respondents was 5.91.

It has to be noted, however, that much depends on the person appointed to the Office – the de facto independence of the Ombudsperson. However, under the amendments to the Law that entered into force in 2017, provisions were adopted to ensure the independence of the institutions. In particular, the same person cannot be appointed for more than two consecutive terms.

However, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is challenged by the fact that, while some of its functions are attributed to the Ombudsperson by separate programmes approved by the Government or individual ministries, these are not necessarily allocated additional funding or are allocated very limited funding. Many proactive promotional and other strategic activities are funded because of the constant application for EU funding, either by the Office itself or by NGOs. Sometimes, financial challenges occur, ensuring the co-funding required from the state budget. Therefore, the financial independence of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is limited, and the institution has limited ability to plan its promotional functions several years ahead. It should be noted that in planning and drawing up its budget, the Office expresses the need for funding for these activities each year but has never received targeted funding for public opinion polls or awareness-raising campaigns.

c) Resources

- The annual budget of the body:

In 2022, the Office's budget totalled EUR 567 000 (compared with EUR 438 000 in 2020 and EUR 570 000 in 2021). Of this sum, the staff budget was EUR 464 000 (compared with EUR 422 000 in 2021).²⁸⁴ An additional EUR 237 000 from EU-funded programmes was used for ongoing project activities. EUR 8 785 was allocated for the activities of the Monitoring Commission on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and 51 % of these funds were used for the salaries of members of the Commission.

- The share of the annual budget dedicated to the equality body mandate:

The Office's main costs are the salaries of the staff, most of whom are responsible for implementing equal opportunities. There is no separate data for the equality body mandate.

- The total number of staff of the body:

The institution employed 11 civil servants and seven employees in 2022, reduced from 16 civil servants in 2019. In 2022, the Office had four temporarily employed persons.

²⁸³ Andriukaitis, Sabatauskaite and Lietuvos žmogaus teisių centras (2017).

²⁸⁴ Law on the Approval of Financial Indicators of the State Budget and Municipal Budgets of 2021 (*Lietuvos Respublikos 2021 metų valstybės biudžeto ir savivaldybių biudžetų finansinių rodiklių patvirtinimo įstatymas*), TAR, 29 December 2020, No. 28951, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/c9d04b30453011ebb394e1efb98d3e67?jfwid=-wwknh34ok>.

- The number of staff dedicated to the equality body mandate:

13 members of staff are dedicated to the equality body mandate.

In its *Annual Report for 2021*, the Ombudsperson expressed concern that, due to a lack of funding and limited human resources, the employees of the Office had been working at 'more than maximum capacity' for some time. For several years in a row, the competencies of the Office have been constantly expanding, but insufficient funding has been allocated for the expansion of human resources, and educational and anti-discrimination activities have not been funded. Due to a lack of budget allocations, three persons were recruited on a half-time basis in 2022.²⁸⁵ Three positions remain vacant due to a lack of funding.

7.5 Grounds covered by the designated body

The Ombudsperson exercises its functions with respect to all grounds covered by the Law on Equal Treatment: gender, race, 'nationality',²⁸⁶ citizenship, language, origin, social status, including family status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin and religion.²⁸⁷

Article 2(9) of the Law on Equal Treatment provides an exception to direct discrimination with regard to nationality (as in citizenship, *pilietybė*). The other term, *tautybė*, even though it may be translated as 'nationality', refers to ethnicity and is listed among the protected grounds, in addition to origin (*kilmė*) or ethnic origin/belonging (*etninė priklausomybė*).

On the basis of the number of inquiries and complaints received, the Ombudsperson recommended expanding the definition of social status so as to include family status²⁸⁸ and also to include the ground of gender identity as a protected ground.²⁸⁹ Family status was added to the LET in 2022, whereas gender identity has not yet been included.

A balance between the Ombudsperson's work in relation to gender and in relation to other grounds listed in Article 13 of the directive (or all grounds in general) is not discussed in public or reflected in the Ombudsperson's own strategic plans²⁹⁰ or annual reports.²⁹¹ The grounds of gender and disability are mentioned in the strategy, however other measures cover all grounds. The legal staff of the institution specialise in particular grounds, although when it comes to other areas (such as awareness raising, research, etc.) it appears that the expertise does not relate to the specifics of different grounds and debates, meaning that it is not possible to ascertain whether sufficient attention is given to each ground – with the exception of the Commission for Monitoring the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the majority of whose members (four) are appointed by organisations of persons with disabilities, with one member from the Ombudsperson's Office.²⁹²

²⁸⁵ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2023), *Annual Report for 2022*.

²⁸⁶ The term used in the LET is *tautybė*, which refers to belonging to a national minority and is not used with the meaning of 'citizenship'.

²⁸⁷ 'Citizenship' was added to the list in 2017 as a result of the transposition of Directive 2014/54/EU and only applies to citizens of the EU and EEA countries and their family members (partners, however, are not explicitly included).

²⁸⁸ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2019), *Annual Report for 2018*.

²⁸⁹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2020), *Annual Report for 2019*.

²⁹⁰ The strategic action plans of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson for 2022–2024 are available in Lithuanian at: <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/01/patvirtintas-2022-2024-m.-strateginis-planas.pdf>.

²⁹¹ The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson's annual reports are available in Lithuanian at: <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/veikla/metines-ataskaitos/405>.

²⁹² Order of the Ombudsperson for Equal Opportunities on the Approval of Regulations on the Commission for Monitoring the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under the Office of the Ombudsperson for Equal Opportunities (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus įsakymas dėl žmonių su negalia stebėsenos komisijos prie Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnybos nuostatų patvirtinimo*), 31 May 2019, No. V-18, <https://www.lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2019/06/zmoniu-su-negalia-teisiu-stebesenos-komisijos-nuostatai-.pdf>.

The Ombudsperson continues to function in a rather reactive way when investigating complaints, addressing issues that arise from complaints, but also tries to address different issues, carrying out opinion polls, research and overviews. The number of investigations into complaints on different grounds cannot be considered a sufficient measure to assess whether all grounds receive equivalent attention.

7.6 Competences of the designated body – and their independent exercise

In accordance with Article 17 of the Law on Equal Treatment, the competence of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson encompasses:

- 1) investigating complaints regarding direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment and providing objective and impartial advice with regard to this function;
 - 2) reporting on the implementation of this Law to Parliament and submitting recommendations to governmental and municipal institutions and organisations on the revision of legal acts and priorities in the policy of implementation of equal rights;
 - 3) conducting independent research related to complaints of discrimination and drafting independent reports and overviews of the situation regarding discrimination;
 - 4) conducting awareness raising, educational and preventive work;
 - 5) exchanging information with analogous institutions in other Member States, other institutions of foreign countries and international organisations;
 - 6) monitoring the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (since 1 July 2019).
- a) Independent assistance to victims

In Lithuania, the designated body does not formally have the authority to provide independent assistance to victims in pursuing their complaints of discrimination in the courts or using another administrative procedure. The Ombudsperson itself is a quasi-judicial institution, so taking the side of the victim is rather problematic. Therefore, assistance to victims should be viewed from the perspective of a tribunal-type body and its functions.

According to the Law on Equal Treatment, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson 'provides independent consultations' with regard to various inquiries. The procedure, possible outcomes, length or scope of these consultations is not detailed in the Law or any other act. Therefore, in the opinion of the author, individual victims do not know what exactly to expect from these consultations. It entirely depends on the attitude and position of a particular consultant. It is apparent from the Office's annual reports that consultations are provided by the legal department. Although this is the only provision that could be interpreted as 'independent assistance' to victims of discrimination, it is rather vague. Since most discrimination complaints reach the Ombudsperson first, in practice, the Ombudsperson carries out consultancy work and potentially advises the applicants on which procedural approach to use to pursue justice. On a few occasions, the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has been involved in judicial proceedings as an expert witness on the side of the complainant, providing its expertise on the matter or as an independent institution providing expert conclusions (the Office submitted conclusions or participated as a third party in six civil cases in 2022). In most cases (12), however, it is involved as a defendant, when complaints are submitted to the courts to rebut a decision of the Ombudsperson. In 2022, the Ombudsperson participated in a total of 17 administrative cases and issued conclusions or participated as a third party in six civil cases.²⁹³

²⁹³ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2023), *Annual Report for 2022*.

In practice, according to the representatives of the Office, the staff devote much of their time to providing consultations and information to ensure that victims of discrimination receive free consultations on possible actions in each situation. Indeed, both the law and the staff of the Office perceive these consultation activities as fulfilling the function of 'assisting victims', as required by the Racial Equality Directive. According to the respondents to the stakeholder survey in 2016, the ability of victims of discrimination to take advantage of the services of the Office to remedy their rights could give them a sense of security and provide at least a theoretical possibility of assistance and hope (in the opinion of nine respondents). Quite a few of the respondents said that the Office was open and ready to provide information, but some did not know what specific assistance the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson provided to victims of discrimination (nine respondents). When asked to evaluate the efficiency of the assistance provided to victims of discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment on a scale of 1 to 10, one third of respondents said that they could not give an evaluation, and the rest rated the efficiency of the assistance provided at 5.92.²⁹⁴

It is hard to evaluate the effectiveness of the consultations provided, as no monitoring mechanism has been created for this. The annual reports mention the numbers of inquiries and complaints received. The *Annual Report for 2020* stressed that the lawyers of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson consulted with 595 persons who contacted the Office by phone (due to the pandemic, there were no consultations provided at the Office).²⁹⁵ In 2022, the Office received 1 479 enquiries by phone, in person, and via email and Facebook, 605 oral consultations were carried out, 732 clarifications, conclusions and answers were provided, and 142 enquiries were answered on Facebook.

The strategic document mentions one of the objectives: to increase the number of persons addressing the Ombudsperson regarding the alleged violation of equal opportunities. However, the resources being formally allocated for implementation of this function are not mentioned.²⁹⁶

b) Independent surveys and reports

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has competence to conduct independent surveys on the situation of discrimination, and to publish independent reports, in accordance with Article 17(2) of the Law on Equal Treatment.

The publications,²⁹⁷ surveys and other analyses²⁹⁸ that have been carried out can be found on the Ombudsperson's website.

In 2022, the Ombudsperson produced a number of surveys and reports, in particular *More balance*²⁹⁹ and the *Report of the Independent Review of Equal Opportunities for Persons Crossing the Belarus-Lithuania Border in Places of Detention*.³⁰⁰ In addition, a number of surveys and analyses were carried out at the request of the Ombudsperson: the *Representative public opinion survey on reconciling work and private life*;³⁰¹ the

²⁹⁴ Andriukaitis, Sabatauskaite and Lietuvos žmogaus teisių centras (2017).

²⁹⁵ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *Annual Report for 2021*.

²⁹⁶ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *Strategic Action Plan for 2022-2024*, adopted on 14 January 2022, <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/01/patvirtintas-2022-2024-m.-strateginis-planas.pdf>.

²⁹⁷ Publications by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, see <https://lygybe.lt/lt/tarnybos-leidiniai>.

²⁹⁸ Surveys and analysis either commissioned or carried out by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, see <https://lygybe.lt/lt/tyrimailygybessrityje>.

²⁹⁹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *More Balance (Daugiau balanso)*, <https://daugiaubalanso.lt/darbuotojai/leidinys/>.

³⁰⁰ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *Report of the Independent Review of Equal Opportunities for Persons Crossing the Belarus-Lithuania Border in Places of Detention (Baltarusijos ir Lietuvos sieną kirtusių asmenų lygių galimybių užtikrinimas sulaikymo vietoje)*, https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2023/01/2022-12-30_nepriklausomos-stebesenos-ataskaita.pdf.

³⁰¹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *Representative public opinion survey on reconciling work and private life (Pakartotinė reprezentatyvi visuomenės nuomonės apklausa apie asmeninio gyvenimo ir darbo*

Representative public opinion survey on the evaluation of women with disabilities;³⁰² and the *Representative public opinion survey on hate speech*.³⁰³

Most surveys and analyses are outsourced to external experts, institutes or agencies, or are carried out by non-governmental organisations. The Ombudsperson does not have sufficient funding to hire experts to carry out analysis or surveys.

Annual reports are submitted to the Parliament by 15 March each year. The Ombudsperson puts additional effort into presenting the results from previous years to the public, inviting stakeholders to their presentations. In addition, all the annual reports are available on the website of the Ombudsperson.

The Office has been adopting strategic plans since 2016.³⁰⁴ The plan for 2022-2024 highlights educational and preventive activities, the dissemination of information on equal opportunities, capacity building for public and private actors in the field of equal opportunities, and discrimination prevention and intervention, with some specific outcome indicators.

c) Recommendations

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has authority to make independent recommendations on discrimination issues. According to Article 23 of the LET, the Ombudsperson can include recommendations in the annual report that it submits to the Parliament.

The author is not aware of any information that would lead to doubts about the independent implementation of this function by the current Ombudsperson or the Office.

Recommendations to amend specific acts or policies can also be issued as a result of an investigation if a certain act has been found to be discriminatory. The Ombudsperson also issues recommendations regarding certain legal acts or policies in its annual reports, when it gets involved in working groups with different ministries, or sometimes in separate cases, after analysing the provisions of a draft law.

However, most recommendations to amend legal acts, when not relating to the investigation of complaints, usually do not have deadlines set for them, therefore they cannot be monitored in the same manner.

Back in 2017, almost half of respondents believed that the Ombudsperson was not active enough, and most respondents commented that the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson should be more active in making suggestions on possible improvements of legal acts, but also pointed out that more human resources would be necessary to fulfil this function.³⁰⁵ However, this has not been evaluated in previous years.

derinimą), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/07/lietuvos-gyventoju-nuostatos-darbo-ir-asmeninio-gyvenimo-derinimo-klausimais-2022.pdf>.

³⁰² Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *Representative public opinion survey on the evaluation of women with disabilities. Detailed report (Reprezentatyvi visuomenės nuomonės apklausa apie moterų su negalia vertinimą. Išsami ataskaita)*, <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/12/reprezentatyvi-visuomenes-nuomones-apklausa-apie-moteru-su-negalia-vertinima-2022.pdf>.

³⁰³ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *Representative survey of the Lithuanian population on hate speech (Reprezentatyvi Lietuvos gyventojų apklausa apie neapykantos kalbą.)*, https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/07/omnibus-tyrimo-ataskaita-del-neapykantos-k.reiskinio2022.07.27_final.pdf.

³⁰⁴ See the website of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson at: <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/administracine-informacija/planavimo-dokumentai/366>.

³⁰⁵ Andriukaitis, Sabatauskaite and Lietuvos žmogaus teisių centras (2017).

d) Prevention, promotion and awareness-raising

Awareness raising and the promotion of equal opportunities was formally added to the competence of the Ombudsperson only on 1 January 2017, even though awareness raising and preventive work have been an integral part of the everyday work of the institution since its foundation. In the current office, three members of staff work for the communications department, and four deal with various awareness-raising and education projects. It should be noted that this particular element of the mandate is being implemented quite effectively. With the support of EU funds, the Ombudsperson carried out a number of effective awareness-raising campaigns, which increased the visibility of the Ombudsperson. In cooperation with NGOs, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson introduced a number of initiatives: it ran training courses for state and municipal institutions and companies and introduced the Equal Opportunities Ruler – an instrument allowing for the self-evaluation of the equal opportunities situation at a particular workplace, etc.

The Ombudsperson was involved by the Government in implementing and/or monitoring a number of action plans and strategies implemented now and previously. The most recent are the Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-discrimination for 2015-2020³⁰⁶ and the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2015-2020.³⁰⁷ Therefore, the Government considered the Ombudsperson as the de facto key institution for awareness raising and the promotion of equal opportunities, despite the fact that funding is not provided for its preventive function. However, the role of the Ombudsperson is not included in the new Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-discrimination for 2021-2023.³⁰⁸

It should be noted that awareness raising, and the promotion of equal treatment are considered by stakeholders as very important tasks of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. When asked if awareness-raising and discrimination prevention activities should be included as part of the mandate of the Office, as many as 77 % of respondents to the stakeholder survey replied that it should, and only 13 % of respondents believed that it should not. Respondents said that educational activities carried out by the Office had the strongest impact on safeguarding equal treatment, followed by complaint investigation activities (13 out of 30 respondents).³⁰⁹

A worrying trend is that, for a number of years now, many promotional activities must be carried out without funding from the state budget. They are mostly implemented thanks to the additional funding received by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, in cooperation with civil society organisations and other institutions. 12 different projects were implemented, continuing with the integration of equal opportunities and awareness-raising activities. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended in its most recent concluding observations 'that the State party allocate sufficient funding to the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson so that it can take up its preventive and education competences.'³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ Decision of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Respublikos 2015 m. sausio 28 d. nutarimas Nr. 46 Dėl Nediskriminavimo skatinimo tarpinstitucinio veiklos plano patvirtinimo*), <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/fa5d2b103a3f11e7b66ae890e1368363/UBCSaHNOQf>.

³⁰⁷ Order of the Minister of Culture of 29 January 2015 No. IV-48 on approval of the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2015–2020.

³⁰⁸ Action Plan for Promotion of Non-discrimination in 2021-2023, adopted by the order of the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour (*Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministro įsakymas dėl nediskriminavimo skatinimo 2021-2023 veiksmų plano patvirtinimo*) No. A1-1256, 11 December 2020, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/b1c5e3b03ae511eb8d9fe110e148c770>.

³⁰⁹ Andriukaitis, Sabatauskaite and Lietuvos žmogaus teisių centras (2017).

³¹⁰ UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (2019), *Concluding observations on the combined ninth and tenth periodic reports of Lithuania* (CERD/C/LTU/9-10), 9 May 2019, available at: <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhsu4Y3oyIeXJMcf%2fjd5knlrIizFYCajC%2bxSue9PULLcifFnMqvTC4%2b6VhhJlvm6HvJojahtmleyBxciERuZE9s88q4AS0RgOpjIMUGJ2Hser0c0WoTEYT1oQnKOVBK0SQ%3d%3d>.

e) Other competences

In accordance with the amendments of 11 December 2018, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has been monitoring compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since 1 July 2019. A Monitoring Commission on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established to carry out this function, working alongside the Ombudsperson's Office, yet no additional funding was assigned to the Office for carrying out this role in 2019-2021. In 2022, EUR 8 785 was allocated for the activities of the Monitoring Commission on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and 51 % of these funds were used for the salaries of the members of the Commission.

7.7 Legal standing of the designated body

In Lithuania, the designated body does not have legal standing:

- to bring discrimination complaints (on behalf of identified victim(s) to court;
- to bring discrimination complaints (on behalf of non-identified victims) to court;
- to intervene in legal cases concerning discrimination, for example as an *amicus curiae*.

In Lithuania, the designated body does have legal standing to bring discrimination complaints ex officio to court. This can be done only when applying to the administrative court asking it to establish whether a normative administrative act (or a part of it), or a rule adopted by a religious community, a political party, a political organisation or an association complies with the Law on Equal Treatment or the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (Article 29(2(8)) of the LET).

The Ombudsperson can be involved in court proceedings as a third party or, in some situations, as an expert witness on the side of the complainant, providing expertise on the matter and assisting the victim or institution in reaching a conclusion in court. The Ombudsperson, as any other person, can request to join the legal proceedings in court in cases where the conclusion of a particular case might have an impact on their rights and duties.

It has to be noted that the Ombudsperson itself does not have the authority to go to the court for compensation of damages or represent victims in the courts. The draft law, which has been registered since 2019, includes a public interest litigation function, but the law is still pending.

7.8 Dispute resolution

a) Quasi-judicial functions

In Lithuania, the designated body is a quasi-judicial institution. Its functions are mostly regulated by Articles 24 to 30 of the Law on Equal Treatment. It also has other functions, as described in this report; therefore, it is a mixed-type institution. The body can issue binding enforceable decisions as well as non-binding opinions.

The decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson do not include compensation for damages to the victim of discrimination. In practice, the Ombudsperson usually issues an opinion (which is essentially non-binding) to stop discriminatory actions and occasionally admonishes those who commit violations.

According to the law, the Ombudsperson may take the following decisions:

- to refer relevant material to the public prosecution authorities if indications of an offence have been established;

- to address an opinion to an appropriate person or institution to discontinue the actions that are violating equal opportunities;
- to recommend that a person or an institution change or repeal an administrative act (or part of it) related to such violations;
- to begin proceedings on administrative violations;
- to declare the complaint unfounded if the alleged violations referred to in the complaint have not been established;
- to admonish those who have committed a violation (in such cases, the Ombudsperson issues a warning or recommendation to halt the discriminatory practices, although these are not essentially binding);
- to issue binding decisions to stop discriminatory advertising campaigns, establishing the applicable terms and conditions;
- to address an application to the administrative court, asking it to establish whether a normative administrative act (or a part of it), or a rule adopted by a religious community, a political party, a political organisation or an association complies with the Law on Equal Treatment or the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

In opinion of the author, it ought to be possible to issue a binding decision in any cases of discriminatory practice (not just discriminatory advertising). However, in the opinion of the staff of the Office of the Ombudsperson, the issuing of non-binding opinions to discontinue discriminatory practices is a sufficient tool.

i) Power to impose sanctions

Despite the fact that the Ombudsperson has been involved in many promotional-type activities, from a legal point of view, the main function of the Office of the Ombudsperson has always been quasi-judicial. Not only can the Ombudsperson investigate complaints; it can also issue administrative sanctions in accordance with the Administrative Violations Code.

ii) Nature and level of sanctions that can be imposed

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has a right to impose binding administrative sanctions – fines and obligations. It also issues warnings, although these are not binding.

Obligations can be imposed only in cases of discriminatory advertising, for example by ruling that discriminatory advertisements must be withdrawn or changed. Fines can be imposed in all types of cases. However, according to its annual reports, the Ombudsperson has issued a fine on only a few occasions during its past 18 years of operation.³¹¹ Fines can range from EUR 40 to EUR 560 (or EUR 560 to EUR 1 200 for repeated offences) and are provided for in the Administrative Violations Code (Article 81). However, the Administrative Violations Code provides that the initial fine issued should be for half the minimum amount (which would be EUR 20 for a violation of the Law on Equal Treatment), and only if the offender does not voluntarily pay this fine can a further (bigger) fine be imposed. The former Ombudsperson stated numerous times in the Office's previous annual reports that it did not consider a fine to be an effective solution to discriminatory situations.

In 2014, this issue was raised by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.³¹² In the past, the Ombudsperson recommended that the Parliament should expand the list of sanctions and allow multiple sanctions in order to ensure the discontinuation of discriminatory acts and also to serve as dissuasive sanctions.³¹³ No major legal changes were made in expanding the list of sanctions or in allowing multiple

³¹¹ The administrative penalties imposed are mentioned in the annual reports of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson for 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2012.

³¹² CEDAW/C/LTU/5.

³¹³ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2009), *Annual Report for 2009*.

sanctions up to 2022. In 2014, the Ombudsperson herself (a temporary substitute) identified the issue of sanctions in the annual report.

In the opinion of the author, the sanctions imposed by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson are not effective, proportionate or dissuasive. The need to review the mechanism for enforcing sanctions and decisions by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is supported by the 2016 stakeholder survey results.³¹⁴ As many as half of the respondents believed that the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson lacked the powers to ensure the enforcement of his/her decisions, and as many as 23 respondents out of 30 pointed out that the sanctions and penalties set out in legislation were not sufficiently effective, proportionate and dissuasive.

iii) Ability to appeal

The decisions of the Ombudsperson can be appealed to the Administrative Disputes Commission or the courts, and they have been appealed in court 12 times during 2022.

iv) Enforcement of binding decisions

According to Article 30 of the Law on Equal Opportunities, decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson must be examined by the persons to whom the decision is addressed and the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson must be informed about the results of this examination and the implementation of each decision.

Persons who fail to comply with the requirements of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson are liable under Article 505 of the Code of Administrative Offences and may be fined from EUR 80 to EUR 780 (for natural persons) or from EUR 390 to EUR 1 950 (for legal persons). Repeated commission of an administrative offence is punishable by a fine of between EUR 720 and EUR 1 170 for individuals and of between EUR 1 100 and EUR 6 000 for managers or other responsible persons of organisations (legal persons).

Since May 2017, a table of opinions and decisions, also showing implementation status (i.e. a monitoring report) has been available on the website of the Ombudsperson.³¹⁵ However, not all of the decisions or opinions are presented in the table.

v) Implementation of non-binding opinions

According to the Ombudsperson, its opinions seeking to stop discriminatory behaviour or to change certain practices are usually adhered to without dispute, although this is difficult to assess, as the monitoring table does not provide a full picture of the opinions adopted. A lack of respect for the authority of the Ombudsperson can be illustrated by a case in 2017, when the mayor of the capital city, Vilnius, publicly stated that he would not follow the Ombudsperson's opinion and would put it in the bottom drawer of his desk, calling it 'absurd' and 'an example of bureaucratic stupidity'.³¹⁶ The case reached the courts, which upheld the opinion of the Ombudsperson. Similar situations were observed in 2022, where in one investigation a company refused to provide any information and ignored enquiries, and another company ignored the Ombudsperson's opinion and did not provide information on its implementation.

³¹⁴ Andriukaitis, Sabatauskaite and Lietuvos žmogaus teisių centras (2017).

³¹⁵ Table for Monitoring the Implementation of the Decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (*Lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimų vykdymo stebėseną*):

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NP38IHq2nzKzs-bbM2bnZBVFTL5_FVxhDqiR5oRXHo0/edit#gid=0

³¹⁶ 'Reikalavimas regioninio parko vadovui važinėti dviračiu diskriminavo neįgaliuosius', *15min*, 9 March 2017, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/reikalavimas-regioninio-parko-vadovui-vazineti-dviraciui-diskriminavo-neigaliuosius-56-766068>.

b) Amicable settlements

Article 29(3)(3) states that the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson may terminate an investigation when the applicant and the offender have reconciled. In practice, the Ombudsperson often acts as a mediator as, according to the Office of the Ombudsperson, peaceful resolution of discrimination is one of its main objectives. However, the Ombudsperson's role as a mediator is not defined in the law and is not formalised in any way, therefore the outcome of the mediation is neither binding nor compensatory. No special conciliation procedures for cases of discrimination exist at national level. Although it could be a useful tool, mediation in discrimination disputes is not covered in national law either, thus limiting the ways of resolving a dispute.

7.9 Procedural safeguards

In Lithuania, the Law on Equal Opportunities does not provide for procedural safeguards when the Ombudsperson performs several interrelated functions.

Formally, the work of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson is mostly focused on investigating complaints from victims of discrimination. This is the main function of the Office under the current legislation. Although the law provides that the investigation may be terminated if the parties reconcile, the mediation procedure and the function of the mediator are not formalised. The Ombudsperson is therefore not restricted from conducting an investigation, participating in a conciliation procedure and subsequently issuing a binding decision to one of the parties if they have failed to reconcile. However, as the author was informed by the Office, there is no internal procedure regulating consultants and complaint handlers, but lawyers provide advice in such a way as to avoid any conflict of interest. During the consultations, information is gathered as to whether the matter falls within the competence of the Office and whether there are signs of discrimination. If so, a complaint is suggested for investigation. If the matter is not within the competence of the Office, its staff try to refer the person who has made the complaint to another body.

Moreover, the designated body does not formally have the authority to provide independent assistance to victims in pursuing their complaints of discrimination in the courts or by using another administrative procedure. Therefore, assistance to victims should be viewed from the perspective of a tribunal-type body and its functions.

7.10 Data collection by the designated body

a) Registration by the body of complaints and decisions

In Lithuania, the equality body registers the number of complaints of discrimination made and the number of opinions and decisions (by ground, field, type of discrimination, etc.). These data are available to the public.

The data on the number of complaints and other inquiries is usually provided in the annual reports of the Ombudsperson. Decisions and opinions are uploaded on the website of the Ombudsperson, grouped by grounds of discrimination.³¹⁷ In the past, this data was not systematically provided to the public (the Ombudsperson would, however, include excerpts from its decisions in its annual reports). However, from the beginning of 2015 the situation started to improve, and the Ombudsperson began publishing some of its decisions and opinions online. The trend continued in 2016, and almost all decisions and opinions are now being regularly uploaded to the official website of the institution.

³¹⁷ Official website of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, decisions of the Ombudsperson, <https://lygybe.lt/lt/kontrolieriaus-priimti-sprendimai>.

The Ombudsperson received 207 complaints in 2022, compared with 222 in 2021, and 1 479 inquiries by email, telephone or Facebook or during consultations at the Office. Since 2022, written and oral enquiries have been summarised together. Lawyers and other experts within the Ombudsperson's office provided 732 clarifications, conclusions and answers to various requests. 605 oral consultations were given and 142 queries were answered via Facebook messages. It is common practice for the Ombudsperson to start an investigation 'on its own initiative' after receiving particular information, either from an NGO or from an individual.

It is worth noting that the amendments to the Law on Equal Treatment adopted in 2022, which expanded protection from harassment to access to goods and services, have proved to be much needed and necessary. The majority of investigations in 2022 concerned discrimination in access to goods and services, and there were 89 complaints and 314 enquiries about possible discrimination in this field (including harassment). In 2021, the most frequent complaint concerned the activities of state and municipal institutions, and people were quite active in enquiring about various issues related to the labour market. The Ombudsperson's investigations revealed the highest number of breaches in the field of goods and services.

The biggest number of complaints were submitted based on the grounds of (1) gender (57); (2) disability (48); and (3) social status (29). A number of investigations concerned multiple grounds, judging from an analysis of decisions provided on the website of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson.³¹⁸

b) Equality data collection

In Lithuania, the equality body collects general equality data by conducting various surveys and pieces of research. The website of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman provides information on the representation of women and men in decision-making at national and local government level.³¹⁹ It also compiles indexes of the equal opportunities situation in Lithuania as measured by various international organisations and NGOs such as the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), ILGA Europe and Transgender Europe (TGEU).

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has access to data collected by other institutions, such as the Department of Statistics (various statistical information on population, employment, education, etc.) and the Department of Informatics and Communications (on pre-trial investigations).

7.11 Roma and Travellers

As has been noted in previous years, there has been a lack of complaints from Roma people throughout the years. No complaints were made by Roma people from 2012 to 2014, and only a few complaints were made from 2015 to 2017. No complaints were made from 2018 to 2021.

In 2022, the Ombudsperson received a complaint of discrimination and harassment in a healthcare facility. A Roma woman and her ill mother were singled out because of their ethnic origin, called gypsies and otherwise harassed.

A commission was set up to investigate the incident at the medical establishment, which found that the employee had provoked a conflict situation in which she had humiliated and insulted the applicant's mother by verbally emphasising her ethnicity. In view of the fact

³¹⁸ Decisions of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson available online in Lithuanian at: <https://lygybe.lt/lt/veikla/kontrolieriaus-sprendimai/369>.

³¹⁹ Official website of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, equality data, available in Lithuanian at: <https://lygybe.lt/lt/lyciu-lygybes-statistika>.

that the actions of the employee had been investigated by the medical facility and were found to be in breach of its internal rules of procedure, and that a decision was made to give her a warning, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson terminated the investigation into possible discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, as the acts in breach of equal opportunities had been stopped.³²⁰

Another incident led to a pre-trial investigation for discrimination under Article 169 of the Criminal Code. Two Roma women and a little girl were going to have a meal at a café in Jonava, but the staff informed them that 'Roma are only given takeaways'. The women disagreed and demanded an explanation, but the owner of the café threw them out into the street, causing one of the women to suffer a health problem, as a result of which she needed to go to hospital for a check-up.

The victims lodged a complaint with the police about the incident, but the officials were reluctant to accept it immediately. A few weeks later, the Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights helped to prepare a complaint to the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, which forwarded it to the Prosecutor's Office after finding indications that a criminal offence had been committed. The pre-trial investigation into discrimination is still ongoing.

Representatives of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson have been involved in the working group monitoring the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2015-2020, where concerns have been raised regarding the prevalent discrimination against Roma persons, mostly in housing and employment. No complaints were submitted or investigations started on the initiative of the Ombudsperson in these fields. However, representatives of the Office reported that they had provided a number of consultations to Roma persons or organisations working with Roma persons.

Roma issues were not explicitly mentioned in the strategic plan of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson for 2020-2022.³²¹

³²⁰ Decision of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson No. (21)SN-95)SP-62, 3 October 2022 (*Lietuvos Respublikos lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus sprendimas dėl galimos diskriminacijos tautybės, etninės priklausomybės, kilmės pagrindais VŠĮ Respublikinėje Panevėžio ligoninėje tyrimo*), <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2022/10/sprendimas-22-sn-95.pdf>.

³²¹ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, *Strategic Action Plan for 2020-2022*, adopted by Order of the Ombudsperson No. V-2, 5 February 2020, <https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2020/02/2020-2022-strateginis-planaspaspatvirtintas.pdf>.

8 IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

8.1 Dissemination of information, dialogue with NGOs and between social partners

- a) Dissemination of information about legal protection against discrimination (Article 10 Directive 2000/43 and Article 12 Directive 2000/78)

A number of awareness-raising initiatives have been implemented, mostly by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and/or non-governmental organisations, to disseminate information about legal protection from discrimination.

The Ombudsperson's website and Facebook page are being updated on a regular basis, a number of awareness-raising campaigns have been organised, and almost all the decisions of the Ombudsperson are being uploaded online. The Facebook page is used not only for communication, but for holding consultations on discrimination. The implementation of recommendations made by the Ombudsperson after investigations of complaints can be observed by the public.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour organises annual billboard or video campaigns promoting equal opportunities, which are covered by the funding contained under the Ministry's Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-discrimination 2021-2023.

In 2022, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson focused on introducing the new changes to the Law on Equal Treatment, which expanded protection against harassment and victimisation and introduced a new ground of discrimination – the status of the family (which comes under social status).

A worrying trend is that many promotional activities now have to be carried out without funding from the state budget. It should be noted that in planning and drawing up its budget, the Office expresses the need for funding for these activities each year, but has never received targeted funding for public opinion polls or awareness-raising campaigns.³²² The author of this report is aware that these activities are mostly covered through drawing up and implementing projects financed by the EU. This means that many educational and prevention activities are thematically determined by project applications and by the EU's overall strategic objectives in the field of non-discrimination, rather than by specific national priorities and needs. In 2019, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination therefore recommended in its concluding observations 'that the State party allocate sufficient funding to the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson so that it can take up its preventive and education competences'.

Initiatives are often also implemented by civil society organisations, mostly without funding from the state budget.

- b) Measures to encourage dialogue with NGOs with a view to promoting the principle of equal treatment (Article 12 Directive 2000/43 and Article 14 Directive 2000/78)

In practice, the Ombudsperson is involved in various projects that have been organised in cooperation with NGOs to implement national non-discrimination measures. For instance, in 2022, the Ombudsperson implemented a project on women with disabilities with Mental Health Perspectives, an NGO. The Ombudsperson is also involved in other NGO initiatives to promote equal opportunities and non-discrimination, such as the prevention of hate speech, the improvement of protection from sexual violence and the adoption of the law on same-sex civil unions.

³²² Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2022), *Annual Report for 2021*.

Awareness raising, educational activities and research are conducted by the Ombudsperson or in partnership and cooperation with other institutions and non-governmental organisations. One must take into account that NGOs operate on very limited human and financial resources, there are no NGOs that specialise only in anti-discrimination work. There are only a few NGOs that deal with human rights (and non-discrimination is only one field of their activities), and there are organisations that work on particular grounds (women's rights, rights of persons with disabilities, LGBT rights, etc.), but there are almost no ethnic-minority NGOs working on lobbying or policy making in the sphere of equal opportunities.

There is a lack of strategic planning in promoting the principle of equal treatment. NGOs are not involved in monitoring the action plan for the promotion of non-discrimination. No monitoring sessions have been organised and as noted, most of the provisions of the action plan are related to work implemented by different state institutions without the plan being adopted. Thus, it can be said that the Government has not implemented the directives properly in this respect.

- c) Measures to promote dialogue between social partners to give effect to the principle of equal treatment within workplace practices, codes of practice, workforce monitoring (Article 11 Directive 2000/43 and Article 13 Directive 2000/78)

Codes of practice to give effect to the principle of equal treatment in workplace practice and workforce monitoring are not commonly implemented in the country. The Ombudsperson's Office finalised its Equal Opportunities Ruler for measuring equal opportunities in the workplace in 2020. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson launched a website for employers on equality plans (<http://www.lygybesplanai.lt/>) and has promoted equal opportunities in the labour market. These initiatives have been continued to encourage other companies and employers to implement similar practices.

A number of companies signed up to diversity charters in 2018 and, in 2019, the first Annual Conference for Diversity Charters was organised by the Diversity Development Group, an NGO. In 2020, the initiative of the Lithuanian Diversity Charter became an association, uniting private, public and non-governmental sector organisations to create an open and inclusive work environment and to strengthen their sense of social responsibility. As of the end of 2022, the Diversity Charter had 24 members from the public, private and NGO sectors.

- d) Addressing the situation of Roma and Travellers

There is no single body or entity appointed on the national level to address Roma issues. Even though the Department of National Minorities is coordinating the implementation of the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2015-2020, it does not have any role to oblige certain institutions to take actions. The situation of Roma is addressed by many institutions from different angles – the municipalities (mainly social, housing and employment issues), the Department of National Minorities (various functions – from funding the non-formal education of children to carrying out research and/or funding cultural activities), the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and others. In 2022 the Department of National Minorities approved the Action Plan for Roma Integration 2022-2023³²³. The action plan sets out various measures, but a significant part of these

³²³ Order of the Director of the Department of National Minorities of 1 July 2022 No. IV-33 on approval of the Action Plan for Roma Integration 2022-2023 (*Tautinių mažumų departamento prie Lietuvos Respublikos vyriausybės direktoriaus įsakymas dėl romų integracijos priemonių plano 2022-2023 m. patvirtinimo*, 2022 m. liepos 1 d. Nr. IV-33), <https://tmde.lrv.lt/uploads/tmde/documents/files/%C4%AEsakymas%20d%C4%97I%20Rom%C5%B3%20integracijos%20%C4%AF%20Lietuvos%20visuomen%C4%99%20priemoni%C5%B3%20plano%202022%E2%80%932023%20patvirtinimo%20%C4%AEV-33%202022-07-01.pdf>.

must be implemented as part of the regular functions of particular institutions (employment exchange, municipalities, etc.).

8.2 Measures to ensure compliance with the principle of equal treatment (Article 14 Directive 2000/43, Article 16 Directive 2000/78)

a) Compliance of national legislation (Articles 14(a) and 16(a))

All draft laws in Lithuania have to go through a certain procedure, partly in order to evaluate their compliance with EU law. In one way or another, the main laws regulating the various fields of life have already been adapted in compliance with the equality provisions contained in Directives 2000/78 and 2000/43. Some provisions of laws, regulations and rules that are still in force are contrary to the principles of equality but, since no legal audit has been undertaken and there is no review mechanism for all this legislation, these inconsistencies emerge on a case-by-case basis.

There is no special mechanism ensuring that all laws do not violate the principle of equality. However, there are general principles on conflict between laws, such as *lex superior derogat legi inferiori* (a law higher in the hierarchy repeals the lower one). The Labour Code is considered a higher law than the Law on Equal Treatment, for example. Another valid principle in cases of conflict between laws is *lex posterior derogat legi priori* (more recent rules prevail over less recent rules). The principle of *lex specialis derogat legi generali* can be applied, but only when two laws or sets of rules with contradictory provisions are at the same level in the hierarchy.

Moreover, the principle of non-discrimination is enshrined in the Constitution. According to the Constitution, the Constitutional Court ensures constitutional legality by deciding whether laws and other legal acts adopted by the Parliament are in compliance with the Constitution and whether the acts adopted by the President or the Government comply with the Constitution and legislation. Of course, any lower-level acts must be in compliance with the Constitution, international treaties and laws. Therefore, all lower legal acts must be in compliance with the principle of equality.

The Constitutional Court adopted a landmark decision in 2019, following the CJEU's decision on *Coman and Others* (C-673/16). The Constitutional Court considered the grounds for a same-sex family reunification, having in mind that same-sex marriages and partnerships are not recognised in Lithuania. The applicant was a spouse married to a Lithuanian national, the marriage having been concluded in Denmark.

The Constitutional Court noted that, by law, a residence permit may be issued to a foreign national who is not a citizen of a Member State of the EU or the European Free Trade Association, and that this is not exclusively in cases where an opposite-sex family member of such a foreign national resides in the Republic of Lithuania, i.e. a person with whom a marriage or registered partnership has lawfully been concluded in another state and who is a citizen of the Republic of Lithuania or a foreign national holding a residence permit, but also in cases where a same-sex family member of such a foreign national resides in the Republic of Lithuania.³²⁴

Article 5 of the Law on Equal Treatment enshrines in law that 'state and local government institutions and agencies must within the scope of their competence ensure that in all the legal acts drafted and passed by them, equal rights and treatment are laid down without regard to gender, race, 'nationality', citizenship, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions or views, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or religion.' Each year, the Ombudsperson assesses different orders or even laws and their compliance with the

³²⁴ Conclusion of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania elaborating on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, 11.01.2019, No. KT3-N1/2019, available in English at: <http://lrkt.lt/en/court-acts/search/170/ta1915/content>.

provisions of the Law on Equal Treatment and makes recommendations to amend them, to the Government, to ministries, or to the Parliament. In 2022, the Ombudsperson made recommendations for regulatory change in a number of areas: the Labour Code and the definition of psychological violence and harassment on the basis of sex; the Civil Union regulating the relationship between same-sex couples; the Internal Service Statute and the protection against harassment and other forms of discrimination; and the recommendations for measures to advance the development of the National Progress Plan programmes.³²⁵

b) Compliance of other rules/clauses (Articles 14(b) and 16(b))

There is no special mechanism to ensure that contracts, collective agreements, internal rules or undertakings are in line with anti-discrimination law.

Article 26 of the Labour Code sets a number of obligations for employers: to ensure the implementation of gender equality and non-discrimination principles; to apply the same selection criteria, ensuring that working conditions and the opportunities to improve one's qualifications are equal; to take the necessary measures to ensure that employees do not experience harassment or sexual harassment and that instructions to discriminate are not given; and to protect employees from other hostile behaviour. There is also an obligation for employers that employ more than 50 employees to adopt measures aimed at promoting and implementing equality policies in the workplace. Even though some of these obligations on employers are set out by the Law on Equal Treatment and the Labour Code, no formal mechanisms have been created to monitor their implementation and therefore to check whether the policies adopted are sufficient and effective and are being implemented in practice.

³²⁵ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (2023), *Annual Report for 2022*, https://lygybe.lt/data/public/uploads/2023/05/lygiu_galimybiu_kontrolieriaus_tarnybos_metine_ataskaita_2022_leidiny-2.pdf.

9 COORDINATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

In December 2020, an Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-discrimination 2021-2023 was adopted by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.³²⁶ The main implementing body is the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Police Department and the Department of National Minorities are also involved for implementing some activities. Unlike in previous years, the equality body is not involved in the implementation of the plan, but it participated in its preparation.

However, the current action plan for 2021-2023 has been largely criticised by non-governmental organisations, international institutions and different groups affected by discrimination. During the preparation of the Action Plan, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson pointed out that the measures in the plan are being formulated as abstract objectives or tasks of a broad nature, and that there is a lack of specificity and clarity.³²⁷ The plan also uses formal measures and sets relatively low values for the evaluation criteria; for example, focusing not on the outcome but on the number of participants. The plan has been developed and coordinated in parallel with other programmes and plans overseen by different ministries, resulting in a lack of integrity and continuity.

In addition, as with previous action plans, the challenge of insufficient funding remains. For instance, the previous action plan in 2016 was given only 35 % of its original budget, according to rough estimates. The Inter-institutional Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-discrimination 2012-2014,³²⁸ was not implemented in full – in 2014 it received EUR 51 627 (or 44.3 % of the initially planned funding). In this respect, 2015 was an exception (97 % of the funding was actually allocated), although the total budget for anti-discrimination measures that year was only EUR 192 000. The Action Plan for 2021-2023 states that EUR 201 000 was allocated for 2021 and envisaged that EUR 311 000 would be allocated for 2022 and EUR 251 000 for 2023. However, the budget for 2022 was lowered to EUR 285 500 in the middle of the year, and not all activities were funded.

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour is the coordinating and implementing institution, while the Department of National Minorities under the Government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Police Department are institutions involved in the implementation of the plan.

The current version of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-discrimination 2021-2023 sets out improvements to legislation, awareness raising and education, research and the strengthening of inter-institutional cooperation as key areas of activity. However, not all the measures envisaged are funded.

A report on implementation of the action plan³²⁹ was prepared by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour for the first time in 2019, covering only the year 2019, even though the plan had been implemented since 2017. Subsequent reports on the implementation of the

³²⁶ Order of the Minister of Social Security and Labour on the adoption of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-discrimination 2021-2023, 11 December 2020, available at: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/b1c5e3b03ae511eb8d9fe110e148c770>.

³²⁷ Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Letter on the Coordination of the draft Action plan for the promotion of non-discrimination 2021-2023, No. (20)PAK-419)S-, 4 September 2020. Letter received by the author.

³²⁸ Decision of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės nutarimas 'Nediskriminavimo skatinimo 2012–2014 metų tarpinstitucinio veiklos plano patvirtinimo'*, 2011-11-02) Valstybės žinios, 10 November 2011, No. 134-6362, http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_p?p_id=410523.

³²⁹ Report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-discrimination 2017-2020 in 2019, https://socmin.lrv.lt/uploads/socmin/documents/files/veiklos-sritys/Lygios%20galimyb%C4%97s/2019%20m_%20Nediskriminavimo%20veiksm%C5%B3%20plano%20i%20gyvendinimo%20ataskaita.pdf.

action plan were prepared in 2020, 2021 and 2022.³³⁰ According to the most recent report, most of the measures implemented in 2022 remain educational, informative or training-related. Most of the activities have been financed from the general budgetary assignments given to the specific institutions involved in the implementation of the plan, with some funding coming from EU structural funds.

The 2022 report once again notes that the involvement of different institutions and bodies in the implementation of the action plan and in the strategic objectives of equal opportunities and non-discrimination remains low. There is a visible need for more active involvement by the social partners (NGOs, trade unions, ombudsmen, etc.) in order to make targeted changes in the field of equal opportunities policy.³³¹

It should be noted that, in 2022, for the first time in a long time, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour allocated funding for targeted NGO projects aimed at promoting equal opportunities, totalling EUR 166 935.

No monitoring measures involving civil society organisations were envisaged in the plan. Therefore, an independent assessment and evaluation of its implementation, along with suggestions, would be useful.

It is important to mention that there are separate action plans covering the issues specific to certain groups, such as the Action Plan for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2023 and the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2022-2023, which are coordinated by different institutions. Both involve civil society organisations working in their field. However, there is no action plan for anti-racism or LGBTQ+ strategies in Lithuania.

³³⁰ All reports are available on the official website of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour: <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/socialine-integracija/lygios-galimybes/nediskriminavimo-skatinimo-veiksmu-planas>.

³³¹ Report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-discrimination 2021-2023 in 2022, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/uploads/socmin/documents/files/veiklos-sritys/socialine-integracija/lygios%20galimyb%C4%97s/Nediskriminavimo%20skatinimo%20VP%202022%20ataskaita.pdf>.

10 CURRENT BEST PRACTICES

The following measures could be identified as good practices in 2022

- In March 2020, a new tool was introduced to promote equal opportunities in the workplace, called the Equal Opportunity Ruler, a free assessment tool based on surveys among employees and employers. The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson not only assesses the situation in an organisation or a company, but also provides a detailed report and recommendations on how to ensure equal opportunities in practice. Using this tool, more than 15 public and private sector organisations of different sizes have evaluated themselves in terms of equal opportunities in 2022. In addition, the Ombudsperson continued to support a website on equality plans for employers (<http://www.lygybesplanai.lt/>) and carried out a number of activities to promote equal opportunities in the labour market.
- The National Equality and Diversity Awards, an awareness-raising initiative implemented jointly by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and a group of NGOs working with vulnerable groups, are an example of good practice which has been taking place annually since 2014. In April 2022, the winners from among various nominees were presented with awards for their achievements in the field of promoting equality or protecting people from discrimination. The award ceremony was broadcasted live on national television and received substantial media attention and social media coverage. A number of organisations, companies and institutions participated in the selection of nominees, in voting and in organising and presenting the awards. Organisers are planning to continue the initiative in future years, as the awards function as a tool to raise awareness and carry out promotional activities. The awards are mainly financed by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in accordance with the Action Plan for Non-Discrimination for 2021-2023.
- There has been significant progress in recent years, with more and more people openly supporting the rights of LGBT people. The first survey of same-sex families in Lithuania was conducted in 2021; the report on the results was distributed to the public and distributed personally to members of the Parliament (Seimas). A survey conducted in 2022 shows that support for same-sex civil unions is around 50 %.³³²
- The National Human Rights Forum, which has already become established as a tradition, was held on 9 December 2022, organised by Vytautas Magnus University, a number of civil society organisations (including the Coalition of Human Rights Organisations and the Lithuanian Disability Forum) and state institutions (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and the Seimas Ombudsperson's Office), and many different stakeholders were invited.
- In the autumn of 2018, the country's businesses signed a 'Diversity Charter', with a public commitment to a culture of equality. In 2020, the Lithuanian Diversity Charter initiative became an association, uniting private, public and non-governmental sector organisations to create an open and inclusive work environment and strengthen their social responsibility. As of the end of 2022, the Diversity Charter had 24 members from the public, private and NGO sectors.
- There are no measures that could be identified as examples of best practice in relation to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the effective implementation of the national legislation transposing the directives.

³³² Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, 'DELFI.lt survey: half of the population supports same-sex civil unions', 7 November 2022, <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/delfi-lt-apklausa-puse-gyventoju-palaiko-tos-pacios-lyties-civilines-sajungas/>.

11 SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

11.1 Potential breaches of the directives at the national level

National anti-discrimination legislation in most cases repeats the wording of the directives, without going into details of particular provisions. In the opinion of the author, the transposition into national law is still insufficient with regard to the following aspects:

- The Law on Equal Treatment does not clearly prohibit discrimination in the field of self-employment and occupation, as required under Article 3(1)(a)) of Directive 2000/78/EC and 3(1)(a)) of Directive 2000/43/EC (see section 3.2.1).
- The existing Law on Equal Treatment does not explicitly state that social protection, social security and healthcare fall under its scope, as in Article 3(1)(e)) of Directive 2000/43/EC. For more information, please see section 3.2.5-3.2.6.
- The Law on Equal Treatment has provided an exception concerning recruitment and employment by employers with an ethos based on religion or belief since June 2008, in accordance with Article 4(2) of Directive 2000/78/EC. However, Article 3 of the LET sets out other spheres where the Law on Equal Treatment shall not be applied in relation to religion and ethos, including in the provision of goods and services, access to education, the content of education programmes and education. This may be in breach of Article 3(1)(g) and (h) of Directive 2000/43/EC.³³³ The first version of the LET did not contain this exception and there is still no case law or interpretation on the matter. There is also no information available about whether such practices existed before the adoption of the directive in the country, which organisations used them and to what extent. Besides, the exception in the Law is much broader than that of Directive 2000/78/EC, in which a 'person's religion or belief constitute a genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement'. There is no mention of the provision that 'difference of treatment ... should not justify discrimination on another ground.' It therefore seems that, if these provisions are to be applied according to the letter of the law, the whole Law on Equal Treatment becomes inapplicable in the areas mentioned, including in relation to the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin. Such a broad exception might be incompatible with the provisions of the directive (see section 4.2).
- Providing independent assistance to victims of discrimination in pursuing their complaints of discrimination does not explicitly fall within the competence of the national equality body – the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson – according to the law. The current wording speaks about 'providing impartial and objective consultations with regards to investigation of complaints' only, which might not fully transpose Article 13(2) of Directive 2000/43. For more information, please see section 7(6)(a) of this report.
- Sanctions must be significantly strengthened to make them effective, proportionate and dissuasive, in the opinion of the author of this report. The quasi-judicial function of the Ombudsperson does not benefit victims of discrimination, and sanctions imposed by the Ombudsperson are not effective, proportionate and dissuasive which

³³³ The relevant provisions of the LET read as follows (official translation): 'The provisions of this Law shall not apply to: 3) cases where religious communities and associations, as well as organisations established by them or their members, the founding documents or equivalent documents of which specify that their ethos is based on religion or belief, supply products, goods and services for religious or belief purposes; 4) the admission of persons to study at schools of religious communities and associations, schools established by them or their members, as well as establishments, enterprises and organisations whose main activity is other than academic education, which have been established with the purpose of education in an environment fostering the values of a religious community or association where refusal to admit a person is necessary in order to maintain the ethos of the said organisations; 5) the content of education programmes, textbooks and teaching aids where religious instruction of traditional religious communities and associations is provided; 8) education and training where the application of the provisions of this Law is inconsistent with the striving of communities of state or private pre-school education establishments, general education schools or other educational establishments, the founding documents or equivalent documents of which specify that their ethos is based on religion or belief, to educate children in an environment fostering the values of a religious community or association.'

might be in breach of Article 15 of Directive 2000/43. Compensations are awarded in few cases reaching the courts, administrative fines are rarely applied by the Ombudsperson in practice and recommendations are provided in most of the situations, without the possibility to ensure their implementation, if refused by the party responsible. For more information, please see sections 6.5 and 7(8)(a).

- Judicial interpretation is required regarding general discriminatory oral statements by representatives of the state and municipality institutions as Article 5 of the Law on Equal Opportunities, which sets out the duties of state and municipal authorities in the field of equal opportunities, only covers legislative areas, not the implementation of equal opportunities, which could potentially include a liability for the discriminatory public statements. For more information, please see section 2.4.

11.2 Other issues of concern

The discriminatory provision in Article 29(10) of the Law on Education, which established an exception for schools that significantly affected children with disabilities and their ability to access schools providing compulsory education in such a way as to be considered discriminatory, was deleted from the Law in 2020. This change should come into force by 2024, although significant preparations must be made by then.

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, when applying administrative sanctions, issues them to the executive body of a legal person (e.g., the director) but not to its employees. According to the Ombudsperson, the current wording of the Law on Equal Treatment does not suggest that it could be enforced against a broad spectrum of parties. Tenants, customers and employees cannot be held liable. For more information, please see sections 2.6(b) and 2.7(b) of this report.

The right for associations to engage in legal proceedings was included in the Law on Equal Treatment, repeating the wording of the directives. However, exercising this right is limited in practice. The Code of Civil Procedure states that only actual members of a particular organisation can be represented in court by that association. In theory, associations can act on behalf of the victim in administrative proceedings only, but not in civil cases. For more information, please see section 6.2.

The author has been informed of a number of instances when refugees, migrants and Roma persons were discriminated against by local property owners when they tried to rent housing. This situation still seems to be ongoing, based on information received by the Roma Community Centre, the Padėk pritapti children's day centre and the refugee support programme run by Caritas. No cases have been reported to the Ombudsperson.

The problematic provision within the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information remains in force.³³⁴ Article 4(2)(16) states that any information that 'encourages a concept of marriage and family other than the one stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania or in the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania' is detrimental to minors and therefore should be restricted. This provision has been subjected to constant criticism by major international human rights and LGBT organisations. However, the law remains in force for the time being, and no legal initiatives have been taken yet. In 2014, a fairy-tale book containing a story about same-sex love was censored. The book was published by the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, which was later ordered to remove it from bookstores. The Inspector of Journalist Ethics concluded that two fairy tales promoting tolerance for same-sex couples were

³³⁴ Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information (*Lietuvos Respublikos nepilnamečių apsaugos nuo neigiamo viešosios informacijos poveikio įstatymas*), https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.817CC58C1A54/TAIS_410367.

harmful to minors and should be marked by the index 'N-14', indicating that the stories were suitable only for readers aged 14 or over.³³⁵

The previous Parliament included a principle of complementarity of man and woman within the family in the Law on Strengthening the Family and in the Civil Code. The laws were amended to ensure the so-called 'protection of traditional values'. There are various other initiatives pending in the Parliament in relation to the 'protection of traditional values', among them the exclusion of the clause on sex reassignment, attempts to describe two partners of the same sex as a non-family and a joint venture, and so on.

On 15 May 2021, the Big Family Defence March (*Didysis šeimos gynimo maršas*) took place in Vilnius, which gathered about 10 000 people from across Lithuania. The main purpose was to resist 'aggressive genderist propaganda' and plans to ratify the Istanbul Convention, as well as to stand against 'extremist minorities intent on imposing an unacceptable lifestyle on society, defiling national traditions and values'.³³⁶ Some Lithuanian Catholic priests expressed support for the event. However, the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference issued a statement, saying that church leaders had been invited to the Family March but would not attend. During the event, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said that a family is between a man and a woman, as stated in the Lithuanian constitution.³³⁷

It would be useful to unify the grounds of non-discrimination in the Labour Code and the Law on Equal Treatment – adding health status to the prohibited grounds, even if these are not mentioned by the directives. Health status is mentioned in the Labour Code.

There are no measures that could be identified as issues of concern in relation to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to the implementation of the national legislation transposing the directives, or regarding the regulation of artificial intelligence.

³³⁵ In early 2023, after the cut-off date for this report, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights ruled on the case and found violation of Article 10 ECHR (See *Macaté v. Lithuania*, 23 January 2023). However, the Court did not explicitly state that the provision of the law was discriminatory and should be repealed. The Court noted that 'the aim of the restrictions imposed on the applicant's book had been to limit access by children to information which depicted same-sex relationships as being essentially equivalent to different-sex relationships... and that laws such as the one applied in the present case reinforced stigma and prejudice and encouraged homophobia.'

³³⁶ See <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1407354/planned-rally-against-genderist-propaganda-electrifies-lithuania>.

³³⁷ See <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1410566/lithuanian-president-addresses-rally-against-genderist-propaganda-backs-traditional-families>.

12 LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN 2022

12.1 Legislative amendments

In 2022, a number of legislative amendments were adopted that have a significant impact on the implementation of equal opportunities.

The Lithuanian Parliament approved amendments³³⁸ to the Law on Equal Treatment,³³⁹ which expanded protection against harassment in relation to the supply of goods and services, and therefore ensured compliance with European Union directives. The amendments allow victims of harassment in relation to access to goods and services and in relation to membership of and involvement in workers' or employers' organisations to seek remedies. In addition, protection against victimisation has been expanded to include education and the provision of goods and services. These amendments entered into force on 2 June 2022.

On 28 June 2022, the Law on Equal Treatment was amended again to introduce changes for people with disabilities in the workplace, a new ground of discrimination, and to establish exceptions for certain benefits. First, reasonable accommodation in the workplace was expanded to include the adaptation not just of premises but of working conditions. Second, exceptions were established within the Law to allow for certain benefits for persons with disabilities, persons of certain ages and those in certain financial situations. For example, it will be possible to apply certain discounts or additional measures based on a person's low income or to offer certain services free of charge for seniors or persons with disabilities (vaccination, sports activities etc). These benefits will have to be justified by a legitimate aim pursued by appropriate and necessary means. Lastly, the ground of social status has been extended to include family status as well.

On 19 July 2022, the Lithuanian Parliament adopted legislative amendments³⁴⁰ proposed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, expanding the opportunities for people with disabilities to actively participate in the labour market, and providing employers with the necessary assistance in recruiting them or keeping an employee in their job after they acquire a disability. The new amendments to the laws entered into force on 1 January 2023.

Lastly, on 20 December, 2022, the Lithuanian Parliament adopted amendments³⁴¹ to the Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities, implementing the disability reform. The new legislation aims to improve the disability assessment model, provide more targeted support for people with disabilities, increase access to services and assistance, improve the speed with which personalised services and assistance can be provided and make public information more accessible to all. The positive changes are expected to affect the daily and social life of more than 221 000 people with disabilities. The reform will enter into force in 2024.

The reform would change the current model of disability assessment, which is contrary to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. New amendments will de-

³³⁸ Law amending the Law on Equal Treatment, No. IX-1826, Articles 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and the Annex (*Lietuvos Respublikos lygių galimybių įstatymo Nr. IX-1826 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 straipsnių ir priedo pakeitimo įstatymas*), 19 May 2022, entry into force 2 June 2022, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/fb2ccb22db3111ecb1b39d276e924a5d>.

³³⁹ Law on Equal Treatment (*Lietuvos Respublikos Lygių galimybių įstatymas*), 2003, No. 114-5115, entry into force 1 January 2005; latest amendments: 19 May 2022, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.222522/asr>.

³⁴⁰ Law amending the Law on Employment No. XII-2470, Articles 2, 16, 20, 24, 25, 30(2), 35, 38, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 and 47, 19 July 2022, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/2e380300f86911ecbfe9c72e552dd5bd?jfwid=-16ncpywf20>.

³⁴¹ Law amending Law No. I-2044 on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities (*Lietuvos Respublikos neigaliųjų socialinės integracijos įstatymo Nr. I-2044 pakeitimo įstatymas*), 20 December 2022, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/253a8e20720911ed8a47de53ff967b64>.

emphasise medical criteria, focusing more on the scope of the individual's needs and environmental barriers, and the new provisions will assess a wide range of other areas such as mobility, self-service, communication, daily activities and living environment in order to clarify the individual's need for assistance. In addition, state and municipal authorities and bodies will have to provide information to people with disabilities in a way that is accessible and understandable to them.

The Draft Law on Equal Treatment, which introduces a number of changes, was introduced in the Parliament in 2019, and the procedure for its consideration has begun, however this was not finalised in 2022.³⁴²

12.2 Case law

A few cases were brought to court in 2022, one of which questioned a decision taken by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. Cases with some significance for the interpretation of the principle of equal treatment are mentioned below.

Relevant discrimination ground(s): Disability

Name of the court: Vilnius Regional Administrative Court (Vilniaus apygardos administracinis teismas)

Date of decision: 24 October 2022

Name of the parties: *Sporto infrastruktūra v. Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson; third party: Ž.P.*

Reference number: eI2-4079-811/2022

ECLI reference: N/A

Link: <https://liteko.teismai.lt/viesasprendimupaieska/tekstas.aspx?id=d5a6405f-5151-441b-9fe2-01a8ecb50377>

Brief summary: At the end of 2021 the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson received a complaint from Ž.P. about possible discrimination on the grounds of disability in the provision of services at the Girstutis swimming pool. The applicant complained that, because of her visual disability, the staff of the Girstutis swimming pool refused to allow her and her 11-year-old daughter to enter the pool, even though they had visited the pool before. The visitor stated that she was refused entry to the pool because she was accompanied by a small child, i.e. that she would not be able to look after her child in the pool because of her disability. Although they were eventually admitted to the pool, they did not use it after suffering negative experiences.

The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson found that the facility had violated the Law on Equal Opportunities and had discriminated against the applicant on the grounds of her disability. Furthermore, the daughter was disadvantaged because of her association with her mother, who has a visual disability. As a result, discrimination by association was established.

The Court noted that, according to the provisions of Article 8(1) of the Law on Equal Opportunities, it is not sufficient to declaratively allow persons with disabilities to use services; the conditions must be such as to enable such a person to feel that he or she is using the services on an equal basis with other persons and to ensure that he or she does not experience any inconveniences or negative emotions and is not placed at a disadvantage simply because of his or her disability.

In the present case, the situation where Ž.P.'s daughter was initially denied access to the pool on the sole ground that Ž.P. would not be able to ensure the child's safety in the pool because of her disability was in clear violation of the provisions of Article 8(1) of the Law on Equal Opportunities, as her daughter's access to the pool was restricted solely on the

³⁴² Draft Law on Equal Opportunities, No. IX-1826, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/96f31cf082b411e98a8298567570d639?jfwid=rmpk3gwww>.

basis of the disability of her mother. The applicant's daughter was placed at a disadvantage because of her association with her disabled mother. The Court therefore agreed with the Ombudsperson's conclusion that such a case constitutes discrimination by association – a situation in which a person is treated less favourably because of his or her association with a group of persons having a particular identity.

ANNEX 1: TABLE OF INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

Country: Lithuania
Date: 1 January 2023

Instrument	Date of signature	Date of ratification	Derogations/ reservations relevant to equality and non-discrimination	Right of individual petition accepted?	Can this instrument be directly relied upon in domestic courts by individuals ?
European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)	14.05.1993	27.04.1995	No derogations / reservations	Accepted	Yes
Protocol 12, ECHR	No	No	NA	NA	NA
Revised European Social Charter	08.09.1997	15.05.2001	No derogations / reservations	Ratified collective complaints protocol	Yes
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	12.03.1991	20.11.1991	No derogations / reservations	Accepted	Yes
Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities	17.02.2002	17.02.2002	No derogations / reservations	Yes	Yes
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	12.03.1991	20.11.1991	No derogations / reservations	Accepted	Yes
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	10.11.1998	10.11.1998	No derogations / reservations	Accepted	Yes
ILO Convention No. 111 on Discrimination	27.13.1996	27.13.1996	No derogations / reservations	Accepted	Yes

Instrument	Date of signature	Date of ratification	Derogations/ reservations relevant to equality and non-discrimination	Right of individual petition accepted?	Can this instrument be directly relied upon in domestic courts by individuals ?
Convention on the Rights of the Child	08.01.1992	03.07.1995	No derogations / reservations	Accepted	Yes
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	30.03.2007	27.05.2010	No derogations / reservations	Accepted	Yes

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