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LIBERTIES

RULE OF LAW REPORT

2025



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LITHUANIA

FOREWORD

This country report is part of the Liberties Rule of Law Report 2025, which is the sixth annual report on the state of rule of law in the European Union (EU) published by the Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties). Liberties is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) promoting the civil liberties of everyone in the EU, and it is built on a network of national civil liberties NGOs from across the EU. Currently, we have member organisations in Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden, as well as a contributing partner organisation in Latvia and Malta.

Liberties, together with its members and partner organisations, carries out advocacy, campaigning and public education activities to explain what the rule of law is, what the EU and national governments are doing to protect or harm it, and gathers public support to press leaders at EU and national level to fully respect, promote and protect our basic rights and values.

The 2025 report was drafted by Liberties and its member and partner organizations, and it covers the situation during 2024. It is a ‘shadow report’ to the European Commission’s annual rule of law audit. As such, its purpose is to provide the European Commission with reliable information and analysis from the ground to feed its own rule of law reports, and to provide an independent analysis of the state of the rule of law in the EU in its own right.

Liberties’ report represents the most in-depth reporting exercise carried out to date by an NGO network to map developments in a wide range of areas connected to the rule of law in the EU. The 2025 report includes 21 country reports that follow a common structure, mirroring and expanding on the priority areas and indicators identified by the European Commission for its annual rule of law monitoring cycle. Over forty member and local partner organisations contributed to the compilation of these country reports.

[Download the full Liberties Rule of Law Report 2025 here.](#)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	2
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	4
KEY CONCERNS	5
JUSTICE SYSTEM	7
Judicial independence	7
Quality of justice	8
Fairness and efficiency of the justice system	10
ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK	11
Levels of corruption	12
Framework to prevent corruption	13
MEDIA ENVIRONMENT AND MEDIA FREEDOM	14
Public trust in media	15
Safety and protection of journalists and other media actors	16
CHECKS AND BALANCES	17
Process for preparing and enacting laws	18
Independent authorities	19
CIVIC SPACE	20
Freedom of association	21
DISREGARD OF HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS AND OTHER SYSTEMIC ISSUES	
AFFECTING THE RULE OF LAW ENVIRONMENT	23
Systemic human rights violations	23
FOSTERING A RULE OF LAW CULTURE	25
Efforts by state authorities	25
CONTACTS	26

LITHUANIA

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Human Rights Monitoring Institute



The Human Rights Monitoring Institute (HRMI) is a non-governmental, non-profit human rights organisation. Since its establishment in 2003, HRMI has been advocating for full compliance of national laws and policies with international human rights obligations and working to ensure that rights are real and effective in practice.

The team of HRMI lawyers and social and political sciences experts conduct research, drafts legal and policy briefings, compiles reports to international human rights bodies, undertakes strategic cases before domestic and international courts, provides expert consultations, engages in various national and international projects, delivers conventional and online trainings to law enforcement officers, other professionals and members of vulnerable groups.

KEY CONCERNS

Judicial System

Lithuania has made progress in improving judicial transparency, particularly in Supreme Court appointments, with clearer criteria and more structured processes. Efforts to reduce court backlogs and allocate resources to the National Courts Administration are also underway. However, challenges persist in funding, staff shortages, and delays, especially in rural areas. Legal aid reforms have been introduced, but administrative burdens still hinder both providers and recipients. The planned court reforms starting in 2025 aim to address these issues and increase system efficiency.

Lithuania has made partial progress in some areas, particularly in improving the transparency of judicial appointments and preparing to start reforms in the justice system. However, there remain critical challenges, particularly in the adequacy of resources for the justice system and the administrative burden faced by legal aid providers. Further action is needed to meet the EU Commission's recommendations fully, with particular focus on securing sufficient funding, reducing bureaucracy, and ensuring that legal aid is accessible to all people, particularly in underserved areas.

Anti-Corruption Framework

Lithuania has made partial progress in strengthening its anti-corruption framework. The State Special Investigation Service (STT) has intensified efforts, especially in high-profile cases like

the 'receipts scandal', leading to reforms in public procurement transparency. Judicial appointments have also become more transparent, with clearer criteria set by the Seimas and oversight from the Constitutional Court. However, challenges remain in whistleblower protection, with the law underutilised and resource limitations continuing to hinder the STT and National Audit Office. Issues like political patronage, conflicts of interest, and bureaucratic inefficiencies persist, especially at the local level.

There were no recommendations in this area provided in the 2024 EU Commission's report.

Media Environment and Media Freedom

Lithuania has made progress in improving media freedom, with efforts to enhance transparency in media ownership and ensure editorial independence, especially for public service media. Legal protections for journalists have strengthened, and measures to combat misinformation on social media have been introduced. However, challenges remain, including the spread of misinformation, low trust in influencers, and sensationalism in commercial media. Political pressure on journalists persists, particularly in sensitive areas like corruption, with instances of intimidation and legal challenges still hindering free reporting.

There were no recommendations in this area provided in the 2024 EU Commission's report.

Checks and Balances

Lithuania has made progress in strengthening checks and balances, particularly concerning

the involvement of NGOs in the legislative process, with more structured consultations on key reforms. The Ombudsman institutions have been working to address human rights violations, though they still face resource constraints. Additionally, the Constitutional Court has played a crucial role in ensuring the legality of key laws. However, challenges remain in ensuring sufficient resources for these institutions to operate effectively and to ensure that consultations with all stakeholders, particularly marginalised groups, are more inclusive and timelier.

There were no recommendations in this area provided in the 2024 EU Commission’s report.

Civic Space

Increasing administrative accountability requirements and eligibility requirements for government funding puts stress on the already minimal resources of CSOs, especially regional CSOs with smaller staff and legal expertise. Without additional financial support from the government, financial sustainability is a major challenge.

There were no recommendations in this area provided in the 2024 EU Commission’s report.







Disregard of Human Rights Obligations and Other Systemic Issues Affecting the Rule of Law Environment

The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania failed to pass a law legalising same-sex partnership and to cancel a provision from the Law on the Protection of Minors from Negative Effects

of Public Information that bans information on LGBTQIA+ on the basis it is harmful to minors. With this inaction, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania failed to enshrine LGBTQIA+ rights into Lithuanian law.

There were no recommendations in this area provided in the 2024 EU Commission’s report.

State of play (versus 2024)

-  Justice system
-  Anti-corruption framework
-  Media Environment and Media Freedom
-  Checks and balances
-  Civic Space
-  Human Rights

Legend

Regression

No progress

Progress



JUSTICE SYSTEM



Key recommendations

- **Ensure comprehensive and inclusive consultations on judicial reform.** The Ministry of Justice and the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania should initiate meaningful consultations with judicial representatives, legal experts, and stakeholders before adopting any judicial reforms. This includes formalising feedback mechanisms and ensuring transparency on how judicial input is incorporated into reform proposals.
- **Improve access to state-guaranteed legal aid.** The Ministry of Justice should allocate additional funding to expand the availability and quality of state-guaranteed legal aid, particularly for vulnerable groups such as migrants, asylum seekers, and low-income individuals. Measures should include providing more qualified interpreters, increasing lawyer capacity, and simplifying the application process for legal aid.
- **Strengthen public awareness of Constitutional Court decisions.** The Constitutional Court should enhance public communication of its rulings through plain-language summaries and outreach campaigns.

Judicial independence

Appointment and selection of judges, prosecutors and court presidents

Judicial appointment transparency remains an issue in Lithuania, particularly with regard to appointments to the Supreme Court. In its July 2024 Rule of Law Report discussing the rule of law situation in Lithuania, the European

Commission¹ drew attention to the concerns about the appointment of a candidate with the ‘lowest assessment’ to the Supreme Court in March 2024. This sparked an investigation into the motivation behind the decision, raising questions about the transparency and criteria used in judicial appointments.

While some progress has been noted in enhancing appointment procedures, such as

1 European Commission (2024), Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in Lithuania accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. 2024 Rule of Law Report. The rule of law situation in the European Union, 24 July 2024, available at: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/5ad49699-6372-4989-80c7-c0b89d6f99d6_en?filename=35_1_58069_coun_chap_lithuania_en.pdf

the introduction of clearer selection criteria and greater oversight, the Supreme Court case underscores the need for further improvements. Stakeholders have called for more rigorous documentation of appointment motivations and the inclusion of independent observers in the selection process to ensure decisions are based on merit rather than other considerations.

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, it is pivotal to finalise the investigation into the March 2024 appointment and ensure its findings are made public to promote accountability and trust in the judiciary. The implementation of mandatory publication of the rationale behind judicial appointments, especially for the Supreme Court, might contribute to enhanced transparency. Also, it is necessary to strengthen oversight mechanisms by including independent legal experts and civil society representatives on appointment panels.

Furthermore, the European Commission has also highlighted amendments to the Law on Courts intended to streamline the judicial appointment process across all court levels. While these amendments have led to some improvements in higher court appointments, their impact at the level of lower courts has been less effective than anticipated. Reports indicate that delays in the appointment process persist, particularly in filling vacancies at regional and district courts.

The main challenges appear to stem from procedural inefficiencies and a lack of administrative resources to handle the volume of appointments required. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the consistency

of assessment criteria, which may contribute to delays in finalising decisions. These issues undermine the intended goals of the reform, which seek to improve the overall efficiency and responsiveness of the judiciary.

It could prove highly useful to conduct an independent review of the amendments to the Law on Courts to identify procedural bottlenecks in lower court appointments, as well as to allocate additional resources to administrative bodies responsible for managing judicial appointments to ensure timely processing. In addition, introducing standardised assessment criteria and additional training provided for appointment committees could contribute to enhanced consistency and transparency.

Quality of justice

Accessibility of courts (e.g. court fees, legal aid, language)

State-guaranteed legal aid is theoretically available to all individuals at all stages of proceedings, including appeals. However, practical barriers significantly hinder access, particularly for migrants and asylum seekers. Legal aid is inconsistently provided and often unavailable during appeals, which leaves these individuals vulnerable at critical stages of their cases. Additionally, insufficient funding for legal aid programs limits resources for lawyers, while a shortage of qualified interpreters further complicates communication and the understanding of proceedings. Moreover, a lack of outreach to marginalised groups about their eligibility for legal aid exacerbates the issue. Many migrants and asylum seekers are unaware of their right

to state-funded legal assistance, especially during appeals, which leads to inequalities in access to justice. Administrative hurdles, such as the documentation required to qualify for aid, disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. For example, migrants in detention centres also face information gaps regarding legal aid services. Despite available information on bulletin boards, many asylum seekers, particularly those speaking minority languages (e.g., Hindi, Farsi, Turkish, Azerbaijani, and Sinhala), are unaware of the legal consultations offered by the Lithuanian Red Cross or how to access state-guaranteed legal aid.²

Although there have been some positive developments, such as expanding legal aid eligibility to include more low-income groups, these changes have not yet addressed the systemic issues facing marginalised communities. Furthermore, proposed plans to increase funding for translation services and simplify application processes remain unimplemented.

Additionally, the right to state-guaranteed legal assistance for victims of criminal offences is recognised regardless of whether the person has contacted law enforcement. However,

challenges arise for victims of crimes committed outside the European Union. Under Lithuanian law, assistance is granted only to those victimised within the EU, with help available for non-EU victims only if a criminal case is ongoing in Lithuania.³ This discretion given to law enforcement to decide whether the victim of a specific crime has the right to state-guaranteed assistance has led to difficulties, particularly for refugees from Ukraine, who have faced challenges in being recognised as victims of war crimes.⁴

Another issue is the need for assistance to be made available in simple and understandable language. While the law acknowledges the right to information in a language the victim understands, it lacks clear requirements for using comprehensible language. For instance, a 2020 update to the Victim's Rights Explanation Protocol appendix still uses legal language, without providing a simpler format.⁵

Use of assessment tools and standards (e.g. ICT systems for case management, court statistics and their transparency, monitoring, evaluation, surveys among court users or legal professionals)

2 Lithuanian Red Cross (2024), *Lithuanian Red Cross Monitoring Report 2023*, February 2024, available at: <https://redcross.lt/veiklos/prieglobscio-ir-migracijos-programa/tebesena-2/>.

3 Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Law No. XIV-169 of 2021 on Assistance to Victims of Criminal Offences (*Lietuvos Respublikos pagalbos nuo nusikalstamos veikos nukentėjusiems asmenims įstatymas*), available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/ce7d8910571711eba1f8b445a2cb2bc7>.

4 Algimantas Čepas, 'Rights of victims of crime' (Nusikaltimų aukų teisės), Human rights Lithuania 2022-2023: Overview, Human Rights Monitoring Institute, 2024, available at: <https://hrmi.lt/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2022-2023-Zmogaus-teises-Lietuvoje-apzvalga.pdf>

5 *Ibid.*

Public understanding of Constitutional Court decisions in Lithuania remains limited, with many rulings perceived as complex and inaccessible to the general population. Currently, the Court primarily communicates its decisions through formal legal language and official publications, which are not easily understood by non-experts. Media coverage is often sparse or overly simplified, leaving significant gaps in public awareness about the judiciary's role and its impact on society.

To improve public understanding of Constitutional Court decisions and foster trust in its impartiality, the Court could adopt innovative communication strategies. These could include user-friendly online platforms that host plain-language summaries of rulings, partnerships with media outlets to disseminate key decisions widely, and educational initiatives aimed at explaining the broader implications of rulings.

Additionally, integrating these communication efforts with assessment tools, such as ICT systems for case management and public surveys, can enhance the transparency of judicial processes. By integrating user feedback mechanisms and conducting regular surveys among court users and legal professionals, the judiciary can monitor the effectiveness of these communication strategies and adapt them to better meet public needs. Such measures would not only demystify judicial processes but also bridge the gap between the judiciary and the public, fostering greater transparency and accessibility. Clear communication tools and proactive outreach campaigns, combined with robust assessment frameworks, could serve as

vital mechanisms for enhancing trust in the judiciary and ensuring that citizens understand the Constitutional Court's role in safeguarding democracy.

Fairness and efficiency of the justice system

Respect for fair trial standards including in the context of pre-trial detention

Concerns about the confidentiality of communications between lawyers and their clients in Lithuania have been repeatedly highlighted in successive European Commission reports. These issues have raised significant questions regarding fair trial standards and the right to a defence.

More recently, new concerns have emerged regarding video surveillance in police and detention facilities. Reports suggest there are no robust guarantees to prevent the recording of private exchanges between lawyers and their clients. This has led to fears that such practices could compromise the confidentiality of legal consultations and undermine the trust necessary for effective legal representation.

Despite these persistent concerns, there have been limited actions to address these issues comprehensively. While some measures to improve detention conditions and monitoring practices have been discussed, there is no evidence of substantial reforms to ensure the inviolability of lawyer-client communications. Legal professionals continue to advocate for stronger safeguards, including the installation of communication rooms free from surveillance

and the implementation of independent oversight mechanisms to ensure compliance with confidentiality standards.

It is necessary to establish clear and enforceable guarantees to protect the confidentiality of lawyer-client communications in police and detention facilities, including the prohibition

of video or audio recording in consultation spaces, and to introduce independent monitoring of police and detention facilities to ensure adherence to these guarantees. Existing cases and complaints need to be addressed promptly, with a commitment to implementing ECtHR rulings on these matters.

ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK

Key recommendations

- **Strengthen measures to prevent misuse of public funds in municipalities and Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania.** *The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania should adopt stricter legal provisions requiring greater transparency and accountability in the use of public funds by local governments and members of Seimas. This includes mandatory real-time reporting of expenses, enhanced auditing mechanisms, and clear sanctions for misuse of funds. The National Audit Office and the Special Investigation Service (STT) should be tasked with overseeing compliance and conducting regular audits.*
- **Enhance whistleblower protection mechanisms.** *The Ministry of Justice and the Seimas should strengthen the implementation of the existing Whistleblower Protection Law by introducing stricter confidentiality safeguards, ensuring whistleblower anonymity, and increasing awareness campaigns about reporting mechanisms. Additional funding should be allocated to the STT to improve whistleblower support systems.*
- **Improve transparency in the legislative process to prevent conflicts of interest.** *The government and Seimas should introduce mandatory impact assessments and conflict-of-interest declarations for all major legislative proposals, particularly those involving public procurement, funding allocation, or regulatory changes. These measures should include clear procedures for public consultations and independent reviews.*

Levels of corruption

The so-called ‘receipts scandal’ in Lithuania, which involved the misuse of public funds by local politicians, has highlighted the persistence of corruption in certain segments of governance. It has raised concerns over the broader impact of such malfeasance on the availability, quality, and accessibility of essential human rights-related services, particularly justice, healthcare, and social services. In the scandal, several local politicians were found to have falsified receipts to cover personal expenses with taxpayer money, undermining public trust in the political system. This issue concerned not only financial mismanagement but also the erosion of accountability and transparency within local governments.⁶

The consequences of this scandal are significant in terms of societal trust, particularly in political institutions. Research has shown that corruption scandals, such as the one in question, can severely reduce public confidence in political leaders and institutions, leading to a lack of trust in the integrity of government

actions and policies. The scandal has left a negative imprint on Lithuania’s political landscape, exacerbating already existing disillusionment with politicians: an independent survey demonstrated that 47% of respondents indicated that their view of local government had changed negatively after this scandal.⁷ This loss of trust is detrimental to the broader human rights landscape, as it can lead to disengagement from civic processes and a diminished demand for reforms that could improve public services like healthcare, education, and social security.

Furthermore, the scandal has raised concerns about the effective allocation of public resources. Corruption often diverts funds that could otherwise be used to enhance the quality of essential services. For instance, funds intended for social services or public healthcare may be siphoned off for personal gain, diminishing the resources available for the most vulnerable. This directly impacts citizens’ access to basic rights, such as access to justice, security, and education, as resources are misallocated or squandered.

6 BNS (2024), ‘In the “Receipts” cases, local government politicians are being asked to pay over one million euros in damages’ (*„Čekiukų“ bylose iš savivaldos politikų prašoma priteisti per milijoną eurų*), Lithuanian Radio and Television, 16 December 2024, available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2439899/cekiuku-bylose-is-savivaldos-politiku-prasoma-priteisti-per-milijona-euru>.

7 Modesta Gaučaitė-Znutienė (2024), “It showed the immorality of politicians, but it will have no impact”: trust in local government has decreased, but some people haven’t even heard of the “Receipts” scandal’ (*„Parodė politikų amoralumą, bet įtakos neturės“: pasitikėjimas savivalda krito, bet dalis žmonių „čekiukų“ skandalo net negirdėjo*), Lithuanian Radio and Television, 25 September 2023, available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2079576/parode-politiku-amoraluma-bet-itakos-netures-pasitikejimas-savivalda-krito-bet-dalis-zmoniu-cekiuku-skandalo-net-negirdejo>.

Framework to prevent corruption

Rules on preventing conflicts of interest in the public sector

Currently, legislative processes in Lithuania lack sufficient safeguards to ensure transparency and accountability, particularly in high-risk areas such as public procurement, funding allocation, and regulatory changes. While some public consultation mechanisms exist, they are often implemented inconsistently or fail to include meaningful input from independent experts and civil society. This creates vulnerabilities where conflicts of interest may go unnoticed, and corruption risks remain unaddressed.

Ensuring transparency in legislative processes is critical to identifying and mitigating conflicts of interest early. High-risk areas like public procurement and local governance are particularly prone to abuse due to insufficient oversight and accountability. A transparent and consultative process, incorporating mandatory conflict-of-interest declarations, public consultations, and independent reviews, would significantly reduce opportunities for abuse. Such measures should also include clear procedures for publishing impact assessments and maintaining public records of legislative consultations.

Strengthening these mechanisms would enhance legislative integrity, reduce corruption risks, and foster public trust in government decision-making. Implementing these reforms would send a strong message that legislative processes are conducted with accountability and fairness at their core.

Measures in place to ensure whistleblower protection and encourage reporting of corruption

In the context of Lithuania's efforts to encourage whistleblowing and protect those who expose corruption, there have been notable concerns. One example that raises issues about whistleblower protection occurred when the identity of a whistleblower within the State Security Department (VSD) was exposed.⁸ This individual had provided critical information about potential illegal actions involving the VSD and the Special Investigation Service (STT), allegedly sharing sensitive data about then-front-running presidential candidate Gitanas Nausėda's associates. The revelation of this whistleblower's identity contradicts efforts to protect individuals who come forward with allegations of corruption or misconduct within government institutions.

While Lithuania does have legal frameworks in place to protect whistleblowers—such as the

8 Jurga Bakaitė (2023), 'The Whistleblower and the President: new book sends ripples through Lithuania's politics, Lithuanian Radio and Television', 7 March 2023, available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1929853/the-whistleblower-and-the-president-new-book-sends-ripples-through-lithuania-s-politics>.

Law on the Protection of Whistleblowers⁹—the case involving the VSD raises serious concerns about the practical enforcement of these protections. The public disclosure of the whistleblower’s identity not only puts the individual at risk but also discourages others from reporting similar issues. This situation highlights the need for stronger safeguards to ensure whistleblowers can report misconduct without fear of retaliation, including protection from identity leaks and professional or personal harm.

The case demonstrates ongoing challenges to building trust in institutions intended to protect citizens’ rights, particularly when those tasked with ensuring transparency and integrity may be complicit in undermining such efforts. These issues, if left unresolved, contribute to an overall climate of distrust and could deter future whistleblowing, ultimately limiting the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures in the country.

MEDIA ENVIRONMENT AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Key recommendations

- **Strengthen safeguards against SLAPPs.** *The Ministry of Justice and the Seimas should introduce legal reforms to prevent the abuse of defamation and civil lawsuits against journalists.*
- **Enhance funding and capacity for public service media.** *The government should prioritise long-term, independent funding for the Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT) to ensure its financial stability and operational independence. Additionally, investments in capacity-building programs, such as investigative journalism and digital transformation, should be supported.*
- **Promote media literacy to combat misinformation.** *The Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport, in collaboration with media regulators and NGOs, should implement mandatory media literacy programs in schools and adult education. These programs should focus on identifying misinformation, understanding media bias, and promoting critical thinking skills.*

⁹ Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Law No. XIII-804 of 2017 on the Protection of Whistleblowers (Lietuvos Respublikos pranešėjų apsaugos įstatymas), available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/3832a702d8ea11e782d4fd2c44cc67af/asr>.

Public trust in media

Lithuania exhibits mixed levels of trust in media, with significant variation across different types of outlets. The latest representative survey performed in October 2024¹⁰ indicates a stronger preference for national public service media over commercial outlets, yet scepticism remains prevalent due to concerns over political bias, sensationalism, and misinformation.

Public Service Media Public service media, such as Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT), enjoy relatively high levels of trust (29% of citizens express trust in them) compared to commercial outlets. LRT is generally viewed as a reliable source for impartial news, supported by its public funding and mandate to uphold journalistic integrity. However, LRT's financial stability and operational independence remain vulnerable due to fluctuating government support and limited long-term funding mechanisms. Ensuring independent, long-term funding would allow LRT to maintain its impartiality, improve content quality, and adapt to technological advancements, such as digital transformation. Additionally, investments in capacity-building programs, including investigative journalism training, would strengthen LRT's ability to deliver high-quality, independent reporting that enhances public confidence in reliable journalism.

Commercial Media. Commercial outlets, such as online news portals and private television channels, tend to face greater criticism for perceived sensationalism and alignment with specific political or business interests. Such platforms often dominate the online news landscape but are criticised for click-bait-style headlines.

Print Media and Radio. While print media has experienced declining readership, it retains a niche audience that values in-depth reporting. Radio remains a trusted medium for local and community-based news, although its influence has diminished with the rise of digital platforms.

Social Media and Influencers. Trust in influencers is particularly low, with only 3% - 8% of citizens expressing confidence in these platforms, largely due to concerns about biased or promotional content.

Challenges Affecting Media Trust:

- **Perceived Political Bias:** the survey suggests that both public and commercial media outlets occasionally face allegations of political influence, reducing trust among audiences.

10 Delfi (2024), 'Trust in information sources: Lithuanians trust "Google" and national media the most, meanwhile influencers are trust the least' (*Pasitikėjimas informacijos šaltiniais: lietuviai labiausiai pasitiki „Google“ ir nacionaline žiniasklaida, mažiausiai – nuomonės formuotojais*), Delfi, 24 October 2024, available at: <https://www.delfi.lt/m360/naujausi-straipsniai/pasitikejimas-informacijos-saltiniais-lietuviai-labiausiai-pasitiki-google-ir-nacionaline-ziniasklaida-maziausiai-nuomones-formuotojais-120059686>.

- **Sensationalism in Commercial Media:** The competition for clicks and viewership has led to a proliferation of sensationalist reporting, particularly in online portals.
- **Misinformation on social media:** Social media is a significant source of news for younger audiences but is often associated with misinformation and a lack of accountability.

Overall, while trust in public service media remains relatively high (as per the data of September 2024, 48% of people trust media¹¹), media trust in Lithuania is hindered by concerns over political bias, sensationalism, and the growing influence of unregulated digital content. Strengthening editorial independence and promoting media literacy could help address these challenges and improve public confidence in the media ecosystem.

Moreover, the rise of misinformation, particularly on social media platforms, erodes public trust in all forms of media, including both commercial and public service outlets. To combat this, mandatory media literacy programs should be implemented in schools and adult education systems, focusing on identifying misinformation, understanding media bias, and fostering critical thinking skills. Collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport, media regulators, and

NGOs are essential to develop effective curricula. These programs could empower citizens to critically assess information sources and distinguish reliable journalism from false or sensational content, thereby fostering resilience to misinformation and rebuilding trust in media.

Safety and protection of journalists and other media actors

Lawsuits and prosecutions against journalists (including SLAPPs) and safeguards against abuse

SLAPPs remain a significant challenge in Lithuania, particularly for journalists investigating corruption or exposing sensitive topics. These lawsuits are often used by powerful individuals or entities to intimidate and silence journalists through prolonged and costly legal battles, deterring them from pursuing investigative reporting.

Currently, Lithuania lacks specific legal mechanisms to address SLAPPs effectively. Courts are not equipped with clear criteria for identifying and dismissing these cases early in proceedings, leaving journalists vulnerable to undue legal harassment. Additionally, there are no provisions to impose penalties on those who file such lawsuits in bad faith, which would act as a deterrent against the misuse of legal processes.

11 ELTA (2024), *Latest survey: public trust in courts, the military, and the media has declined* (Naujausia apklausa: smuko visuomenės pasitikėjimas teismais, kariuomene ir žiniasklaida), Lietuvos Rytas, 8 September 2024, available at: <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvosdiena/aktualijos/2024/09/08/news/naujausia-apklausa-smuko-visuomenes-pasitikejimas-teismais-kariuomene-ir-ziniasklaida-34101143>.

Recognising the importance of tackling SLAPPs, the European Commission recently emphasised the need for stronger safeguards across EU member states, including Lithuania. Introducing reforms that include early dismissal mechanisms, penalties for bad-faith lawsuits, and legal aid for journalists facing SLAPPs would significantly enhance protections for media freedom. Such measures would ensure that journalists can work without fear

of legal intimidation, fostering transparency and accountability in society.

To build public and political support for these reforms, awareness campaigns highlighting the impact of SLAPPs on media freedom and democratic accountability are crucial. Engaging with civil society organisations, media professionals, and international bodies would further strengthen efforts to introduce comprehensive legal safeguards against SLAPPs.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

Key recommendations

- **Ensure adequate funding and resources for the Ombudsman institutions.** *Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania should increase the financial and human resources allocated to the Parliamentary Ombudsmen's Office and the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman. This could be achieved through amendments to the annual state budget to prioritise funding for these institutions*
- **Improve stakeholder consultations in the legislative process.** *The government and Ministry of Justice should institutionalise meaningful and consistent stakeholder consultations, particularly with NGOs, independent experts, and the judiciary, during the preparation of laws and amendments. This can be achieved by introducing mandatory consultation timelines, clear feedback mechanisms, and impact assessments for all major legal reforms.*
- **Enhance transparency and public communication of Constitutional Court decisions.** *The Constitutional Court should implement measures to improve the accessibility and transparency of its decisions, such as providing plain-language summaries of rulings and proactively communicating their broader implications to the public.*

Process for preparing and enacting laws

Framework, policy and use of impact assessments, stakeholders/public consultations (particularly consultation of judiciary on judicial reforms), and transparency and quality of the legislative process

Recent cases, such as the review of the Law on the Protection of Minors from Negative Information and debates on the Istanbul Convention, highlight the importance of broader and more inclusive consultations during legislative processes. Ensuring meaningful stakeholder involvement early in the legislative process promotes clarity, constitutionality, and alignment with international human rights obligations. It also reduces the risk of laws facing opposition or legal challenges due to inadequate input during the drafting stages.

Regime for constitutional review of laws

In Lithuania, the regime for constitutional review of laws is overseen by the Constitutional Court, which ensures the compatibility of legislation with the Constitution. The Court plays a key role in upholding the legality and transparency of the legislative process. In 2024, several significant cases were brought before the Constitutional Court, reflecting

ongoing debates about human rights, government structure, and freedom of information.

Istanbul Convention. A constitutional review was initiated regarding Lithuania's potential ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). Opponents argued that certain provisions of the Convention might conflict with the Lithuanian Constitution, particularly regarding gender definitions and traditional family values. This case underscores the tensions between international human rights commitments and domestic constitutional principles. In mid-March 2024, the Constitutional Court ruled¹² that the Istanbul Convention does not conflict with the Lithuanian Constitution, thereby clearing a significant obstacle to its potential ratification.

Law on the Protection of Minors from Negative Information. After the ECtHR delivered its judgement in the case *Macate v. Lithuania*,¹³ the Constitutional Court was asked¹⁴ to review amendments to the Law on the Protection of Minors from Negative Information, which has been criticised for restricting access to certain information, particularly content related to LGBTQIA+ issues. Human rights organisations argue that the law disproportionately limits freedom of expression and access to information, raising concerns about

12 Constitutional Court (Lithuania), Judgment of 14 March 2024, No. KT24-I1/2024 (Istanbul Convention case), available at: <https://lrkt.lt/lt/teismo-aktai/paieska/135/ta2975/content>.

13 ECtHR [GC], Judgment of 23 January 2023, *Macate v. Lithuania* [GC], no. 61435/19 (2023).

14 Government of the Republic of Lithuania, Resolution on the Appeal to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania No. 121 of 2024 (Nutarimas dėl kreipimosi į Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucinį teismą), available at: https://lrkt.lt/~prasymai/2_2024.htm.

compliance with constitutional and international obligations. In December 2024, the Constitutional Court ruled that the provisions in question are unconstitutional. The Court highlighted that the restriction of information about family models other than those based on the marriage of a man and a woman for minors is not necessary to protect constitutional values and, moreover, hinders the development of children into mature individuals as well as violates democratic values such as equality, pluralism, and tolerance.

Number of ministers in government. The appeal case¹⁵ brought to the Constitutional Court by TS-LKD focuses on the legality of ministerial appointments when approving the composition of the government. The dispute centres on whether constitutional norms were breached after the release of the presidential decree approving an incomplete government without two ministers, whereas the Constitution provides for the approval of a full-fledged government. This case highlights the importance of constitutional safeguards in ensuring a transparent and lawful governmental formation process. There is no decision by the Constitutional Court as yet.

These cases illustrate the continued relevance and accessibility of constitutional review mechanisms in Lithuania. The Constitutional

Court remains an essential institution for upholding constitutional principles, protecting human rights, and ensuring that legislative processes comply with the highest legal standards. Furthermore, public and stakeholder engagement in these cases reflects growing awareness of constitutional norms and democratic accountability.

However, challenges remain, particularly regarding the politicisation of constitutional issues, as seen in the debates surrounding the Istanbul Convention and the Law on the Protection of Minors from Negative Information. Addressing these matters requires a balanced approach that respects both constitutional values and international commitments.

Independent authorities

Existing independent authorities in Lithuania, such as the Parliamentary Ombudspersons' Office, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, and the State Data Protection Inspectorate play a pivotal role in ensuring good governance, protecting human rights, and promoting equality. However, these institutions face significant challenges that limit their effectiveness.

One of the primary issues is the lack of sufficient financial and human resources, limiting

15 Gailė Jaruševičiūtė-Mockuvienė, 'Martyna Pikelytė, TS-LKD will appeal to the Constitutional Court regarding Nausėda: the approval of the government composition is the issue' (*TS-LKD dėl Nausėdos kreipsis į Konstitucinį Teismą: užkliuvo Vyriausybės tvirtinimas*), Lithuanian Radio and Television, 12 December 2024, available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2434418/ts-lkd-del-nausedos-kreipsis-i-konstitucini-teisma-uzkliuvo-vyriausybes-tvirtinimas>.

the ability of the Ombudsperson institutions to conduct proactive investigations, address systemic issues, and fulfil their mandates effectively. Adequate funding would enable these institutions to hire more specialists, expand outreach activities, and address a larger number of complaints. Strengthening these institutions enhances public trust and institutional accountability, ensuring better governance and stronger protection of rights.

Another concern is the technical capacity and independence of these bodies. While their mandates grant them autonomy, their ability to operate independently can be undermined by insufficient resources or delays in receiving budget allocations. Furthermore, the

increasing complexity of issues, such as data protection and AI regulation, require these institutions to enhance their technical expertise, which is challenging without additional investments in capacity-building programs.

Despite these challenges, there have been some encouraging developments. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has launched successful awareness campaigns on gender equality and discrimination, reaching a wide audience through digital platforms. The State Data Protection Inspectorate has also made progress in educating businesses and individuals about GDPR compliance, reflecting its growing role in navigating digital rights.

CIVIC SPACE



Key recommendations

- **For the government of Lithuania to allocate more funding to CSOs.** CSOs serve an important function as experts in their fields and mediators between state institutions and members of various groups. Raising the levels of financial support to CSOs will ensure that they can continue to work for the benefit of social inclusion and equality.
- **For managing institutions to ensure that funding programmes are transparent and foster a healthy CSOs environment.** CSO funding programmes and project calls need to foster healthy CSO competition and ensure that project funding is adequate for project delivery requirements.
- **For the government of Lithuania to control the 'NGO marker' designation in the Registry of Legal Persons.** Government oversight of the 'NGO marker' will ensure that only not-for-profit CSOs may receive this marker and benefit from state programmes designed for CSOs.

Freedom of association

Financing framework for CSOs, including availability of and access to public funding, rules on fundraising, rules on foreign funding, tax regulations (e.g. tax advantages for organisations with charitable or public benefit status, eligibility to receive donations via citizens' allocation of income tax to charitable causes, eligibility to use public amenities at low or no cost, etc)

Funding to CSOs by various foundations managed by the government of Lithuania remains limited and financial sustainability remains a difficult challenge for many CSOs. This shows a lack of interest on the government of Lithuania's behalf to strengthen the civil society sector and support CSOs' function as independent experts and mediators between vulnerable groups and governmental institutions. Several funding competitions are announced every year, however, the funding provided is often insufficient to significantly contribute to CSOs' annual budget and the requirements for project deliverables are sometimes so high, that implementation of the project may become more costly than that provided by the funding.¹⁶ Other times we observe project calls that seem tailored to a particular CSO given the

inclusion of complex eligibility requirements that only one or a couple of large CSOs may possess. The limited funding made available discourages other CSOs from engaging in complex and costly-to-manage consortiums to meet the requirements. While we appreciate that certain initiatives require very specific expertise, extremely tailored requirements negatively affect healthy competition between CSOs and may foster government favouritism.

Additionally, the requirements for funding eligibility and administrative accountability keep rising. Starting in 2025, amendments to the Charity and Support Act regulate that only CSOs that have an 'NGO' marker in the Registry of Legal Persons (RLP) will be eligible to receive donations of 1.2% from the yearly personal income tax donation.¹⁷ The same requirement is applied in some government funding competitions for CSOs. This marker is received by self-declaration and is not supervised by state authorities, meaning that for-profit organisations (e.g. countryside tourism organisations) can receive the 'NGO' marker and present themselves as non-profit CSOs, which is misleading to the public. An example of rising accountability requirements is the government's intention to issue personal fines to directors of CSOs who fail to present their

16 Order of the Minister of Social Protection and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania On the Approval of the Provisions for the Organization of the Selection Competition of the Non-Governmental Organizations Project, Intended for the Implementation of Measures to Promote Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination in 2025, Art. 17, available at: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/f6e58e80690f11efafbb8694c098bac5>.

17 National NGO Coalition (2024), 'Important changes regarding 1.2% GPM support: what do non-governmental organizations need to know?', December 2024, available at: <https://www.ngo.lt/svarbus-pokyciai-del-12-gpm-paramos-ka-privalo-zinoti-nevyriausybinis-organizacijos/>.

annual activity reports to the RLP. While we support transparency and accountability, such requirements disproportionately affect smaller grassroots CSOs, especially those established in the provinces that function to address local issues and do not have sufficient human resources or administrative know-how to keep up with government regulations.

June 2024 saw amendments to the Sports Law create a requirement for non-governmental sports organisations (e.g. non-governmental organisations leading Olympic, Paralympic, sports for people with visual, hearing, mobility or intellectual disabilities, and student sports movements in Lithuania) to fulfil the criteria requiring the rotation of members in the organisation's governing bodies in order to receive governmental funding. A group of MPs filed a request to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania to provide a ruling on the requirement, as they argued

this is a direct and unjustified interference in the internal governance of these organisations and a violation of the principle of freedom of association.¹⁸

On 1 November 2024, additional requirements came into force for people working with minors. Now it is required to take out an official QR code which will ensure that people with a history of serious and very serious offences, including sexual offences against minors, won't have the right to work with minors. This is an important positive development in the protection of minors, however, it constitutes another example of the rising administrative burdens on CSOs, which particularly affect small organisations that do not have sufficient resources to fulfil administrative burdens.¹⁹ In such a context, the government's financial support to CSOs becomes increasingly important.

18 Lietuvos Rytas (2024), *The Constitutional Court will assess whether the requirements imposed on sports organizations regarding the rotation of members of their governing bodies are in conflict with the Constitution*, 17 November 2024, available at: <https://www.lrytas.lt/sportas/startai/2024/11/17/news/konstitucinis-teismas-vertins-ar-sporto-organizacijoms-keliامي-reikalavimai-del-valdymo-organu-nariu-rotacijos-nepriestarau-35197251>.

19 Artscape (2024), 'New child protection requirements for organizations', available at: <https://artscape.lt/naujienos/nauji-vaiko-apsaugos-reikalavimai-organizacijoms/>.

DISREGARD OF HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS AND OTHER SYSTEMIC ISSUES AFFECTING THE RULE OF LAW ENVIRONMENT

Key recommendations

- **The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania should legalise same-sex partnerships.** Giving legal status to same-sex couples would not only ensure the protection of their rights, but also contribute to reducing hate speech and hate crimes.
- **The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania should cancel the provision in the Law on the Protection of Minors from Negative Effects of Public Information banning information on LGBTQIA+ to minors.** Lack of education on LGBTQIA+ topics contributes to social exclusion and hate crime. Normalising LGBTQIA+ topics would be an important step towards ensuring equality for all groups within the society and a strong indicator of willingness to protect the rights of members of LGBTQIA+ communities.
- **The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania should implement the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights.** Lithuania, being a member of the European Convention on Human Rights, needs to abide by the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights and implement its decisions.

Systemic human rights violations

Implementation of decisions by supranational courts, such as the Court of Justice of the EU and the European Court of Human Rights

On 23 January 2023, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled against Lithuania in the case of *Macate v. Lithuania*²⁰ and found that Lithuania had violated an article of

the European Convention on Human Rights that defines freedom of expression. The case was related to a book named 'Amber Heart', which contained stories of various groups experiencing social exclusion and discrimination (the disabled, migrants, homosexuals, Roma people), authored by Neringa Macatė-Dangvydė and published in 2013 by the Lithuanian Educational University. Since two of the six stories describe romantic relationships between same-sex characters, the book's distribution

²⁰ ECtHR [GC], Judgement of 23 January 2023, *Macate v. Lithuania* [GC], no. 61435/19 (2023).

was suspended and only continued after it was marked as harmful to children under the age of 14. The decisions were based on the ‘Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Protection of Minors from Negative Effects of Public Information’,²¹ passed in 2009, which states that information depicting same-sex romantic relationships that describe other forms of families than established in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania is harmful to minors. N. Macatė appealed to the Lithuanian courts over discrimination in 2014 and, after losing her appeal, to the ECtHR in 2019.²²

The ECtHR rejected the Lithuanian government’s arguments that certain passages in the book were sexually explicit and degraded heterosexual families, stating that “the tales promoted respect for and acceptance of all members of society in a fundamental aspect

of their lives [...]”. The Court therefore concludes that restricting children’s access to such information did not pursue any aim which it could recognise as legitimate”.²³ Following the ECtHR ruling, the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania presented a draft amendment to the aforementioned law to the Seimas of Lithuania seeking to scrap the existing ban on information to minors about LGBTQIA+ relationships. However, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania rejected the draft amendment and failed to implement the ECtHR ruling.^{24,25} As a result, in February 2024, the government cabinet filed a request to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania to rule on the Law on the Protection of Minors from Negative Effects of Public Information and whether its provision banning depiction of same-sex relationships is

21 Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Protection of Minors from Negative Effects of Public Information, Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Document no. IX-1067, available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.183129/asr>.

22 Saulius Jakučionis, BNS, *Lithuania loses ECHR case over children’s book about same-sex relationships*, Lithuanian Radio and Television, 23 January 2023, available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1873262/lithuania-loses-echr-case-over-children-s-book-about-same-sex-relationships>.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Lithuanian Radio and Television (2023), ‘The Seimas went against the will of the ECtHR – it did not allow the lifting of the ban on talking about LGBTQI to minors’, 7 November 2023, available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2118293/seimas-stojo-pries-eztt-valia-neleido-panaikinti-draudimo-nepilnameciams-pasakoti-apie-lgbtqi>.

25 Lithuanian Radio and Television (2023), ‘Lithuania looking for ways to react to ECHR ruling after Seimas rejects LGBTQ information law change’, 8 November 2023, available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2120543/lithuania-looking-for-ways-to-react-to-echr-ruling-after-seimas-rejects-lgbtq-information-law-change>.

constitutional.²⁶ A decision by the Constitutional Court is expected in January 2025.

FOSTERING A RULE OF LAW CULTURE

Efforts by state authorities

Contribution of civil society and other non-governmental actors

Every year on International Human Rights Day, a National Human Rights Forum is organised.²⁷ This Forum is organised by a group of representatives from CSOs, academia and state institutions, namely: Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuanian Disability Forum, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, the Parliament (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania) of the Republic of Lithuania, Coalition of Human Rights Organisations, Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Office of Parliamentary Ombudspersons of Lithuania, Office of the Ombudsperson for Child's rights of Lithuania. This year the seventh annual National Human

Rights Forum was held, and it covered a broad range of topics for discussion, e.g. political human rights agenda in the new Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, gender equality, rights of people with disabilities, children's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, integration of migrants, institutional development of equal opportunities, and the weaponising of disinformation.²⁸

This forum is important not only because it marks International Human Rights Day and raises awareness of human rights issues in Lithuania, but also owing to the creation of an environment for constructive discussions between members of the national government, academia, CSOs and vulnerable groups. Speakers share their perspectives, opinions, research findings and personal experiences, contributing to normalising discussion on human rights-related issues in the public sphere. This year's Forum was attended by 216 people and aired online, with discussion recordings available on the Forum's YouTube channel.²⁹

26 Lithuanian Radio and Television (2024), 'Lithuanian government to turn to Constitutional Court to invalidate anti-LGBTQ law, Lithuanian Radio and Television', 14 February 2024, available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2195979/lithuanian-government-to-turn-to-constitutional-court-to-invalidate-anti-lgbtq-law>.

27 Lithuanian Radio and Television (2024), 'National Human Rights Forum took place', 10 December 2024, available at: <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2434884/vyko-nacionalinis-zmogaus-teisiu-forumas>.

28 National Human Rights Forum, available at: <https://nztf.lt/en/>.

29 National Human Rights Forum channel, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@nacionaliniszmogaus-teisi-uf5850>.

CONTACTS

Human Rights Monitoring Institute

Human Rights Monitoring Institute (HRMI) is a non-governmental, not-for-profit human rights organisation. Since its establishment in 2003, HRMI has been advocating for full compliance of national laws and policies with international human rights obligations, and working to ensure that rights can be exercised in practice.

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The Civil Liberties Union for Europe

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) is a non-governmental organisation promoting the civil liberties of everyone in the European Union. We are headquartered in Berlin and have a presence in Brussels. Liberties is built on a network of 21 national civil liberties NGOs from across the EU.

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