

Integration of refugees in Lithuania

Participation and Empowerment

Understanding Integration in Lithuania through an age, gender and diversity based participatory approach

October – November 2013



UNHCR
The UN
Refugee Agency



Vilniaus
arkivyskupijos
„Caritas“



LIETUVOS
RAUDONOJO KRYŽIAUS DRAUGIJA



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LEGAL PROCESS: refugees are granted a range of entitlements and rights which are broadly commensurate with those enjoyed by citizens. These include freedom of movement, access to education and the labour market, access to social assistance, including health facilities, and the capacity to travel with valid travel and identity documents. Realization of family unity is another important aspect of integration. Over time the process should lead to permanent residence rights and in some cases the acquisition of citizenship in the country of asylum.

ECONOMIC PROCESS: refugees attain a growing degree of self-reliance and become capable of pursuing sustainable livelihoods, thus contributing to the economic life in the host country.

refugee integration

TWO-WAY PROCESS: preparedness on the part of the refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and to meet the needs of a diverse population.

SOCIO-CULTURAL PROCESS: refugees acclimatize and local communities accommodate refugees to enable them to live amongst or alongside the receiving population without discrimination or exploitation, and contribute actively to the social life of their country of asylum.

List of abbreviations

AGD	Age, Gender, Diversity
DSSS	Department of Supervision of Social Services
ERF	European Refugee Fund
EUMS	EU Member States
EUREMA II	Intra-EU re-allocation of refugees from Malta
FRC	Foreigners' Registration Centre
LRCS	Lithuanian Red Cross Society
MD	Migration Department
MFT	Multi-Functional Team
MSSL	Ministry of Social Security and Labor
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PA	Participatory Assessment
PD	Police Department
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
RRC	Refugee Reception Centre
RRNE	UNHCR Regional Representation for Northern Europe
SBGS	State Border Guard Service
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees

1. Introduction

Lithuania acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (“the 1951 Refugee Convention”) in 1997, and has since received refugees in small numbers compared to its Nordic neighbours. Those granted asylum in Lithuania have often found it difficult to integrate and many have subsequently moved onwards within Europe in search of livelihoods. This has contributed to a general perception that refugees would - if they could - prefer to get asylum in other European countries with higher living standards and better social support systems. Refugees’ ability to realize integration is an integral part of an efficient asylum system, and the UNHCR Regional Representation for Northern Europe has selected integration as one of its regional priorities for advocacy, capacity development and technical support.

To understand the reasons why many refugees recognized in Lithuania move onwards, and inform the content of UNHCR’s engagement, the first step has been to conduct a Participatory Assessment of refugees’ integration opportunities and challenges in Lithuania, from the perspective of the refugees themselves. For UNHCR, it is crucial to start the formation of an assessment and analysis of the effectiveness of the current integration program, by listening to the voices of those the program is intended to benefit. In many respects, the refugees themselves are best placed to tell us if programs and activities being implemented by the Lithuanian authorities and NGO partners have the intended impact in practice, or if changes are needed in order to more effectively use the resources spent on facilitating integration.

UNHCR, in close collaboration with the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour and the NGO partners Lithuanian Red Cross Society and Caritas therefore formed a Multi-Functional Team, and conducted Participatory Assessments with almost 70 beneficiaries of international protection in Lithuania of different nationalities, ages, gender and personal and professional backgrounds, during October and November 2013.

This report is the result of that effort, to 'map' opportunities and challenges faced by refugees in the process of integration, through a participatory approach. Previous studies on refugee integration in Lithuania have been used as reference to guide the selection of areas critical for successful integration and to validate the information obtained through the Participatory Assessment. This report is therefore one contribution towards acquiring a comprehensive assessment and analysis of the impact and effectiveness of the integration program available today for refugees in Lithuania. To obtain a comprehensive assessment, more research will be needed in particular in relation to the roles and responsibilities of the existing institutions, and the legal framework in place through, for example, participatory consultations with the various actors involved in the integration process in Lithuania.

UNHCR hopes that this report can help advance the discussion on how Lithuania can further develop what is already in place and functioning well, and ultimately establish an integration program where the valuable resources invested will effectively contribute to refugees' ability to legally, economically and socially integrate in their new home. Recommendations proposed at the end of each thematic section are provided against the background of practice in Europe, mainly in the Nordic Countries, which are the Regional Representation for Northern Europe's area of operation and expertise. The examples of practice referred to have been chosen based on the good results they have yielded in terms of facilitating integration. The proposed recommendations are also based on experience and knowledge gathered through the EU funded project "Refugee Integration Capacity and Evaluation" that was recently implemented by UNHCR and included a study of refugee integration in four EU Member States, Austria, Ireland, France, and Sweden.

The members of the Multi-Functional Team are grateful towards the refugees who took part in the Participatory Assessments, and so openly and candidly shared their personal experiences and suggestions with the team, with the aim of helping us understand how the current integration program impacts on their ability to integrate in Lithuania and what adjustments could make the program more effective.

The project team

The Multi-Functional Team, which carried out the Participatory Assessments in Lithuania consisted of Karolina Lindholm Billing, Senior Regional Legal Officer, and Karin Davin, Senior Resettlement and Integration Associate at the UNHCR Regional Representation for Northern Europe; Renata Kules, Liaison Officer for Lithuania; Lina Charauskaite, Chief Specialist of the Equal Opportunities Division of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour; Raimonda Lebelionyte-Elseikiene, Social Worker of the Refugee Affairs Unit at the Lithuanian Red Cross Society; Lolita Panave, Project Manager and Ilma Skuodiene, Foreigners' Integration Programme Manager and Project Manager at Caritas Vilnius.

Many thanks also go to Kamile Maciulaityte, UNHCR Volunteer, for documenting the meetings; and to Neringa Gauciene, Ghulam Rabani Rahmat, Egle Rusinskaite and Ilma Skuodiene for their help in organizing the meetings with refugees in Rukla, Kaunas and Vilnius.

2. Rationale for UNHCR's engagement in refugee integration

2.1 Objectives of the Participatory Assessment of refugees' integration opportunities and challenges in Lithuania

UNHCR has been entrusted by the United Nations General Assembly with the mandate to provide international protection to refugees and, together with governments, seek permanent solutions to the problems of refugees. For the majority of refugees in Europe, integration is the most relevant durable solution. UNHCR's interest and engagement in integration stems from its mandate to seek solutions and Article 34 in the 1951 Refugee Convention, which sets out that states shall, as far as possible, facilitate the integration and naturalization of refugees. Complementing this article are various soft law and policy documents related to integration, such as the UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusion No. 104 on Local Integration¹ and the 2009 note on strategic approaches for combating discrimination².

The logic of the Convention framework is that, with the passing of time, refugees should be able to enjoy a wider range of rights as their association and ties with the host state grow stronger. In this sense, the 1951 Refugee Convention gives refugees a solid basis on which they can progressively restore the social and economic independence needed to get on with their lives. UNHCR Executive Committee (ExCom) Conclusion No. 104 calls on states to facilitate, as appropriate, the integration of refugees and recalls that special efforts may be necessary.

As mentioned in the Introduction above, facilitating the integration of refugees in their new home country is a priority area for UNHCR's advocacy and capacity building activities

¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Conclusion on Local Integration*, 7 October 2005, No. 104 (LVI) - 2005, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4357a91b2.html>

² UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Combating Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance through a Strategic Approach*, December 2009, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4b30931d2.html>

in the Northern Europe region, including in Lithuania. To help inform and guide the focus and content of these efforts in respect of Lithuania, the UNHCR Regional Representation for Northern Europe (“RRNE”) identified a need to conduct an assessment and analysis of the current opportunities and challenges in relation to integration of refugees in Lithuania, as there are no comprehensive studies available on the topic.

Based on UNHCR’s policy, that refugees must be at the centre of identifying their own needs and capacities and in making decisions aimed at enhancing their well-being, UNHCR determined that the starting point for such an assessment and analysis would be to engage in a direct dialogue with the refugees concerned. In order to ensure that all refugees – regardless of their age, gender and individual characteristics – have equal access to rights and services and enjoyment of protection, the assessment was conducted in an Age, Gender and Diversity (“AGD”)-sensitive manner. Participation of refugees in identifying opportunities and protection gaps and in proposing, developing and implementing policies and activities to address the gaps is also important for ensuring their empowerment. The Participatory Assessment methodology³ was therefore chosen as the format for this assessment. A Multi-Functional Team (“MFT”), comprising representatives from UNHCR and the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour (“MSSL”) and the NGO partners Lithuanian Red Cross Society (“LRCS”) and Caritas, all involved in facilitating the integration of refugees in Lithuania, was formed to carry out the Participatory Assessment of refugees’ integration opportunities and challenges in Lithuania (“PA”). The purpose of having a MFT conduct the PA was to ensure that the topics selected to guide the discussions with the refugees would reflect the various aspects of the integration process, that the views expressed by the refugees would be analysed from different perspectives, and to allow for the findings and recommendations to be better ‘anchored’ and understood by the key stakeholders.

The PA with refugees in Lithuania served several purposes:

- ❶ to identify and examine** opportunities and challenges in relation to the integration of refugees in Lithuania through gathering basic information about existing policies and programmes that seek to support refugees in various aspects of their integration;
- ❷ to hear from a representative group** of women, men, girl and boy refugees how they experience integration and how these policies and programs impact on their ability to integrate, and elicit their recommendations on how the integration environment in Lithuania could be further improved;
- ❸ to reflect on what is learned** through the PAs and make recommendations for consideration;
- ❹ to sensitize** relevant Lithuanian authorities and NGOs about the PA methodology and to build their capacity to continue using this method in their work; and
- ❺ to institutionalize participation** and AGD mainstreaming approaches in reception arrangements and integration programs.

³ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessment in Operations*, May 2006, First edition, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/462df4232.html>

This report from the PA with refugees on integration opportunities and challenges in Lithuania does not purport to be a comprehensive assessment and analysis of the integration environment for refugees in Lithuania, but one contribution to such. It is neither an evaluation of how successful integration policies and programs are in Lithuania, nor a detailed analysis of whether or not Lithuania correctly implements the binding international and EU standards in relation to asylum and the reception of asylum-seekers. In order to have a comprehensive assessment, one would also need to thoroughly analyse Lithuanian legislation and policies affecting the rights and integration of refugees vis-à-vis international and European standards, and to map all of the institutions and civil society organizations involved, including through stakeholder consultations. Nonetheless, UNHCR hopes that the findings from the PA, conveying the views of the refugees who are the recipients of the Government's integration policies and programs, as well as the proposed recommendations, will contribute to such an overall assessment and inform the development of a future National Integration Strategy, with associated programs and projects aimed at facilitating refugees' integration in Lithuania in the most efficient way possible.

As mentioned in the Introduction above, the recommendations proposed at the end of each thematic section are provided against the background of integration policies and practices in Europe, mainly in the Nordic Countries. The examples of practice referred to have been chosen based on the good results they have yielded in terms of facilitating refugees' integration. The proposed recommendations are also based on experience and knowledge gathered through the EU funded project "Refugee Integration Capacity and Evaluation" ("RICE") that was recently implemented by UNHCR and included a study of refugee integration in four EU Member States, Austria, Ireland, France, and Sweden. The aim of the RICE project was to review trends in the development of policy areas relevant to integration, to identify measurable integration indicators used and the methods of evaluating integration, and to highlight factors that influence integration outcomes for refugees.

In this report, the term "refugees" is used to encompass all beneficiaries of international protection in Lithuania, including 1951 Convention refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, unless specified otherwise.

2.1. Definition of integration

There is no consensus on the definition of immigrant integration in the context of developed countries and there is no formal definition in international refugee law.⁴ For UNHCR and for the purpose of this report, integration is understood as the end product of a dynamic, multi-faceted two-way process with three interrelated dimensions: a *legal*, an *economic* and a *socio-cultural* dimension. Integration requires efforts by all parties concerned, including preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and to meet the needs of a diverse population.⁵

The two-way process underlies the three specific dimensions that UNHCR emphasizes as being part of the process of refugee integration:

- **AS A LEGAL PROCESS:** refugees are granted a range of entitlements and rights which are broadly commensurate with those enjoyed by citizens. These include freedom of movement, access to education and the labour market, access to social assistance, including health facilities, and the capacity to travel with valid travel and identity documents. Realization of family unity is another important aspect of integration. Over time the process should lead to permanent residence rights and in some cases the acquisition of citizenship in the country of asylum.
- **AS AN ECONOMIC PROCESS:** refugees attain a growing degree of self-reliance and become capable of pursuing sustainable livelihoods, thus contributing to the economic life in the host country.
- **AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL PROCESS:** refugees acclimatize and local communities accommodate refugees to enable them to live amongst or alongside the receiving population without discrimination or exploitation, and contribute actively to the social life of their country of asylum.⁶

⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Europe*, p. 13, available at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/522980604.html>

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction seminar to the Participatory Assessment

As a starting point for the PA exercise, UNHCR RRNE and the MSSL jointly organized a one-day seminar in Vilnius titled “Mapping integration in Lithuania – through Participatory Approaches” (hereafter referred to as the “Introduction Seminar”) for relevant stakeholders on 3 October 2013. The aim of the Introduction Seminar was to outline the objectives of the Participatory Assessment of refugees’ integration opportunities and challenges in Lithuania, to introduce the stakeholders to the international and European standards relevant for the integration of refugees and to share practice examples from other countries in relation to integration. The Introduction Seminar also explained the AGD and PA methodology and its advantages, and helped to identify thematic areas of interest for the PA sessions.

3.2 Participatory Assessment approach

PA methods include various steps aimed at gathering information, reviewing existing information, mapping diversity, facilitating discussions, and systematizing and analysing information. PA is a process of building partnerships with refugee women and men of all ages and backgrounds by promoting meaningful participation through structured dialogue, and includes holding separate discussions (or interviews) with women, men, girls and boys in order to gather information on the specific situation they face, to understand their capacities and to hear their proposed solutions where there are concerns. The advantage of PA as a method to gather and analyse information compared to ‘traditional mapping or evaluation,’ is that the exercise leads to greater empowerment for the refugees involved. Through their involvement in the exercise, the refugees will hopefully experience greater ownership of and engagement in the processes and its outcomes, which will in turn increase the probability of successful results.

3.3 Multi-Functional Team

A MFT was established to conduct the PA, in order to ensure that the topics selected to guide the discussions with the refugees would reflect the different aspects of the integration process and that the views expressed by the refugees would be analysed from all relevant perspectives. Using a MFT would also ensure a stronger 'anchoring' of the findings and proposed measures for improvement among the key stakeholders, and enhance the prospects for implementation of recommendations in future integration strategies. The MFT established included representatives of the UNHCR RRNE, MSSL, the LRCS and Caritas. UNHCR had the leading role in introducing the PA methodology at the Introductory Seminar in Vilnius, and for facilitating the PAs with the refugees. The MSSL played a key role in organizing the Introductory Seminar, and the LRCS and Caritas informed the refugees about the project and invited them to PA meetings, hosted them at their premises. The staff of the Refugee Reception Centre in Rukla ("RRC") effectively helped organize the PAs with refugees residing in the Centre.

3.4 Age, Gender and Diversity-sensitive composition of refugee groups

In order to ensure that the views elicited during the PAs would reflect the impact of existing integration support programs on individuals and groups of refugees of different ages, gender and background, the MFT sought to ensure that the PAs would include a representative group of refugees in Lithuania. Accordingly, refugee men and women of different ages, nationalities and backgrounds, living in different locations and having been granted different legal status and with a varying number of years of residence in Lithuania, were proactively identified and invited to attend the PAs. However, logistical constraints such as the need for interpretation and limited financial and time resources to carry out the exercise had to be taken into consideration when inviting the participants.

3.5 Focus areas for the Participatory Assessment

A number of thematic areas determined to be of critical importance for refugees' ability to integrate in a new society were selected to guide the discussions during the PAs. However, the refugees were not restricted to only speak about their experiences within these selected areas.

The thematic areas were identified through a number of means. The Introductory Seminar included a session in which the participants were invited to share concerns they saw in relation to the reception and integration of refugees in Lithuania. Issues raised related to conditions in the RRC, in particular the insufficient financial support to cover e.g. food and travel. The participants also stressed the lack of access to social housing after the state integration support is over and the importance of acquiring language skills in order to integrate. The importance of capacity building activities for staff working with refugees, and sharing of good practices from other countries was also mentioned. The participants in the Introductory Seminar referred to the recent study *"Survival in Lithuania: the*



UNHCR, Participatory Assessment with a group of refugee children in the Rukla Reception Centre.
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*experience of asylum-seekers and foreigners granted asylum*⁷ as an important reference to inform the selection of topics for the PAs.

UNHCR was also guided in the selection of thematic focus areas by integration benchmarks or indicators used at the EU level. These include the areas of employment, education, social inclusion and citizenship.⁸ Through the recently implemented RICE project, as we have introduced the abbreviation earlier in the report, UNHCR found that additional areas of relevance for the realization of integration are reception, documentation, family reunification and the transition period from asylum-seeker to recognized refugee.

⁷ Institute for Ethnic Studies at the Lithuanian Social Research Centre (2013) 'Implementation of the EU Asylum Policy: Legal and Sociological Focus', *Ethnicity Studies*, 2013/1, available at: <http://www.redcross.lt/files/leidinys.pdf>

⁸ See for example the Zaragoza Declaration adopted by the European Ministerial Conference on Integration in Zaragoza, 15 and 16 April, 2010 Available at: <http://goo.gl/npUu9o>

In light of the above, the following thematic areas were selected to guide the discussions with the refugees during the PAs:

- Reception conditions and time spent in the asylum procedure;
- Post recognition integration support provided at the Refugee Reception Centre in Rukla and in municipalities, including financial support and Lithuanian language courses;
- Legal status and duration of residence permits;
- Access to housing in municipalities;
- Access to employment including validation of qualifications and possibilities for self-employment and skills training;
- Social integration, including feelings of belonging, participation in public/communal life, discrimination and xenophobia, and education;
- Health care;
- Family reunification, including information about and access to family reunification procedures and eligibility criteria.

These thematic areas were shared with the refugees before the PAs started; however, the facilitator of the PAs stressed that the refugees should not feel restricted to only speak about their experiences within these areas, if there were other critical aspects of the integration process that they would like to raise. Due to time constraints, some areas were discussed more at length than others, reflecting the issues that refugees felt were of most concern to them.

3.6 Questionnaire to refugees

In order to supplement the 'qualitative information' gathered through the PAs with refugees, a questionnaire was prepared in which the refugees were asked to provide basic information about their year of arrival in Lithuania, their age and sex, country of origin and legal status granted as well as their current residence. The reason for distributing this questionnaire was to be able to limit the amount of time spent during the meetings to these questions and to provide some basic quantitative background information on the composition of the refugee groups.

3.7 Considerations in relation to methodology

The MFT dedicated approximately two hours to each participatory focus group discussion. During this time, the MFT and the themes that had been selected to guide the discussion were introduced and the refugees were invited to introduce themselves. Towards the end of the session, the refugees were asked if they wished to make additional comments, add a theme or ask questions. Without the time limit of two hours/PA session, additional attention could perhaps have been given to themes that now generated less attention and comments. On the other hand, it was felt that two hours was a reasonable time to maintain the focus and concentration of all. The focus group-format probably impacted on each individual's willingness to express themselves at length and may also have

inhibited some refugees in sharing sensitive personal details which otherwise could have come up. On the other hand, the MFT always tried to give time for individual, one-on-one conversations after the PA had ended, and the focus group format enabled some of the feedback received to be 'validated' in the group of refugees who shared similar views about specific topics.

3.8 Overall composition of the refugee groups

Considerable effort was made by the MFT to include in the PA both those recognised as 1951 Convention refugees and those recognised as beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in accordance with the EU Qualifications Directive.⁹ Efforts were also made to ensure the inclusion of refugees from the major ethnic groups and nationalities represented in the refugee population in Lithuania and to interview men, women and children. In order to include perspectives both on the initial integration support and the longer term support in municipalities, participants represented both refugees living in the RRC and in the municipalities of Vilnius, Kaunas and Jonava.

Prior to the PAs, the refugees had received an information leaflet (see Annex 1) explaining the aim of the PA as well as which organizations were part of the MFT. This information leaflet was prepared in English, Russian, Arabic and Dari by UNHCR and the NGO partners in the MFT. Separate focus group discussions were held with men, women and children when possible, though in some instances, men and women were interviewed together. However, the MFT always sought to leave time for individual, one-on-one discussions after the PA, to allow refugee participants who wished, to express views they did not want to share in front of the group.

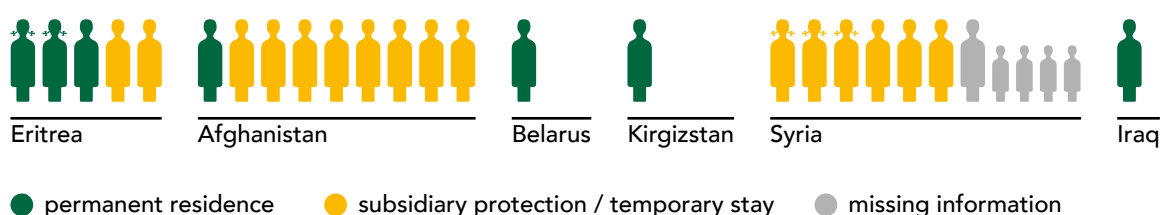
In total, 68 refugees, originating from 12 different countries took part in the PAs. 46 of the refugees were men from Afghanistan, Belarus, Eritrea, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Russia (Chechnya), Somalia, Syria, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan, and 12 were women from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Russia (Chechnya) and Syria, and 10 were children from Afghanistan, Syria and Uzbekistan. The majority of refugees who took part in the PAs were men from Afghanistan. The educational background of the refugee participants varied from no education to University education. A majority of the refugees had secondary education.

The refugee men who participated were between the ages of 14 and 62 and originated from 12 different countries. Those who stayed in RRC had arrived in Lithuania between 2011 and 2013. The men staying in Jonava and Kaunas had arrived between 1997 and 2012, and those staying in Vilnius had arrived between 2009 and 2012.

⁹ European Union: Council of the European Union, *Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast)*, 20 December 2011, OJ L 337; December 2011, pp 9-26, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f197df02.html>

12 of the refugee participants were women from 5 different countries, between the ages of 25 and 44. They had arrived in Lithuania at different times between 2000 and 2012 and stayed in RRC or lived in Jonava, Kaunas or Vilnius. Half of the refugee women were granted refugee status and permanent residence permits, while the others were beneficiaries of subsidiary protection who had been granted temporary residence permit. None of the women refugees had been transferred to Lithuania under the Dublin Regulation, while 3 of the refugee women had been transferred from Malta in 2007 and in 2013 under the EUREMA II scheme.

Composition of the refugee groups in the RRC



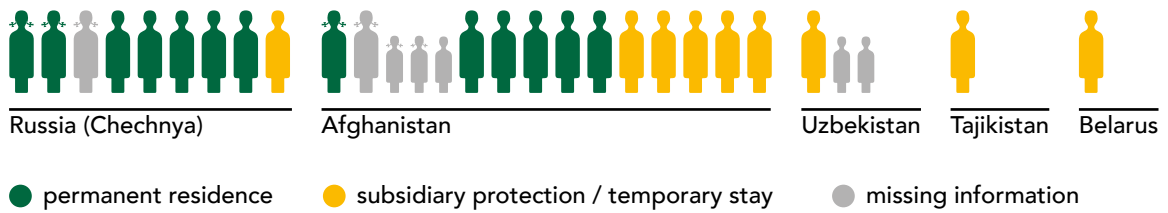
In the RRC, PAs were undertaken with 28 refugees from 6 different countries: 5 from Eritrea (2 women and 3 men), 9 men from Afghanistan, 1 man from Belarus, 1 man from Kirgizstan, 11 from Syria (3 women, 4 men and 4 children) and 1 man from Iraq. For the PAs, the refugees were divided into different groups based on their sex, age and language skills. The MFT met the group of Syrian children separately, without their parents.

22 of the refugees who took part in the PAs in the RRC completed the questionnaire with bio data and information on year and manner of arrival (e.g. through Dublin transfer).

The women who took part in the PAs in RRC were between the ages of 25 and 36 and originated from Eritrea and Syria. They arrived in Lithuania in 2012 or in 2013. The refugee women from Eritrea had been granted permanent residence permits and the refugee women from Syria had been granted subsidiary protection and temporary stay permits. The women from Eritrea had been relocated from Malta under the EUREMA II scheme in 2012; one of the women stated that she has a minor child left in Sudan. The husband of one of the women from Syria is still in Syria. One of the four women stated that she is without any education, one has a University degree and two have secondary education.

The men who took part in the PAs in RRC were between the ages 14 of and 47 years. They arrived in Lithuania between 2011 and 2013. Five of the men were in possession of permanent residence permits, while 13 were in possession of temporary residence permits. 3 of the men reported not to have any education, 2 reported to have a University degree, 7 to have secondary education and 6 reported to have primary education. Among the men, 3 stated that they had been transferred to Lithuania under the Dublin Regulation.

Composition of the refugee groups in Kaunas



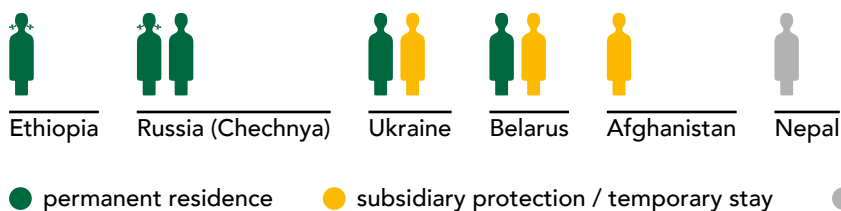
In Kaunas, PAs were held with 30 refugees from 6 different countries: 3 women from Russia (Chechnya), 2 women from Afghanistan, 2 girls and 1 boy from Afghanistan, 2 boys from Uzbekistan, 10 men from Afghanistan, 1 man from Uzbekistan, 1 man from Somalia, 1 man from Tajikistan, 1 from Belarus and 6 men from Russia (Chechnya).

23 of the refugees who took part in the PAs in Kaunas completed the questionnaire with bio data and information on year and manner of arrival (e.g. through Dublin transfer).

The women indicated in the questionnaires that they arrived in Lithuania in 2000, 2007 or in 2008. Their ages ranged from 29 to 44 years, 3 women possessed permanent residence permits; 3 indicated that they have primary education and 1 that she has secondary education. No cases of Dublin return were mentioned by the refugee women in their questionnaires.

The men indicated that they had arrived in Lithuania between 1997 and 2012. Their ages ranged from 19 to 62 years. 10 men indicated that they have permanent residence, while 9 are in possession of temporary residence permits. One man indicated that he does not have any education; 3 indicated that they have primary education, 5 have University education and 10 indicated that they have secondary education. One of the refugee men indicated that he was returned to Lithuania under the Dublin Regulation.

Composition of the refugee groups in Vilnius



In Vilnius, PAs were held with 9 refugees from 6 different countries: 1 woman from Ethiopia, 1 woman from Russia (Chechnya), 1 man from Russia (Chechnya), 2 men from Ukraine, 2 men from Belarus, 1 man from Afghanistan and 1 man from Nepal.

8 of the refugees who took part in the PAs in Vilnius completed the questionnaire with bio data and information on the year and manner of arrival (e.g. through Dublin transfer).

The women indicated that they came to Lithuania in 2007 and 2010 and that they are 28 and 41 years old. One indicated that she has University education and the second woman that she has secondary education. One of the women was transferred from Malta in 2007 on the basis of a bilateral agreement concluded at the time, and both indicated that they hold permanent residence permits. In Vilnius, the men indicated that they arrived in Lithuania between 2006 and 2012. Their ages ranged from 27 to 52 years. 3 of the men hold permanent residence permits and 3 hold temporary residence permits. One of the refugee men indicated that he has secondary education and 4 that they have University education. 2 of the men indicated that they had been returned to Lithuania under the Dublin Regulation.

3.9 Analysing the findings of the PAs

After the first PAs had been conducted in the RRC, the members of the MFT reflected on the feedback received from the refugees in order to seek a common understanding of the views expressed. Working in a MFT proved particularly valuable for this reflection process and analysis of the views expressed, as the different members of the MFT were able to interpret and put into context the refugees' feedback based on their professional perspectives and experiences from working with refugee integration in Lithuania.

The findings from the PAs, analysed jointly by the members of the MFT, are presented in the current report. Under each 'integration area' in chapter VII, the report contains a summary of the views expressed by the refugees in relation to that thematic area. This is followed by some reflections from the MFT, relating the refugees' experiences to existing knowledge about refugee integration, relevant standards of treatment and good practice examples from particularly the Nordic countries. On the basis of this, recommendations are proposed to improve and strengthen the existing support and services available to facilitate integration within the respective areas. The findings are presented and discussed in an order which takes into consideration the importance accorded by the refugees to the topic or theme during the PAs.

The concluding recommendations in chapter 9 also include suggestions for continued consultations between UNHCR and stakeholders to further develop policy and draw on good practices.

In connection with the PA interviews the refugees were promised that the report, with findings and recommendations proposed to the Lithuanian authorities would be shared with them as a step towards facilitating continued participation of the refugee community in assessing opportunities, challenges and needs, and supporting the empowerment of refugees in the development and implementation of integration policies and programs.

4. Introduction to the system of reception and integration of refugees in Lithuania.

4.1 Institutional structure

Two ministries in the Republic of Lithuania, and institutions under these respective ministries, are responsible for the reception of asylum-seekers and integration of refugees in Lithuania: the Ministry of the Interior (“MOI”) is responsible for the reception of asylum-seekers and the MSSL is responsible for the integration of beneficiaries of international protection who have been granted asylum in Lithuania, as well as for the reception of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum.

Asylum-seekers can submit asylum applications at border crossing points, police stations or at the Foreigners’ Registration Centre (“FRC”) in Pabrade.¹⁰ The Migration Department (“MD”) under the MOI is primarily responsible for examining asylum applications and taking decisions on asylum applications.¹¹

The State Border Guard Service (“SBGS”) under the MOI is responsible for the initial processing of asylum applications submitted at border crossing points and at the FRC. The Police Department (“PD”) under the MOI is responsible for the initial processing of asylum applications submitted at police stations.

The FRC operates an open accommodation facility for asylum-seekers and a detention facility for irregular migrants and detained asylum-seekers.¹² The MD decides on the

¹⁰ Republic of Lithuania, *Law on the Legal Status of Aliens* (29 April 2004) No IX-2206 (As last amended on 10 October 2013 – No XII- 548), Art. 67 (1).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Art. 80.

¹² *Ibid.*, Art. 7 (4) [stipulates: “The Foreigners’ Registration Centre is an institution intended for keeping aliens detained on the grounds specified in this Law and, on the decision of the court or the Migration Department, providing temporary accommodation to aliens, carrying out inquiries with regard to identity of the aliens, the circumstances of their entry into the Republic of Lithuania, keeping of records of aliens as well as carrying out the return and expulsion of aliens from the Republic of Lithuania.”]

accommodation of asylum-seekers.¹³ All asylum-seekers are expected to stay in the FRC, except those who have entered Lithuania legally. In the latter case, the MD may take a decision to allow an asylum-seeker to stay privately outside the FRC, if the asylum-seeker so requests.¹⁴

The MSSL co-ordinates and supervises the state support for the integration of persons granted asylum in Lithuania, analyses relevant social processes and prepares legislative initiatives with a view to ensuring effective provision of the state support for the integration of the concerned persons.¹⁵

The Department of Supervision of Social Services (“DSSS”) under the MSSL evaluates and analyses the processes related to the integration of refugees in Lithuania; organizes research; takes part in the financial planning and monitors the provision of support for the integration of refugees; submits proposals to the MSSL with regard to legislative amendments; organizes trainings for the workers of the municipalities, NGOs and other agencies; provides information about refugees to the society in order to prevent isolation, xenophobia and intolerance; shares best practices with other countries; and communicates with the MD, the FRC and other related state authorities.¹⁶

The RRC is the lead public agency when it comes to the provision and organization of integration support to refugees in Lithuania. In particular, the RRC provides accommodation to refugees at the initial stage of the state supported integration programme, i.e. until they move to municipalities for further integration, or until the end of the integration support provided in the RRC. The support includes the provision of educational, social and health care services. The RRC organizes and implements the social integration support programme in the RRC and municipalities; administers funds; concludes agreements with refugees on integration relevant support; and concludes agreements with institutions implementing individual integration support programmes. It allocates relevant resources for integration, supervises the delivery of integration support by institutions implementing individual integration support programmes and contributes to financial planning and takes decisions on integration in municipalities and allowances. RRC also disseminates information related to integration storing data in the database, and analyses the efficiency of integration measures provided in the Centre and municipalities and provides reports to the MSSL on integration and related expenditures and shares practices with foreign countries.¹⁷ Furthermore, the RRC provides accommodation and other reception support to asylum seeking unaccompanied minors.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Art. 79 (1) [reads: “The Migration Department shall take a decision on the accommodation of the asylum applicant, except in cases where the asylum applicant has been detained or a measure alternative to detention has been imposed against him according to the procedure established by the laws of the Republic of Lithuania.”]

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Art. 79 (2) [“[h]aving lawfully entered the Republic of Lithuania, an asylum applicant who has been granted temporary territorial asylum shall be provided with accommodation at the Foreigners’ Registration Centre on the decision of the Migration Department. On the decision of the Migration Department, such an asylum applicant may be permitted to reside in the place of his choice if the asylum applicant so desires.”]

¹⁵ Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, Order No A1-238 of 21 October 2004 on the Approval of the Description of the Procedure of Rendering Lithuanian State Support for the Integration of Foreigners Granted Asylum in the Republic of Lithuania (Official Gazette, No. 157-5741, 2004; No. 83-3449, 2009), para. 5.1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 5.2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 5.3.

The LRCS and Caritas are the two non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”) providing state funded integration support in the municipalities of Vilnius and Kaunas. Other agencies providing integration relevant support to refugees within the state funded integration programme are the municipal institutions (typically the Social Support units of local municipalities). Municipalities and NGOs implementing the programme *inter alia* conclude agreements on integration relevant support with individuals or families, deliver relevant support and services to the concerned persons, and makes suggestions and recommendations to the RRC with regards to the prolongation, reduction, suspension, renewal or termination of integration support for individuals or families.¹⁸

4.2 Legal framework

The Law on the Legal Status of Aliens No IX-2206 (“Aliens Law”) has only a few articles of relevance to the integration of refugees. First, it stipulates that the state of Lithuania shall provide conditions for foreigners holding a residence permit to integrate into the political, economic and socio-cultural life of the state in accordance with the procedure established by laws.¹⁹ Second, it provides for the allocation of state funds for the implementation of a national policy in the area of refugee integration alongside the resources provided by international organisations, EU structural funds, humanitarian aid foundations and NGOs.²⁰ The provision of state support for the integration of refugees in Lithuania shall be coordinated and supervised by the MSSL.²¹ Thirdly, the Aliens Law singles out the areas of state funded integration support. They encompass language training, education, employment, provision of accommodation, social welfare support, health care, and the provision of information to the general public about the integration of foreigners.²² In line with the Aliens Law, state support for the integration of refugees is to be regulated in detail in a by-law. The Order on the Approval of the Description of the Procedure of Rendering Lithuania State Support for the Integration of Foreigners Granted Asylum in the Republic of Lithuania²³ (“Social Integration Order”) has been approved by the MSSL as that by-law. It describes the organization, implementation and administration of the State support for integration.

4.3 Principles of state funded integration support

The Social Integration Order describes *integration* as the process of adaptation of a person/family in a foreign environment (*lith. svetima aplinka*), which starts in the RRC and continues in municipalities, and includes the provision of educational, medical, social and

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 19.

¹⁹ Republic of Lithuania, *Law on the Legal Status of Aliens*, Art. 107 (1).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Art. 107 (2).

²¹ *Ibid.*, Art. 109 (2).

²² *Ibid.*, Art. 110.

²³ Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, Order No A1-238 of 21 October 2004 on the Approval of the Description of the Procedure of Rendering Lithuanian State Support for the Integration of Foreigners Granted Asylum in the Republic of Lithuania (Official Gazette, No. 157-5741, 2004; No. 83-3449, 2009), para. 5.1

other services according to the needs of the person/family, so that that person/family can integrate into the local community and labour market.²⁴ State support for integration is described as a series of measures being provided to a person granted asylum, which enables him/her to maintain him/herself (*lith.* išlaikyti save) and participate in the social life equally with other members of the society.²⁵

The state supported integration programme covers two stages – support for integration in the RRC and support for integration in municipalities. The first stage starts from the day a residence permit is issued to a refugee.²⁶ However, a refugee in Lithuania may apply for integration support only once.²⁷ Refugees who do not participate in the integration program carried out in the RRC may not benefit from the support for integration in municipalities.²⁸ The benefits granted to refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are the same, although refugees receive some of the benefits through the ‘mainstream’ services, while persons granted subsidiary protection receive them via the integration programme.

The integration support may be reduced, suspended or terminated pursuant to a decision taken by the Director of the RRC, based on a proposal by the Commission established by the MSSL, and taking into account recommendations of the NGO or municipality in charge of implementing the individual integration support programme as well as the explanations of the person concerned.²⁹ The grounds, on the basis of which a decision to reduce, suspend or terminate the integration support can be made, are the following:

- the refugee **has not attended more than 40% of language classes** and classes on the Lithuanian society without a valid reason;
- the refugee **has not registered at a territorial Labour Exchange** or refused a job offer or vocational training without a valid reason;
- the refugee **has failed to attend an appointment with a tutor** in charge of his/her social integration more than twice or does not participate in integration support measures;
- the refugee **has misinformed or failed to inform about changes** to his/her living conditions;
- the refugee **has been subject to sanctions** for committing an administrative offence or criminal law sanctions, or serves a custodial sentence, or is in pre-trial detention;
- the refugee **does not follow his/her obligations under the agreement** concluded with an organisation implementing the individual integration support programme;
- the refugee **has left Lithuania for more than 3 months** and does not return until the end of the integration period.³⁰

²⁴ *Ibid.*, para.2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 14.

Termination of integration support in the RRC due to non-attendance of training courses may be postponed for unaccompanied minors, refugees with medical problems or mental disabilities, pregnant women, and victims of torture or other forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence.³¹

4.4 Refugee reception centre in Rukla

In the RRC, integration support is provided for 8 months. Based on individual circumstances, it may be prolonged up to 12 months. Vulnerable persons (defined in the Social Integration Order as unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, victims of torture, people with mental disorders, people having mental or physical disabilities, elderly people, single parents with children, families with children) may receive support in the RRC for up to 18 months. Support for unaccompanied minors in the RRC may be prolonged until they reach 18 years. In *force majeure* situations, support in the RRC may be prolonged for an unspecified period. Decisions regarding prolongation are taken by the Director of the RRC, based on a proposal of the Commission established by the MSSL³² (as an example, the support period in the RRC was extended during the last economic crisis in the country). Individual circumstances to be taken into account in such situations are the refugee's psychological state, vulnerability, other risks and his/her preparedness to be engaged in employment.³³

In the RRC, the state support for integration covers:

- social assistance,
- health care,
- legal assistance,
- intensive Lithuanian language courses and courses on the Lithuanian society,
- professional and job search training and evaluation of personal skills and qualifications,
- an allowance to meet basic needs,
- an allowance to purchase school items (130 LTL, approximately 38 EUR) paid at the beginning of the school year,
- kindergarten fee,
- an allowance for children below 3 years, if they do not attend kindergarten,
- other integration measures.³⁴

³¹ *Ibid.*, para. 16.

³² *Ibid.*, para. 11.

³³ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 13 and 21.

4.5 Integration in municipalities

When the stay in the RRC comes to an end, state support for integration continues to be provided in a municipality for a period of up to 12 months.³⁵ As mentioned above, it is municipal or non-governmental organizations which implement the state funded integration support programme for refugees in municipalities. The RRC concludes agreements with such organisations and supervises the process of providing relevant services to the individuals and families. The agreement is also concluded between a refugee and the organisation in charge of the refugee's integration. It is essential that refugees declare their place of residence once they have settled in a local community. Such a declaration is instrumental in accessing certain benefits, such as utilities-related compensation, and for the application of a renewal of the residence permit.

The initial integration period of 12 months may be extended for vulnerable groups (i.e. unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, victims of torture, people having mental or physical disabilities, elderly people, single parents with minor children, and families with minor children). The total period of integration support in the RRC and municipality may not exceed 5 years.³⁶

The state support for integration in municipalities covers:

- a lump sum settlement allowance,
- allowance for the rent of apartments and utilities,
- allowance to meet the basic needs,
- Lithuanian language training,
- allowance to purchase school items (130 LTL, approximately 38 EUR) paid at the beginning of the school year,
- kindergarten fee,
- allowance for children below 3 years, if they do not attend kindergarten,
- other integration measures.³⁷

If a decision is taken to extend the period of state support in the municipality, the amount of funds may be gradually decreased as follows:

- to 80% during the 2nd year,
- to 70% during the 3rd year,
- to 60% during the 4th year,
- to 50% during the 5th year.³⁸

³⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 18.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 25.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 26.

However, the reduction is not applied to the following allowances:

- allowance for children below 3 years who do not attend kindergarten,
- kindergarten fee,
- allowance to purchase school items,
- childbirth allowance,
- burial allowance.³⁹

4.6 Health care

In the RRC, medical assistance is available 9.5 hours/week to its inhabitants. Psychological counselling is available to refugees for a total of 7 hours/week in the RRC. Refugees living in the RRC can also benefit from the mainstream medical services in the town of Rukla. As of October 2013, all beneficiaries of international protection, including those granted subsidiary protection, are covered by the compulsory health insurance scheme⁴⁰ and have full access to medical services on the same conditions and under the same procedure as nationals.

4.7 Lithuanian language courses

Lithuanian language courses and courses on the Lithuanian society are organized for adults during the integration period in the RRC. Language courses are provided to each refugee for a total of 190 hours (approximately 2 hours/day). Once the language courses are completed, the refugee has the possibility to take the first level (A1) exam. An additional 100 hours may be provided to re-take the exam for those who failed to pass the exam, if the failure was caused by valid reasons (i. e. psychiatric disorder, learning difficulties, etc.).⁴¹

4.8 Accommodation

In the RRC, refugees are accommodated in one building, with the possibility for families to be accommodated in a separate room, but sharing the communal kitchen and leisure facilities with the other residents.

Once the integration support period in RRC is over, refugees are required to move to a municipality within 60 days from the day of signing a contract with the organisation in charge of their integration (a municipal institution or an NGO). Refugees are expected to find housing/apartments themselves with the support of a municipal or non-governmental organization.⁴² The lease agreement is concluded between the owner and the refugee.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 27.

⁴⁰ Republic of Lithuania, *Law on the Health Insurance* (21 May 1996) No I-1343, (lastly amended on the 12st of December, 2013), Art. 6 (1) available at: <http://goo.gl/nD6OP4>

⁴¹ Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, *Order No A1-238*, para. 30-31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, para. 36.

A lump sum settlement allowance is paid to the personal account of a refugee/family when moving from the RRC to the municipality. The amounts are as follows:

UNACCOMPANIED MINOR

who reaches the age of majority:

7,800 LTL (± 2,260 €)

ADULT:

1,560 LTL

(± 452 €)

MINOR:

1,170 LTL

(± 339 €)

The total lump sum settlement allowance paid to a family cannot exceed **3,900 LTL** (±1,130 EUR).⁴³

During the integration period in the municipality, rent and utilities are covered as follows:

single person and families of two persons:

700 LTL (± 203 €)*

family of 3 or more persons:

1,050 LTL (± 304 €)*

*based on the actual monthly costs.

The funds are transferred to the personal account of the refugee.⁴⁴

4.9 Employment

The RRC is required to carry out, in cooperation with the territorial Labour Exchange and territorial labour market training and consulting agency:

- evaluation of personal skills and qualifications of the refugee concerned;
- vocational and job search training.⁴⁵

Refugees are required to register at the Labour Exchange.

4.10 Social welfare

During the integration period, refugees have the right to receive:

- a lump sum child birth allowance: **1,430 LTL** (± 414 €);
- a burial allowance. Following the death of a refugee, this allowance is to be paid to the deceased refugee's family members or person(s) who has buried the refugee: **1,040 LTL** (± 301 €);
- a monthly allowance for a child below 3 years, if the child does not attend kindergarten: **97,5 LTL** (± 28 €),
- a monthly allowance to meet the basic needs: **245 LTL** (± 71 €).⁴⁶

⁴³ *Ibid.*, para. 51.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 38-39.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 13.3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 15.2 - 15.5.

5. Previous studies and publications on the integration of refugees in Lithuania

The current project did not encompass an analysis of all previously conducted studies on integration in Lithuania, or seek to list all publications on the topic. The intention was rather to review and provide examples of relevant studies, which could inform the analysis of the findings and formulation of proposed recommendations in this report.

The *“Assessment of Social Integration Programme of Foreigners Who Have Been Granted the Refugee Status or Temporary Protection in the Republic of Lithuania”*,⁴⁷ conducted by the Institute of Social Studies in Lithuania in 2007, concluded that integration is facilitated not only by personal characteristics and how much support the refugees receive, but also by the social environment in which the refugees find themselves. The assessment of the feedback provided by 73 refugee respondents in Kaunas, Klaipeda, Vilnius, Elektrenai, Marijampole, Pabrade, Lentvaris and Rukla reveal that the key factors preventing refugees from successful economic integration and employment opportunities, which forces individuals to take up unqualified or low salary work, are an inability to speak the Lithuanian language, older age and/or gender. The assessment revealed that refugee women experience greater challenges in integrating into the Lithuanian labour market and other sectors, such as health care and/or education of children, due to post-traumatic stress syndrome and the family situation (e.g. the number of children in the family). In addition, 1/3 of the respondents noted the negative attitude of Lithuanian employers as a barrier to integration. According to the assessment, 70% of the refugees in Lithuania are unemployed. The analysis of the surveyed data indicated that even though Lithuanian companies experience a shortage of labour force, the majority of employers are not willing to employ asylum-seekers and/or refugees. The assessment concluded that employers were influenced by xenophobia and negative stereotypes about other nationalities, and tended to request more information about job-seekers of foreign origin when recruiting personnel.

⁴⁷ Institute for Social Studies and Lithuanian Adult Education and Information Centre *“Assessment of Social Integration Programme of Foreigners Who Have Been Granted the Refugee Status or Temporary Protection in the Republic of Lithuania,”* 2007 Report, Vilnius.

The publication "*Lithuania has become home to them*",⁴⁸ a collection of stories describing successful refugees in Lithuania, was published by the Department of Supervision of Social Services under the MSSL in 2013 to sensitize the general public to the plight of refugees and help the host society overcome fear and distrust. The publication comprises four 'success stories'. A refugee family from Afghanistan, and single men from Afghanistan, Belarus and Nepal share information about their life in Lithuania. The intention behind telling their stories is to break the myth that it is difficult for foreigners to settle in Lithuania.

In 2012-2013 within the ERF-funded project "*Support for the Foreigners Granted Asylum – New Perspectives*" implemented by the RRC, "*The life of refugees in Lithuania: impressions of the country, aspects of integration and future plans*"⁴⁹ was published. The publication contains interviews with refugees and representatives from various institutions responsible for facilitating integration, who share their views on the social integration program, and on the impact of the support provided. This publication contains a number of recommendations which correspond to findings from the present Participatory Assessment of refugees' integration opportunities and challenges in Lithuania.

The publication identifies a number of necessary improvements, such as the need to stimulate the integration of refugees into the labour market, to find mechanisms to motivate employers to recruit refugees, and the need to organize more events to facilitate the contact between refugees and the communities and youth, in particular with a view to promoting tolerance and reducing xenophobia.

The publication also lists some recommendations made by the refugees, which includes the necessity to provide more language training; to increase the allowance paid to refugees in the RRC for food and small expenses; to improve vocational training opportunities and the identification of skills of the refugees; to prolong the period of the integration support in the RRC; to extend the integration period in the municipality for refugees who do not belong to a vulnerable group; to provide support in accessing housing; and to create an incentive system which motivates refugees to improve and to put their skills to use. The publication also noted the need to work with refugees more individually and to provide more independence to them. Moreover, it was noted that it was necessary to provide more information about refugees to the Lithuanian society.

The article "*Survival in Lithuania: the experience of asylum-seekers and foreigners granted asylum*",⁵⁰ published by the Institute for Ethnic Studies, stresses that the lives of asylum-seekers and refugees in Lithuania depends greatly on the institutions that operate within the asylum system. The article further noted that refugees experience stigmatization, and that their experiences could be called the 'wrong side' of social capital, resulting in isolation, restricted opportunities and social exclusion. The article highlights that asylum-seekers and refugees in Lithuania experience a life as underprivileged and undesirable strangers with restricted human rights, imprisonment (psychologically and physically) and dependence, and that this kind of experience leaves practically no chance for successful integration.

⁴⁸ Department of Supervision of Social Services under the MSSL, MSSL and RRC "*Lithuania has become home to them.*" (Lietuva jiems tapo namais), 2013, available at: <http://goo.gl/rwKdQv>

⁴⁹ Refugee Reception Centre (2013) "*The life of refugees in Lithuania: impressions of the country, aspects of integration and future plans*".

⁵⁰ Institute for Ethnic Studies at the Lithuanian Social Research Centre (2013) 'Implementation of the EU Asylum Policy: Legal and Sociological Focus', *Ethnicity Studies*, 2013/1.

6. Statistical data

Lithuania receives relatively few asylum-seekers compared to other countries in Europe and the number of recognised refugees and persons granted subsidiary protection has decreased in recent years.

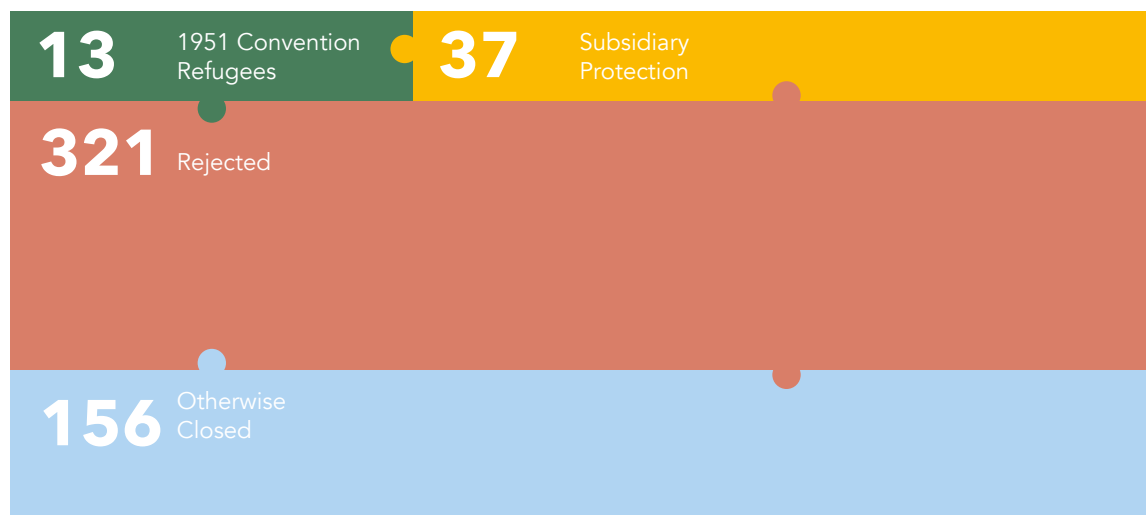
According to UNHCR annual statistics, which are based on information from the Migration Department (in regard to decisions taken on first asylum applications), the total number of individuals granted international protection in Lithuania between 1997 and 2013 was 916 persons, originating from 28 countries. About 80% of all persons granted international protection in Lithuania are of Russian (mainly Chechnyan) origin or Afghan nationals: Russian nationals comprise 64% and Afghan nationals 17%.

In 2012, Lithuania received 526 applications and in 2013 only 275 applications were registered. The decrease, compared to 2012, was primarily due to a significant drop in applications from Georgian nationals, who have constituted the largest group of asylum-seekers since 2009. Nonetheless, 115 of the 275 applicants registered in 2013 were of Georgian origin, followed by asylum applicants from Afghanistan (45), the Russian Federation (28), the Social Republic of Vietnam (26), India (12) and Syria (11). In 2012, only 13 persons were recognised as 1951 Convention refugees, 37 were granted subsidiary protection status, 321 persons were rejected, and 156 applications were (otherwise) closed.

In 2013, 14 persons were recognised as 1951 Convention refugees, 38 granted subsidiary protection, 110 persons were rejected and 122 applications were otherwise closed. The persons recognised as refugees and issued with permanent stay permit originated from Afghanistan (8), Russia (2), Belarus (2), Eritrea (1) and Ukraine (1). The persons granted subsidiary protection and stay permit for 1 year originated from Afghanistan (17), Syria (13), Belarus (1), Georgia (1), Ivory Coast (1), Iraq (1), Uzbekistan (3) and Ukraine (1).

There were 74 asylum applications pending in the Migration Department by the end of 2013, of which 20% were from female applicants.

2012: 526 applications for asylum



90% of all asylum-seekers are accommodated in either the open reception-centre part of the FRC, or in its detention-section. The other 10% have been granted permission to stay outside the FRC, as their arrival or stay in Lithuania is considered regular by the authorities. By the end of 2013, there were 12 children present in FRC, 6 boys and 6 girls. About 60% of the children placed in FRC were under the age of 12 years. By the end of 2013, 34 male asylum-seekers were held in detention at the FRC, including 3 from Afghanistan.

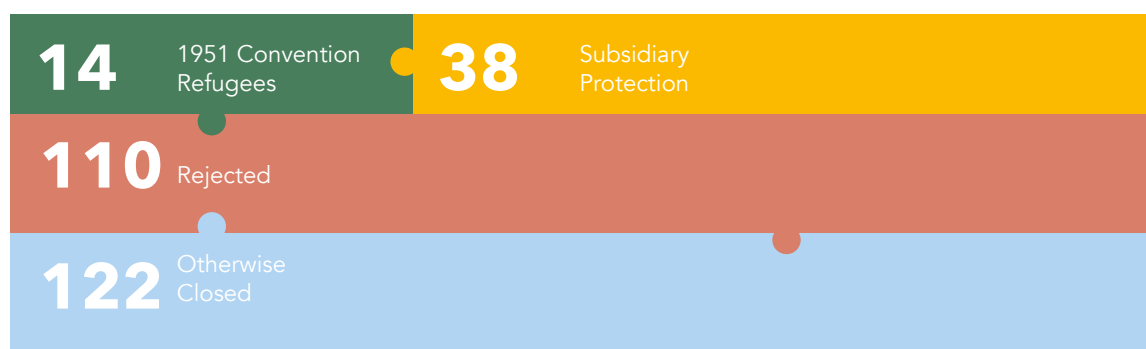
90% of all asylum-seekers are accommodated in either the open reception-centre part of the FRC, or in its detention-section. About 60% of the children placed in FRC were under the age of 12 years.

By the end of 2013, RRC provided accommodation to 56 beneficiaries of international protection: 26 male, 9 female and 24 children. The majority of them originated from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Syria.

Statistical data about the total number of accepted refugees currently residing in Lithuania is not available, except the data about current beneficiaries of state integration support. By the end of 2013, this figure was 59: The refugees concerned were residing in Elektrenai (8), Jonava (13), Kaunas (16) or in Vilnius (22).

There is no statistical data available on the number of refugees enrolled or engaged in various integration areas such as education, employment or reception in the municipalities.

2013: 275 applications for asylum



7. Findings from the Participatory Assessment

7.1 General observations on findings

Although the MFT met with a total of 68 refugees from 12 different countries, with a variety of cultural, religious and educational backgrounds, and living in three different locations, the feedback provided in the PAs was quite consistent: four topics in particular generated the most extensive discussions and grievances on the part of the refugees, namely:

- the stay and ill-treatment in detention during the asylum procedure;
- the restrictions and limitations on everyday life due to the low financial allowance provided during the stay in the RRC;
- difficulties finding employment; and
- difficulties finding housing when the period of integration support in RRC had ended.

In addition, the integration program and support in place in Lithuania was also discussed at some length.

The following is a summary of the overall findings of the PAs, based on the direct input from the refugees and the analysis of this by the MFT.

In all groups, the refugees conveyed that they had come to Lithuania to seek protection from persecution, war and conflict. They had expected, and were motivated to contribute to society as productive residents and their biggest wish was to find a job to be able to take care of themselves and their families.

This initial eagerness and readiness to take part in society and integrate in their new home gradually broke down when the refugees experienced that their skills and motivation to start a new life could not be put to use.

The first challenge faced by many of the refugees with whom the MFT spoke, was the reception upon arrival in Lithuania and the time spent in detention. Several of the refugees were visibly traumatized by the fact that they had been detained without understanding on which grounds, and in addition been ill-treated during the time in detention. In one case, a mother had been separated from her young children for days without knowing the whereabouts of her children. The refugees described this experience as re-traumatizing and exacerbating the memories of persecution and war that they carried with them to Lithuania. The time spent in the RRC therefore had to be used by many to recover from trauma and deteriorated mental health, instead of preparing for a new start in Lithuania.

A second challenge unanimously conveyed was the isolation experienced during their stay in the RRC. The environment in Rukla did not facilitate rehabilitation from trauma and prevented the refugees from taking full advantage of the available integration support. In particular the isolated location and the proximity to a military training camp, which revived memories of war and shooting, were mentioned as problematic. The environment and location, coupled with the limited financial allowance which was not enough to cover food, other basic necessities and public transportation, left the refugees feeling very isolated from the rest of the society, and compelled to live in striking poverty. This hampered even the possibility to take the bus to other cities in search of employment and housing, and created strong feelings of exclusion from the rest of society and disillusion among the refugees. The refugees described that the physical isolation led to mental isolation and affected not only social integration, their motivation and spirit and their recovery from trauma, but also language learning and job and house searching.

A third overall challenge conveyed was that the refugees felt that they could not properly benefit from the integration support in place, or from the services available in Lithuania. They did not fully understand what support was available or the contents of the programme. Their feedback and responses also left the MFT with the impression that the integration support available has not been developed as part and parcel of an overall, comprehensive and integrated National Integration Strategy with clear goals and long, medium and short-term objectives. Instead, the various integration support-components available appear to be implemented in isolation from each other, which limits their individual and collective effectiveness. For example, obstacles in finding a job and securing housing were, for the vast majority, not possible to overcome, and the existing support, such as language training and courses to complement education from the home country did not prove efficient enough. Many refugees stated that it was impossible to find a job unless one spoke almost fluent Lithuanian, at the same time as it was impossible to acquire the Lithuanian language from the 190 hours of language classes provided and the limited opportunities to practice the language with the local population due to the isolation in the RRC.

The limited prospects of finding a job and become the productive resident of Lithuania that they had initially aspired to be, including as a result of xenophobia and disinterest from potential employers, eventually led many refugees to the conclusion that integration in Lithuania was impossible. Consequently, many of the refugees with whom the MFT spoke stated that if they would not be able to find a job and become self-reliant in the near future, they would be compelled to make a second forced movement, onwards to another European country in search of livelihood opportunities. They referred to the fact that so many Lithuanians had felt forced to leave Lithuania during the economic crisis, in search of work abroad, and explained that they – as refugees – are in an even more

precarious situation as they lack the family and social/community support structures in Lithuania that nationals have.

These accounts left the MFT with a sense that, contrary to the prevailing perception in Lithuania, that refugees would prefer to get asylum in European countries with a higher living standard, refugees would like to stay and integrate in Lithuania. As noted above, the refugees with whom the MFT met unanimously expressed a wish to build a life in Lithuania, but explained that if this would prove impossible, they would have no other choice than to move on, in search of means for survival.

Care was taken to ensure an Age, Gender and Diversity-sensitive composition of the groups of refugees who took part in the PAs. However, there were no clear gender-specific findings in relation to the integration experience with one exception: the separation of family members during detention, which seems to have been particularly traumatizing for the mothers who had been separated from their children. Moreover, the focus group format used for the PA with young children and the limited time available reduced the possibility of gaining a genuine understanding of their situation. Nonetheless, the meeting with children in RRC did provide the MFT with the impression that the children were strongly affected by their parents' trauma from the time in detention, and the frustration and feelings of disempowerment and lack of control over the future that most of the adult refugees in the RRC expressed. The children also gave the impression of feeling isolated and somewhat 'trapped' in the RRC, though they seemed to enjoy going to the local school.

The feedback gathered from the PAs confirms the findings from studies on integration in other countries, such as the RICE research, namely that the various areas and aspects of integration are inextricably linked. Hence, in order to maximize the impact of support in one area, such as employment, one needs to adapt the support provided in another area accordingly, to ensure complementarity and overall effectiveness.

The sub-chapters below will seek to illustrate the findings of the PAs in more detail. The areas, or thematic issues, are presented in the order of importance attached to them by the refugees.

7.2 Impact of reception conditions and time spent in the asylum procedure on integration

A topic which came up in all of the PAs, and which clearly left the refugees emotionally affected, was the treatment they had been exposed to in the detention-section of the FRC in Pabrade. Many of the refugees who took part in the PA seemed to have personally experienced detention in the FRC, some for quite lengthy periods.

“ *The conditions were horrible. I was hoping that they will take us from detention next day, but instead I spent 3 months there. I did not want to stay in this country anymore. I was sure I will leave after I will be released from detention.* ”

" I think the pressure is first of all on the kids. They asked if we have committed a crime."

Others testified of having been imprisoned in Lukiskes Remand Prison for illegal border crossing, including a group of young Afghan men who had arrived in Lithuania as unaccompanied children seeking asylum. Sometimes imprisonment resulted in the

separation of families. If they had not been detained or imprisoned themselves, they knew of fellow asylum-seekers who had.

“ *We were asking for asylum from the first moment, but the court put us in prison for 15 days. I lived with criminals and I had no contact with my children and had no information about them."*

The refugees gave detailed accounts of how they had been ill-treated during the time in detention, mentally and physically. They described the excessive use of force and degrading treatment by the border guards when undertaking regular checks and searching for drugs, mobile telephones or other forbidden items.

“ *In Pabrade they have different laws, they don't speak, they only beat. Why is it so? They say it is because they find prohibited things inside. They come for no reason. The staff was leading this."*

It was clear to the MFT that the period spent in detention was extremely painful and traumatizing, and that talking about it brought back very negative feelings. Several refugees mentioned that the time in detention had exacerbated the traumas they were already bringing with them to Lithuania, from their experiences of persecution, conflict and war.

The memories caused in particular refugee mothers to cry as detention had resulted in separation from their minor children. The time in detention and/or of separation had also left a strong negative impact on the children.

The first time in the RRC was thus spent on trying to find mental peace and start the process of trauma rehabilitation.

" You stand face into wall, stretch legs, they beat you if you try to say anything. They were shouting – don't look at me. I was looking to see who they are. One guy who had telephone to record the situation got horrible beating, he could have died. There were 3-4 persons beating one person. It is to scare people that those who go back, would say to other to not come to Lithuania."

“ *I came here as unaccompanied minor but they put me in prison and we need to ask for asylum. We were in the prison for 4 months. We still do not know the reason why we were in the prison. Afterwards we heard it was possible to say to them we are refugees, but they did not listen. The only person who came to help us was the lawyer from Red Cross."*

“ *My children said that you will bring us to a safe place but you brought us to prison. I am a teacher, my husband is a lawyer. We have education, but Europe has let us down. The way we were dealt with, the hope we had for Europe were let down.”*

When discussing the situation in the FRC with the refugees who had moved out in municipalities they described FRC as a facility characterised by high tension, social and psychological unrest. They felt this was, at least partially, due to the close cohabitation of asylum-seekers, some of whom have specific needs due to traumatic experiences of persecution and flight, with undocumented migrants, and persons with a criminal background. In addition, the idleness and insufficient social support was said to create a socially explosive environment from which many refugees were eager to move out as soon as possible.

To summarise, the period spent in FRC clearly had a negative impact on the mental health and physical well-being of the refugees and was, on the whole, described as lost time. In particular, the inhumane treatment experienced in detention caused refugees to re-live previous traumatic experiences and their health to deteriorate. Personal experiences of detention, or of witnessing harsh and violent treatment of fellow asylum-seekers negatively affected the refugees' integration capacity.

Instead of 'frontloading' integration by equipping refugees as early as possible through humane, dignified and meaningful reception arrangements, the asylum procedure and reception conditions had left the refugees with an impaired capacity to adjust to the receiving society and reduced ability to prepare for the process of starting a new life in Lithuania. Sadly, the reception received upon arrival to the new country – which was supposed to become their new home – had left many with a negative image of Lithuania and reduced their motivation to make the necessary efforts to successfully integrate.

UNHCR has not looked deeper into the individual cases of detention raised and the grounds for detention and use of force in each; and it is not the purpose of this report to pronounce on the legality of the measures in the individual cases. However, considering that the testimonies gathered through the PAs indicate that detention of asylum-seekers in Lithuania is widespread, also for women and unaccompanied children, and that practice has *inter alia* led to family separations and ill-treatment, UNHCR is of the firm view that the current policy in relation to detention needs to be reviewed.

International and European law contains clear standards pertaining to the grounds and conditions for the detention of asylum-seekers, for example in the EU recast Reception Conditions Directive.⁵¹ The use of detention for asylum-seekers who arrive in an irregular manner has also been the subject of UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusions on international protection, and the 2012 UNHCR Detention Guidelines outline the relevant international standards in this area.⁵² As a general rule, detention of asylum-seekers should be avoided and be a measure of last resort. Detention can only be applied where it pursues a legitimate purpose and has been determined to be both necessary

⁵¹ European Union: Council of the European Union, *Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and Council of 26 June 2013 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast)*, 29 June 2013, L 180/96, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/51d29db54.html>

⁵² UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Guidelines on the Applicable Criteria and Standards relating to the Detention of Asylum-Seekers and Alternatives to Detention*, 2012, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/503489533b8.html>

and proportionate in each individual case. In addition, alternatives to detention should be considered as part of the overall assessment of the necessity, reasonableness and proportionality of detention.⁵³

In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, asylum-seekers are generally not detained. When used, this is primarily in relation to return procedures or transfers under the Dublin Regulation when a risk of absconding is present. Furthermore, asylum-seekers are not detained with persons convicted of a crime and detention facilities are run by civilian administrative staff in civilian clothes. Moreover, in Sweden significant efforts have been made to establish alternatives to detention, and are often referred to as a good practice country in this area.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended that the Lithuanian authorities undertake a comprehensive review of the national legislation, policy and practice in relation to the reception and detention of asylum-seekers and refugees in order to bring it fully in line with international and European standards. This could usefully be done in connection with Lithuania's efforts to transpose the EU Reception Conditions Directive, and include a review of both the legal framework and the reception facilities and practical arrangements. The purpose would, *inter alia*, be to ensure the humanitarian nature of the reception conditions and that the time spent in the asylum procedure is meaningful and supports future integration, or reintegration in the country of origin in cases where the applicant is rejected asylum and returns home. In this context, UNHCR recommends and encourages the authorities to introduce alternatives to detention, in cases where detention has been considered necessary and proportional.

- It is recommended that immediate steps are taken to review the use of detention for unaccompanied minors and families with children, in order to ensure that children, as a general rule, are not detained and that family unity is preserved.

- It is recommended to review the administrative and internal regulations of the detention-section of the FRC and the manner in which asylum-seekers are made to adhere to these, in order to ensure that harsh, inhuman and/or degrading treatment is not used when enforcing regulations.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

7.3 Impact of the post-recognition period support on integration

As elaborated in Chapter 4.3 and 4.4 above, all refugees are obliged to reside in the RRC for an initial period of at least 8 months before they have to move to independent accommodation in the municipalities. RRC provides support in relation to educational, social and health care services. The experiences of refugees from the stay both in the RRC and in the municipalities are summarised below.

7.3.1 Financial support

One of the issues raised almost immediately as a point of concern by refugees in all three locations, irrespective of their gender, nationality or educational background, was the low financial allowance provided to cover expenses for food, clothes, medicines, public transport etc. The financial assistance (210-245 Lt per person/month), which should cover all expenses except accommodation was described as insufficient to secure a living. The refugees in the RRC mentioned that they could not buy enough food to eat two meals per day with this level of assistance. Most meals would consist of potatoes, and one refugee added that he survived on money received from family members outside Lithuania.

“ *Without additional help we would not survive. When my family asks how much I get here, I cannot say the truth because I am ashamed of the conditions.”*

Moreover, the refugees explained that the financial allowance received did not allow them to travel from Rukla to other cities, which is essential in order to look for a job, meet employers and employment agencies, and to lead a normal life with social activities.

“ *It makes it difficult for you to get enough nutrition and afford basic living conditions. It has a direct impact on your ability to integrate, you need money to travel to the employment agency and you need to interact with society, otherwise you are isolated.”*

The lack of money was thus clearly described as a barrier to interaction, participation and integration with other people and the society at large, and as a factor contributing to isolation, which in turn added to the psychological stress and difficulties to pursue education or seek employment. The low level of financial allowance was raised by all the groups, and while the refugees displayed a clear understanding that there are limits to the level of allowances that can be provided, they referred to it as a source of worry, dissatisfaction and disappointment, and as a factor that prevented them from seeking jobs, housing and from interacting with the rest of society and practising the language.

The refugees also stressed the importance of introducing the possibility to receive additional financial support for persons with special needs to, for example, cover costs for medical treatment and medicines.



UNHCR, Refugee contemplating how the impact of the post-recognition support can be maximized, during a Participatory Assessment in the Rukla Reception Centre. © UNHCR

The financial assistance provided in the municipalities of Kaunas and Vilnius was also described as insufficient to cover both living expenses and rent. The refugees explained that they always needed to prioritise between necessities and had no money for recreational activities or 'non-essentials'. Expenditures for clothes, food and transportation in particular

had to be calculated taking key expenditures such as rent into consideration. As a result of the small financial margins, single adults usually needed to live together in a shared room, while a family would rent only one room. The low income places refugees in a precarious situation where they are at risk of social marginalisation and destitution.

The refugees made a constructive suggestion, that the MSSL explore the possibility of reaching an agreement with the public transport provider to give refugees bus tickets/ passes free of charge.

A practice example that enables increased participation in the social and cultural life can be found in Iceland, where asylum-seekers and refugees are given free public transport passes and free entrance to the public swimming pool with a gym and to certain museums and cultural events. This practice has been expressly appreciated by asylum-seekers and refugees with whom the UNHCR RRNE has spoken, and referred to as an important contribution to their ability to participate in society, get to know Icelandic people and culture, and practice the language through interaction.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended that the Lithuanian authorities undertake a review of the financial support provided to refugees during the integration transition period in light of the expenses that the allowance is expected to cover, to ensure that the level of financial support enable refugees to enjoy a basic standard of living as comparable to nationals. In this connection, it is recommended to review whether the financial support provided to refugees during the integration period is on the same level as that available to nationals in need of social assistance to ensure non-discrimination, and to what extent the mainstream social welfare system adequately caters for refugees' needs and rights or if any changes are needed.
- It is recommended to explore the possibility of providing asylum-seekers and refugees with free public transport passes as well as free entrance to, for example, museums and other facilities for cultural exchange and sports facilities, based on the refugees' suggestion and the good practice established in Iceland.

7.3.2 Lithuanian language courses

Most of the refugees expressed frustration over not learning the Lithuanian language quickly enough. They mentioned that language is key to finding a job, and the fact that refugees do not possess it well enough was used as a pretext not to employ them.

Illiterate refugees, or individuals with lower education levels, for example those who do not speak English or Russian felt that they could not benefit from the language courses in the same way as others, as the courses were adapted to persons with higher educational levels. Tuition style and groups were not adapted to illiterate refugees. From the feedback received, it seems that the refugees in general perceived the Lithuanian language as difficult to learn. A few refugees mentioned the limitations of the teachers' abilities and lack of expertise as obstacles to good quality language tuition. In addition, the refugees expressed that the current number of hours provided is insufficient. Some refugees mentioned that intensive courses would be helpful.

" We think to have more contact with people would help a lot. If we would have some job to also practice the language. Now we are more or less isolated and speak in our native language."

According to most of the refugees, increased contact with the local community would significantly help to learn the language. Employment and interaction at the work place would increase the practical use and knowledge of the language as well. The isolation felt by the refugees, due to the insufficient financial support, location of the RRC and experiences of intolerance and/or xenophobia, further reduced the refugees' abilities to find opportunities to practice the language in social settings.

|| *When you are recognized as a refugee you go to Rukla, there you go to language courses. If you have been in Rukla, there is only forest and military base. There you lack communication with local population. There is a need of revision in language learning program. The main thing – it is hard to get a job without a language here or open your business."*

Some refugees saw a link between having gone through traumatic experiences and their difficulties to learn the language.

Refugees who had been successful in opening their own business pointed out the benefits of contact with the local population when it comes to learning the language.

" Yes I attend but I am not so successful. I have serious psychological issues what do not help me to learn the language. This is a pity."

|| *The best way to learn the language is to be in the society. But it is my experience, for others it might be different. I understood that I cannot learn Lithuanian with a teacher and books, I had to find friends and communicate."*

Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden provide language training as part of the post recognition integration support. In Norway, the program comprises 550 hours, in Denmark the 2 year integration period comprises at least 15-18 hours per week of language tuition. In Sweden, the integration transition period is 2 years and comprises 'Swedish

for Immigrants' ("SFI"). Through SFI, the refugee acquires basic knowledge in Swedish and knowledge about the Swedish society, as well as how to use computers as an aid in learning the language. Daytime SFI courses typically involve 15-20 hours per week, while evening courses are about 6 hours a week.

Obviously, the ability to benefit from language courses provided in integration programs depends on the quality of the courses and the expertise of the teachers. But in addition to this, factors that influence language acquisition are the refugee's personal education background and degree of literacy, health status impacting on the ability to concentrate, as well as other factors.

Methods of teaching also have an impact on the efficiency of the courses. The RICE studies found that actual learning of language occurs best in 'real life' with social contacts playing a crucial role, and suggested that a combination of work/language opportunities should be considered in addition to basic language training in order to facilitate labour market entry and to speed up further language development. Opportunities could include volunteering, internships, work experience and apprenticeships. The Swedish model for allowing a combination of language training and employment is a good example which addresses the fact that language learning is enhanced when there are opportunities to practice in a genuine environment.

Language acquisition is key to obtaining employment and central to social integration. It is therefore important to make language training available as early as possible.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended to review the Lithuanian language tuition offered to refugees, including teaching methods, to ensure, amongst other things, that the program is adapted to suit different needs and capacities of the refugees varying educational background and taking into account good practice experience from other countries.

- It is recommended to facilitate trainings and exchange opportunities for officials responsible for organising language tuition, as well as for language teachers, in order to learn from experiences and practices in other countries and discuss how language learning can become an integral part of an integrated national integration program.

- It is recommended to consider the possibility of introducing combined language and job training programs and activities, drawing as relevant on the Swedish model.

- It is recommended to organize trainings on empowering working methods for personnel providing services and/or information to refugees, to enhance their capacity to help the refugees achieve their full potential.

- It is recommended to explore ways of further facilitating the interaction between refugees and the local population and NGOs as well as refugees' participation in the social and cultural life of Lithuania, which will increase opportunities for practicing the language

7.3.3 Legal status and duration of residence permits

The PAs revealed that refugees who have been granted 1 year residence permits in Lithuania experience a “chain of difficulties” as a result of their legal status. It was mentioned in particular that they experienced difficulties in accessing housing, finding employment and opening a bank account. Employers are less interested in recruiting refugees with short term legal status as they foresee that their residence permit may not be prolonged and hence that the employee may not be able to continue serving on the position. Moreover, having a short term residence permit makes it difficult for refugees to register at an address

“ We have residency permits for one year. No one wants to hire us for a short time. ”

As having employment and being self-sufficient is crucial to being able to afford housing, the short term residence permit also affects housing integration negatively.

“ *I work and I would like to buy a flat, but I cannot take a credit, but they say you have only one year permit. ”*

In addition, after one year of integration support, the support comes to an end unless the refugee is considered to have special needs. Usually single men or women risk ending up without support. Refugees who have no family support or other network are therefore exposed when the integration support ends, and may end up as homeless, living on the streets. As a result, refugees in the RRC felt the need to try and provide shelter to fellow refugees who had ended up in a precarious situation when they had to leave the flats they had found or after losing the job they had.

Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection also mentioned the difficulties they face in having family members join them in Lithuania, since the current Lithuanian legislation does not provide them with the right to family reunification.

Many of the refugees interviewed, in particular those with short term residence, felt that their situation in Lithuania was so difficult and the prospects for improvement so poor, that they were contemplating to move to another country in Europe where they hoped to find employment more easily and access integration support. In fact, some of the beneficiaries of subsidiary protection had already tried their luck elsewhere, for example in Belgium, Germany or in Sweden, but were returned to Lithuania under the Dublin Regulation. Valuable time to learn the language, undertake trainings and search for employment had been lost when they ended up spending time in the asylum procedure again upon return to Lithuania. This was particularly sad in the case of families with children, who had to readjust to new schools, catch up with the studies, find new friends and start all over, when their parents were moving in search of integration opportunities.

UNHCR has expressed that there is no reason to expect the protection needs of subsidiary protection beneficiaries to be of shorter duration than the need for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention, and that access for subsidiary protection beneficiaries to similar rights as those of refugees would significantly facilitate their early participation

and contribution to the host community.⁵⁴ The timely grant of a secure legal status and residency rights would thereby support social cohesion and the overall integration prospects. It is likewise important to grant similar rights to family members of beneficiaries of international protection.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION:

- It is recommended to review the current legislation with the aim of aligning the residence permit and rights granted to beneficiaries of subsidiary protection to those of refugees; this could be done in the context of Lithuania's ongoing transposition of the recast EU Qualifications Directive.⁵⁵

7.3.4 Access to housing in municipalities

In the PAs, the refugees expressed a need to receive more help and assistance in finding suitable and affordable housing. Due to the lack of information, contacts, limited language skills and financial means, including funds for travel to locations with available flats, it seems to be very difficult in practice for refugees to find housing. In addition, refugees have difficulties affording the rent offered as many of them are unemployed. As a remedy to some of these obstacles, the refugees proposed to introduce social housing as a solution.

“ *I cannot afford normal rent, so we have to rent one room flat for the family. It is expensive, we are looking for something cheaper. Also, it is hard to look on your own – language, transportation and the pay to agents.”*

Furthermore, many of the refugees told of difficulties in finding housing due to expressions of xenophobia and intolerance from landlords who refuse to rent flats to refugees. The existing requirement of declaration or registration at an address is also an obstacle for refugees to access housing; this requirement makes it particularly difficult for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, with short-term residence permits, to find housing.

⁵⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR comments on the European Commission's proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection and the content of the protection granted* (COM(2009)551, 21 October 2009), 29 July 2010, para. 8, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4c503db52.html>

⁵⁵ European Union: Council of the European Union, *Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast)*, 20 December 2011, OJ L 337; December 2011, pp 9-26, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f197df02.html>

" I live here for 10 years already. I have several problems: accommodation – no one wants to rent to us because we are from Afghanistan. When people hear you are from Afghanistan they become afraid. No one gives us employment or housing. "

Without a suitable home, it is difficult for individuals to lead a normal life, to work or to study. The refugees hence conveyed the importance of receiving support in finding affordable housing as most of the refugees living in Kaunas and Vilnius were facing difficulties because they could not afford to move, or had experienced difficulties to find a place to stay. Among the refugees were some who had been successful in finding housing, thanks to the support from an NGO, which illustrates their point that assistance in searching for housing can indeed help.

Some of the Muslim refugees explained that the difficulties in finding housing impacts on their possibility to marry and start a serious relationship. According to the refugees, their religious values and culture requires that couples have an apartment to live in as a couple before they can start a relationship.

In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden refugees granted residence permit receive assistance to secure housing and to move out in municipalities as soon as possible after recognition. State agencies are responsible for finding housing in a suitable municipality and for concluding the contract with the landlord. This practice, coupled with the general responsibility of municipalities to organise language tuition for immigrants and refugees and to ensure day care and schooling for the children, is a key feature of the Nordic countries' integration support program. The municipalities are compensated financially by the state to provide these integration services. In Denmark and Norway, reception of refugees in the municipalities has been made compulsory by law, whereas Finland and Sweden have opted for voluntariness. In Sweden asylum-seekers can choose to stay with family or friends or secure accommodation on their own already during the asylum process, and hence would not require the same assistance. It should be acknowledged, however, that the increasing number of asylum-seekers and the shortage of flats have, in recent years, made it more difficult to secure housing and municipality placement in a timely manner.

The RICE study recommends that receiving countries support refugees to find suitable and affordable housing upon recognition and take measures to prevent refugees from becoming homeless.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION:

- It is recommended to review the extent and form of support refugees receive to help them find housing and conclude a lease agreement, with a view to exploring ways of strengthening the support provided, for example by introducing a system whereby a state agency or an NGO is assigned the responsibility for assisting refugees to find affordable housing and for facilitating the signing of the contract.

7.3.5 Access to employment including validation of qualifications

The refugees explained that they had not come to Lithuania to receive social support, but to find protection from persecution, war and insecurity. Through the interviews, both in the RRC and in the other locations, the MFT got the impression that the refugees were, as a start, highly motivated to find work. Their statements demonstrated a strong wish to take care of themselves and their families, and to contribute to society through, in particular, paying taxes. All of the refugees affirmed that employment is a central element of the integration process.

At the same time, the refugees expressed disappointment that it takes too long to find employment and a need for more support in finding a job, as they face many specific barriers. For example, refugees find it difficult to access information about available jobs due to language problems. Moreover, proper access to the agencies assisting refugees to find work was quite limited as the possibilities to travel from the RRC to bigger cities, or between cities, was seriously hampered by the low financial assistance provided.

Unemployment and the poor prospects of finding a job creates a lot of anxiety for the future. As the refugees are aware that the social support available in case of unemployment is very limited, there is a general feeling that it will not be possible to survive on social welfare in Lithuania in the longer term. Some already relied on money received from relatives abroad. The refugees expressed that they feel they have to take responsibility for their destiny and future, and if they do not find means of survival in Lithuania, they will be forced to leave the country and seek opportunities in other European countries. In this respect it is worth noting that refugees are in a particularly difficult situation compared to nationals, many of whom have left the country to seek employment opportunities after the financial crash in 2008, as refugees often lack the support of family networks and relatives. The refugee community is not large and resourced enough to provide a sufficient safety net, which unemployed Lithuanians may have.

The difficulty in finding employment and means of survival therefore seems to be one of the main reasons why many refugees seek to leave Lithuania to try their luck elsewhere, for example in Germany, France or in the UK.

A number of refugees who had succeeded in finding a job reported that the salary was very low. If only one person works in a family, the income is usually not sufficient to sustain the family.

“ *In five years when I am a refugee here in Lithuania, I became psychologically exhausted (cries), we worked here with my husband for little money, like slaves. No one would help us.* ”

Some of the refugees interviewed had worked as kindergarten teachers, engineers, or lawyers before fleeing their home country. Some had university education and experience from before, however they had not been able to use their qualifications to find employment, in particular due to sufficient lack of knowledge of the Lithuanian language.

Furthermore, as a result of insufficient proficiency in Lithuanian, some had not been able to get a driving license, which is required for some jobs.

Another issue which was raised as a factor preventing refugees from finding employment in spite of their higher levels of education was the fact that their diplomas and educational background were not recognised by Lithuanian employers. This was also the case for the refugees with higher qualifications who had moved out of the RRC and lived in Kaunas and Vilnius.

This challenge was particularly difficult for the refugees to accept considering that the struggle for survival was such a prominent element of the post-recognition period. The difficulties to make a living contributed to not feeling welcome in Lithuania.

“ *For instance, in engineering you have to have 2nd level language. In civil services [where the refugee would like to work] you have to have even higher level of language. Without this examination you can only get manual job. I have no problems with language.”*

In regard to the recognition of qualifications from third countries, UNHCR's ExCom Conclusion No. 104 on local integration encourages states to recognize the equivalency of academic, professional and vocational diplomas, certificates and degrees acquired by refugees prior to entry into the host country.⁵⁶ For regulated professions, it is important to take into account professional qualifications obtained by the holder in third countries, as

“ I have a higher education in water supplies. I have no job here. I have visited several companies but got no response. I have record of employment of 25 years. They say that it is not valid in Lithuania. In Lithuania I have no record – as if I have not worked.”

well as training undergone and/or professional experience, in procedures of professional recognition, while respecting minimum training requirements established by the relevant EU Directives.⁵⁷

In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, individualized integration programmes (integration support) are developed with the ultimate or key aim of equipping adult refugees with the basic language skills and training to enter the labour market or access education. In addition special recruitment incentives and try-out positions are examples of targeted initiatives

created to facilitate the entry of immigrants and refugees into the labour market. Besides the municipalities' responsibility to arrange for housing, the educational and training program developed to equip refugees with the necessary skills to access employment are at the centre of the integration efforts in the Nordic countries. In Sweden, the overall responsibility for the reception of refugees was shifted from the municipalities to the Employment Office in 2010, with a view to enhancing the outcome of the targeted post recognition integration support and supporting earlier employment. In the other Nordic countries, the municipalities retain the main responsibility for integration support.

⁵⁶ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Conclusion on Local Integration*, 7 October 2005, No. 104 (LVI) - 2005, para. (m), available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4357a91b2.html>

⁵⁷ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: European Agenda for Integration – Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union*, 1 September 2005, COM(2005) 389 final, available at: <http://goo.gl/E3cjGi> [accessed 14 May 2014]

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended to undertake a comprehensive review of the way in which refugees are supported in finding employment and to what extent their individual capacities and aspirations are taken into account and individualized integration plans are developed, to identify opportunities for further strengthening the support provided and ensuring that refugees are considered and integrated into national employment policies and schemes, while benefitting from targeted support.

- It is recommended to undertake a mapping of obstacles refugees face in starting private businesses and projects, including of what information is available for refugees on the requirements and procedures. Such a mapping could include inspirational examples of refugees who have successfully started their own business.

- It is recommended to undertake an analysis of opportunities and needs in the Lithuanian labour market, and possibilities to create special incentives for employers to recruit immigrants and refugees.

- It is recommended to explore the possibility of combining work and language training opportunities, to complement the basic Lithuanian language courses in order to facilitate labour market entry.

- It is recommended to initiate a dialogue with potential public and private sector employers on the recruitment of refugees, to raise awareness about the skills and capacities that refugees can bring to a work place, specific issues for consideration when hiring a refugee (e.g. in regard to hiring a beneficiary of subsidiary protection with a short-term residence permit) and to combat negative attitudes and stereotypes.

- It is recommended to develop a system and methodology for the validation of academic, professional and vocational diplomas, certificates and degrees, using good practice and expertise from European countries.

- It is recommended to facilitate trainings and exchange opportunities for Employment Office staff to strengthen their capacity and experience in coaching refugees to find employment and to develop efficient and empowering individual plans for obtaining employment.

7.3.6 Social integration, participation in public/communal life, discrimination and xenophobia

Whereas the refugees unanimously expressed gratitude towards the staff working at the RRC and testified that they felt safe there, most of them expressed that they have very little contact with the local society outside. They explained that they rarely left the Centre after 6 or 7 pm as they did not feel safe. They reported of instances of aggressive behaviour and that stones had been thrown at them when going to the markets etc. Due to language difficulties the refugees cannot easily call the police for assistance when they are attacked and this fact adds to their feeling of insecurity.

For some refugees, social integration in the bigger cities of Kaunas and Vilnius was easier, especially for those who could speak Russian or English.

“ *It seems that the environment in Vilnius and Kaunas felt less of a threat than in Rukla.* ”

The refugees also referred to the small village of Rukla as isolated, and said that there are not so many opportunities for refugees to practice the Lithuanian language with the local population. They described the isolation as hard to endure and the chances of finding a job in or close to Rukla very slim, due to the limited job opportunities and high unemployment.

“ In Vilnius people are more open, because the city is multicultural. They are more friendly than in other city. ”

“ *Lack of contact with Lithuanians, lack of access to internet and TV, expensive journeys to Kaunas or Vilnius.* ”

The refugees also spoke of tensions between the refugees staying in the RRC and the local population. Some of the refugees had directly experienced intolerance and negative attitudes from the local population.

“ *They throw stones at us and we need to run to the Centre.* ”

“ I saw the society here stereotypes me because of my skin colour or my appearance. ”

The refugees were not always able to call the police due to the language barrier.

Muslim refugees reported having experience negative attitudes in relation to their religious affiliation.

“ *We are Muslims, so we are usually treated as terrorists.* ”



UNHCR, Engaging discussion on social integration in Lithuania between refugees taking part in the Participatory Assessment. © UNHCR

Most of the refugees were of the view that social integration is easier in bigger cities such as Kaunas, Vilnius or even in Jonava, and that it is easier to communicate with Lithuanians in bigger cities. Almost all of them stated that xenophobia is not as deeply rooted in the bigger cities, and that the people there are more open and tolerant.

“ *I have some friends. It is more comfortable in Jonava.*”

“ *Lithuania is not a hard country to integrate in. If you go to bad places then you will get bad perception. But if you go to normal society the integration is not that difficult. People will accept you regardless of your religion, or skin colour. I have seen xenophobia and discrimination, but not in my circles. You should not generalize about the nation from one example. I would not say that all Lithuanians are homophobes or xenophobes. I smile to people.*”

In Denmark, civil society and associations play a key role in the government’s reception and integration policy. The government financially supports migrant advisory activities at community centres in municipalities. Volunteers assist immigrants and refugees to find their way in society; they help with homework and organize social and cultural activities to promote the use of the Danish language and strengthen the social capital of the refugees. In Sweden, similar initiatives by the Red Cross or non-governmental

organizations exist as a complement to government initiatives and programs, and sports and youth associations play an important role in welcoming refugees and function as a 'bridge' to local communities.

In Iceland, the Red Cross has for many years organized a particularly successful program whereby all resettled refugees are matched with an Icelandic mentor family who is able to help with day to day tasks and provide advice regarding practical issues that can be challenging during an initial period.

Beside this practical set up to help refugees find their way into society and pave the way for cross-cultural exchange, Sweden has implemented strategies at national level to combat xenophobia and discrimination based, *inter alia*, on ethnic affiliation, and introduced legislation to punish hate crimes and racist remarks. The strategies encompass the areas of employment and education in particular. As the responsibility to improve the integration environment is shared by the receiving society, the government, the municipalities, the civil sector and the individuals concerned, it is important that the population in receiving communities understands the plight of refugees.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended to undertake activities aimed at raising host communities' awareness about the background, needs and capacities of refugees both at national level and in municipalities and smaller towns. This could be done, for example, through information campaigns conveying the personal stories of refugees; projects targeting the youth and children in schools; projects and events aimed at enhancing the contacts and interaction between refugees and the host community, such as through a host-family system; and by supporting refugees in their daily life with information about Lithuanian society and culture.

- It is recommended to explore ways of enhancing the knowledge and understanding of the media about global refugee issues and the situation of refugees in Lithuania, to ensure accurate and objective reporting and the avoidance of stereotyping.

- It is recommended to review the national legislation with a view to ensuring that it contains provisions discouraging and punishing racist actions or treatment and discrimination in all sectors of society, including schools and work places.

- It is recommended to explore the possibility of seeking EU-funding for projects aimed at increasing public awareness and combatting racism, xenophobia and related intolerance

7.3.7 Health care

Many of the refugees staying in the RRC mentioned poor medical assistance as an issue of concern to them.

// *There is no health assistance, only for emergencies."*

Others mentioned that the assistance system is slow.

// *The terms are usually two or three months to get a check-up. Even if you have severe pains. They just give you medication to sleep."*

Another issue which came up is that the majority of refugees cannot afford the needed dental care without additional financial support.

Several refugees mentioned that it was difficult for them to benefit from the psychological support available, as they cannot communicate with the psychologist due to the language barrier.

In fact, the language barrier appeared to be an obstacle to accessing any medical assistance available in the RRC. One particularly compelling case, which illustrates, amongst other things, the impact of problems with communication is that of an Eritrean family with a son who were transferred to Lithuania from Malta under the EUREMA II scheme. The boy is suffering from a particular condition that requires specialized treatment. He had received the necessary treatment, including physiotherapy, during the family's stay in Malta and consequently developed in accordance with his age and capacity. Since the family's arrival to Lithuania, the boy's physical and mental development, including his ability to speak and write, had significantly deteriorated, as he had not received the requisite medical attention and treatment. The lack of follow-up of and medical attention to his condition seemed to be partially due to the mother's inability to communicate in Lithuanian with the medical staff in the RRC as well as due to the absence of an overall coordination and accountability mechanism for ensuring follow-up to individual cases. As a result of the deterioration, the boy was moved back to second grade in school. Hence, this case illustrates the importance of providing interpretation to refugees to facilitate their communication with authorities, social services and medical institutions as well as the need to have in place overall coordination and supervisory structures, which are accountable for ensuring that the integration support program is implemented in an effective manner and that individuals do not fall between the cracks.

" Psychological support without language is hard. There was one kind psychologist, but I cannot express all I want with few words. Sometime ago one person came to give us support but without the translator."

In the Nordic countries, refugees have access to mainstream medical assistance during the asylum procedure and after being granted international protection and a residence permit. Refugees who need an interpreter to communicate with the authorities and social and medical services have the right to receive this assistance. Interpretation is sometimes a challenge in small municipalities and for languages that are not spoken by many refugees. Sometimes telephone interpretation needs to be resorted to in order to ensure access to the interpretation.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended to undertake a comprehensive review of the existing structures for the provision, follow-up and supervision of medical care and treatment, to ensure that refugees in the RRC and in municipalities have effective access to the medical care and psychological support needed to ensure their enjoyment of international and European standards pertaining to the right to health.

- It is recommended to review the criteria and procedures for ensuring that interpretation is available to refugees who need such assistance in order to communicate effectively with the medical services, in the RRC and in municipalities.

7.3.8 Information to refugees

Although the issue of information was not presented to the refugees as a particular indicator or theme related to integration, the PAs revealed that many had an unclear understanding of the integration program, its content and goals, as well as refugees' rights and obligations in Lithuania. Moreover it became apparent that the role of the institutions involved in providing integration support was not clear. In this respect, it did not seem that the integration contracts signed, in RRC or in the municipalities, had helped to provide much clarity about refugees' rights, and what integration support is provided, with what aim.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended to review the content and format of the information provided to refugees on the various elements of the national integration support program and the roles and responsibilities of the various institutions and NGOs involved, to ensure that refugees have a clear understanding of the applicable rights, services and support available and the obligations of the refugees.

- It is recommended to review the manner in which information to refugees about the various elements of the integration support program is delivered, to ensure this is done in an effective manner, including in a language understood by the refugee.

- It is recommended to strengthen the effectiveness and empowering character of the integration contracts and their individual character, by linking them to the provision of information about the goals of the integration program, the support available and by basing the choice of targeted integration support on a dialogue with the refugee about his/her aspirations for future employment or education.

7.3.9 Family reunification

The topic of family reunification did not feature as prominently in the PAs as the other topics. However, it was discussed upon the invitation of the UNHCR MFT-member, or in response to particular questions in this regard. UNHCR notes that the limited interest to talk about this issue, as compared to the other topics presented at the outset of the PAs, should be viewed against the fact that an important proportion of the refugees who participated in the PA were single adult men who had not formed a family of their own before leaving their country of origin, or married couples who already had their children with them in Lithuania.

Nonetheless, some refugees shared their wish to be reunited with older parents or other dependent family members and informed that they had raised the issue with the authorities and sought assistance to achieve family reunification.

One particular case, of an Eritrean refugee couple who informed that they had minor children left in Sudan came to the attention of the MFT as particularly compelling. The mother asked UNHCR for assistance in achieving reunification with her children as this could not be done otherwise. Also, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from Afghanistan and Syria reported during the meetings that they would not qualify for reunification under the current provisions in the Lithuanian law, and that the prospects for achieving reunification with their spouses and minor children are therefore limited unless changes are made to the national legal framework.

UNHCR advocates for family reunification mechanisms that are swift and efficient in order to bring refugee families together as early as possible. UNHCR also recommends that EU Member States provide beneficiaries of subsidiary protection access to family reunification under the same rules as those applied to refugees.⁵⁸ The RICE study strengthened UNHCR's understanding of the negative impact of delayed family reunification on the integration process. It provided 'evidence' from integration stakeholders, in particular those active in the area of language tuition, that refugees who are preoccupied with the plight of minor children and spouses remaining in countries of origin or asylum (often affected by conflict and insecurity) are unable to concentrate fully on language studies or other education aimed at improving future access to employment. Hence, valuable time in the integration process is lost.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION:

- It is recommended to review the national legislation with a view to providing beneficiaries of subsidiary protection the same rights as refugees in respect of family reunification, and to establish a system for counselling and support during the process of family reunification.

7.4. Summary reflections on the post recognition integration support

As mentioned in the chapter on employment, a main concern put forward by the refugees was the limited assistance provided by the authorities in helping refugees find a job when it is time to move out of the RRC. They stated that on the job training is not always available, or accessible in practice in the RRC, and that the financial limitations to travel exacerbated the difficulties in finding employment.

Furthermore, it was the opinion of many refugees that the language support provided is not enough to acquire sufficient language skills to be able to work. Since many refugees lack social network support, it is also difficult for them to solve the problems of employment on their own.

“ *In some countries the government takes the lead to help you integrate, but in Lithuania everything is up to you, you need to learn the language on your own, etc.* ”

⁵⁸ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) *Refugee Family Reunification. UNHCR's Response to the European Commission Green Paper on the Right to Family Reunification of Third Country Nationals Living in the European Union (Directive 2003/86/EC)*, February 2012, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f55e1cf2.html>

“ *Most of young people who are healthy, after one year they cannot get any support from the government. It is difficult for refugees because they have no family or relatives and have to face difficulties alone. The same situation with single people. After one year, they get no support. They are left on their own. This includes all of the insurances. However one year is not enough to get a profession or learn the language. ”*

In addition to the particular barriers to finding employment and learning the Lithuanian language, another aspect highlighted by the refugees was the duration of the integration support in RRC, which was considered too short, including for individuals who are not vulnerable or considered as having special needs. In addition, living in the RRC, close to a military training area was described as a problem, in particular by the Syrian and Chechen refugees, who said that they woke up to the sound of gun shots reminded them about the war in their home country:

“ This place is not convenient to live in. Near the Centre there is an institution for mentally disabled persons, our children feel threatened. As well the military base, always with explosion sounds. It was traumatizing and very stressful for my family. ”

“ *I was one of the first ones to come from Chechnya. When I came from the war situation in Chechnya, the first impression in Rukla was the sounds from military base. It was traumatizing and very stressful for my family. ”*

The vast majority of refugees who participated in the PAs described the stay in Rukla as problematic. Although the refugees testified that the staff in the RRC was helpful and dedicated, the shortcomings mentioned resulted in depression. The same impressions were shared by refugees who had moved out of the RRC and eventually succeeded in starting their own business and integrating into a municipality.

“ *Psychologically it was the hardest time in my life. There were young people in one place, no activities, short language courses. You cannot exercise the language skills, it feels useless. It becomes not interesting. ”*

Studies on refugee integration in Europe have highlighted the importance of initial targeted integration support programs for beneficiaries of protection.⁵⁹ Some typical aspects of such programmes are the provision of language tuition, assistance to qualify for and finding employment, securing adequate housing and the provision of civil orientation. Experiences show that consultations with refugees, as well as qualitative and quantitative research, can assist in shaping the support to maximize its impact on the integration outcome.

⁵⁹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Europe*, September 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/522980604.html>

In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, the integration transition period during which the state ensures support to refugees lasts for 2 - 3 years.⁶⁰ In the case of Norway, this period can be prolonged in individual cases with one more year. In the case of Lithuania, it is noted that the integration transition period can be prolonged for individuals with particular needs. This flexibility is positive and should be retained, recognizing, based on the knowledge and evidence gathered *inter alia* through the RICE studies, that the transition period from asylum-seeker to refugee can be a very challenging process for the individual.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended to develop an Action Plan comprising multiple measures aimed at strengthening the individual and collective impact of the various sectors and areas of integration support, taking into consideration the findings of the PA with refugees and recommendations proposed in this report.

- It is in particular recommended to review the requirement for accepted refugees to stay in the RRC after a residence permit has been granted, and to consider introducing a possibility for refugees to move straight into a municipality, where they will be assisted to find appropriate housing and employment and receive the necessary language training etc. However, in order to avoid the risk that direct placement of refugees in municipalities becomes counterproductive and leaves refugees in a 'vacuum' non-conducive to integration, this measure should be undertaken only after consolidating the existing integration support (in regard to Lithuanian language tuition and support in finding employment etc.) and ensuring that the measures implemented are effective. This includes putting in place the structures and services needed for concluding individual integration contracts upon placement in a municipality.

- It is recommended to also review the monitoring and evaluation methods used by the MSSL to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

- It is recommended to consider undertaking a similar PA with the state and non-governmental integration stakeholders, as the current one with refugees could be envisaged as one possible element of a continuous follow-up and monitoring of the integration programme and services.

- It is recommended to consider ways of institutionalizing participatory approaches and the systematic participation of refugees in the identification of opportunities and needs and in the development and implementation of responses.

⁶⁰ In Sweden the integration support period encompasses 2 years, in Denmark 3 years. In Norway, the initial 2 year period can be prolonged to 3 years in particular cases.

8. Integration models, barriers and facilitators of integration of refugees

Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have developed holistic integration models which encompass legislation, funding and institutional structures where immigrants and refugees have access to mainstream services, social support and education after recognition and can access help as any other citizen. In addition to this, and as described under the different thematic chapters of this report, refugees receive targeted post-recognition support during a transition period which helps them access the mainstream services and right in practice, as this will prove difficult directly upon arrival without possessing the native language and with limited knowledge about society.

The post recognition targeted support encompasses, at a minimum, language tuition, civic orientation and on the job training, and lasts from 2 to 3 years. In addition to the services mentioned, refugees receive assistance to find housing. The state compensates the municipalities that bear the costs for reception of refugees and for the provision of the targeted transition support. During the transition period, the refugees receive financial allowances to cover their costs of living, including rent.

The aim of these policies is to ensure social cohesion and equality of rights, inclusion and participation.

Through the RICE project recently carried out by UNHCR in Europe, and findings from the literature studies, interviews with refugees and integration stakeholders in Austria, Ireland, France and Sweden, UNHCR has strengthened its understanding of what factors may impact the integration trajectories of refugees. Some key points have emerged that can help understand the feedback in the current mapping of opportunities and challenges faced by asylum-seekers and refugees in Lithuania.

Through the RICE studies, it has been confirmed that the asylum procedure and reception conditions have a direct impact on the well-being of refugees. Measures aimed at shortening the process, and ensuring a dignified treatment of asylum-seekers in the process are worth investing in with a view to reducing both the financial costs for the state and the humanitarian costs for the asylum-seekers. The study, in particular in Sweden,

confirms the view that humane and efficient asylum procedures have a positive impact on subsequent integration. In the context of Sweden, it is widely acknowledged among integration stakeholders that integration is a process which takes time, and therefore, that early interventions and integration support are beneficial to the integration process. Integration stakeholders are of the view that the first months of reception in the asylum process are pivotal for the continued process. It is therefore argued that much is gained if integration support, such as language training, can begin during the asylum period. Similarly, studies on integration find that asylum processes often contain numerous challenges to overcome. For example, the length of time spent in the asylum process and the lack of rights, entitlements and/or meaningful activities provided during this period often leads to boredom, depression and loss of self-esteem. Literature on integration describes the impact of the asylum process, including the time spent in the procedure, on refugees' health and refers to the damaging effects on refugees' well-being.⁶¹

The findings gathered through the exchanges and discussions with integration stakeholders and refugees in the RICE study also highlighted that there is close interdependence between different integration policy areas, and that employment is a key factor for successful integration. Many other areas or indicators of integration in fact relate back or depend on employment integration. At the same time factors such as language skills, education and training, health and accommodation will impact on the possibilities to access employment and reach early economic independence. There is wide acceptance among the countries studied, and in the literature on integration, that employment constitutes the biggest issue of concern for refugees. In Austria and in Sweden the integration of refugees into the labour market is a top priority. Also, employment is viewed as a key indicator of integration and a central component of measuring integration in many of the EU countries.

Another important element which came out strongly from the RICE study in Sweden is the fact that refugees cannot be treated as a homogenous group, even when they come from the same country. Although refugees who arrive in a new country will face common structural obstacles, it should be kept in mind that individual backgrounds, personality, psycho-social and educational resources, professional skills, history of flight, trauma and a variety of other factors will impact on the preparedness to face the challenge of meeting a new culture, learning a new language and starting a new life in a new country. Integration programs therefore need to take into consideration the individuality of the clients.

For the integration process to work well, it is important to acknowledge that refugees bring with them different human capital and resources, through education and personal and professional experiences. Against this background, an important aspect of the Nordic countries' integration policies is the development of individually tailored integration plans, which outline the introductory support to be provided during the integration transition period. These plans are discussed and agreed with the client, thereby constituting an empowering tool and placing a shared personal responsibility on the refugee to identify the integration support that will help him/her achieve the agreed goals.

⁶¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Europe*, available at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/522980604.html>

9. Conclusion

The integration of refugees entails challenges for governments and authorities, including in countries that have longstanding experience and that regularly review policies to promote the inclusion of immigrants and refugees in society. In many countries in Europe, refugees and migrants continue to face difficulties in gaining full economic and social foothold, despite government measures to improve the outcome of integration programs. Monitoring the impact of, and improving the content and format of integration policies and programs therefore needs to be an ongoing activity.

Integration policies should empower and support refugees to become economically productive and self-reliant residents who feel confident to interact with the local community and participate in the social and cultural life of the receiving society.

The PA interviews with refugees in Lithuania left the MFT with a strong sense that the predominant feelings among the refugees were despair, sadness and loss of motivation as the obstacles to integration seemed insurmountable and even caused many to leave the country in the hope of succeeding better elsewhere. The challenge ahead therefore lies in reversing this trend by enhancing the impact of the integration program and support provided, for the benefit of the refugees who have been granted international protection and for the Lithuanian society.

The proposed recommendations contained in Chapter VII of this report could inform the formulation of relevant components of a comprehensive national integration strategy and program; such would seek to consolidate the existing integration support into a holistic national integration strategy, and outline a clear vision with goals, direction and guidance from the state to the regional and local agencies.

In addition, an improved gathering of statistics related to the reception of asylum-seekers and the integration of refugees would allow for a better, evidence-based analysis of the effectiveness and impact of integration policies and programs. In this connection, it would be useful to establish integration indicators against which periodic evidence-based reviews of policies could be undertaken.

UNHCR would also like to underline the value and importance of a continued participatory approach to the processes of monitoring, evaluation and further development of policies and programs in the areas of reception and integration. As mentioned in the introduction to this report, it is UNHCR's firm belief that participatory methods of assessment serve to empower asylum-seekers and refugees and enhance their sense of responsibility and motivation as well as ownership of the processes. Participatory approaches also strengthen the evidence and grounds on the basis of which decisions are made.

UNHCR stands ready to support the Lithuanian government and authorities in the development of a National Integration Strategy with related programs and projects, which can be informed by the findings from this Participatory Assessment of refugees' integration opportunities and challenges. In particular, UNHCR RRNE has access to relevant expertise in the Nordic countries from which cross-fertilization of experience, good practice and know-how can be retrieved. As a follow-up to the joint PA exercise, UNHCR RRNE will be pleased to help and facilitate the organisation of seminars and exchanges on several of the integration-related topics covered, drawing on the network of integration stakeholders in the Nordic countries. For the purpose of undertaking further studies and reviews recommended in the sections above, and organizing training events and exchange opportunities, it is recommended to explore the availability of external funding, such as the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, for financing some of the capacity building and quality enhancing activities proposed.

Annex 1: Information note to refugees invited to the Participatory Assessment



The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), together with the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Lithuanian Red Cross Society and Caritas is starting a survey about the integration of refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Lithuania. The purpose of the survey is to hear directly from refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection about how you experience your life and possibilities to integrate in Lithuania – what are the opportunities and what are the difficulties.

We would like to hear from you - what has been good with your stay in Lithuania, what has been difficult, and your recommendations for improvements. UNHCR will facilitate group meetings in Rukla Refugee Centre, Kaunas and Vilnius, when we want to hear your opinion. Your opinion about your stay in Lithuania, and your recommendations on what can be done to make integration easier will be summarized in a report that UNHCR will present to the authorities and organizations for discussion. We would like to gather information on the topics of accommodation, the asylum process, work, language, support and benefits, health, social integration, residence permit and family reunification.

We would like women, men and children refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, of different nationalities and backgrounds to participate in these meetings so we can get the voice of as many refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection as possible.

Interpretation will be arranged to facilitate the communication during the meetings. Snacks and drinks will also be provided to those who participate in the meetings.

The meetings will be held on the following days:

- in Rukla Reception Centre: on 22-23 October
- in Kaunas: on 6-7 November
- in Vilnius: on 8 November

Some of the meetings will be held in the morning, some in the afternoons and some in the evenings on these dates, in order to make it possible for those who work to participate.

UNHCR, together with the staff at Rukla Reception Centre, will provide more information to the refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection in Rukla about the exact time and place of the meeting to which you will be invited.

The Lithuanian Red Cross Society and Caritas will contact refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection living in Kaunas and Vilnius to invite for a meeting at a specific time.

If you have any questions about this project and/or not yet been contacted and invited by UNHCR, the Lithuanian Red Cross Society or Caritas to a meeting and would like to participate, please call:

UNHCR, 8 52 10 7416
Lithuanian Red Cross Society, 8 52 12 7322
Caritas, 8 646 12671

Thank you very much for your participation! Your opinion is important!

