



**Lithuanian Red Cross Society
2020 Activity Report**

CHALLENGES OF THE LITHUANIAN RED CROSS DURING THE PANDEMIC YEAR – TO HELP THE STATE AND THE MOST SENSITIVE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY

2020 was a year of special challenges for Lithuania as a whole and, of course, for the Lithuanian Red Cross. As an organisation whose main mission is to be the state's helper in times of disaster, the Lithuanian Red Cross came to the rescue wherever its hands were needed most during this pandemic year.

In 2020, the Lithuanian Red Cross (LRC) continued to develop its regular programmes – assisting lonely elderly people, caring for refugees and migrants in Lithuania, and providing first aid training. However, the organisation has also had to focus a great deal of energy on new activities to help the state and the most vulnerable in the face of the pandemic. Volunteers and business organisations have also helped the organisation.

The onset of the pandemic has sowed a great deal of anxiety among older people. They have consistently been identified as being at the highest risk of contracting Covid-19 and experiencing more severe symptoms of the disease. This has caused them a lot of anxiety and uncertainty – how to buy food or medicine, and how to take care of their daily lives and psychological health in isolation. The Lithuanian Red Cross not only looked for new ways to take care of the seniors in its care (when the possibilities to visit them were limited), but also extended a helping hand to those seniors who were not previously in the care of the LRC. With the help of the insurance company AVIVA and volunteers, we counselled seniors on how to protect themselves from the virus, registered those who needed help with food deliveries or other shopping, and provided emotional support.

Another important area of activity was the collection of data necessary for the successful management of the pandemic. LRC volunteers assisted the NVSC in interviewing Lithuanian residents who had contacts with sick persons or returned from other countries – both by calling them by phone and meeting them at the country's airports. We also took care of foreigners, migrants and asylum seekers in Lithuania, for whom the language barrier made it more difficult to find information on lockdown requirements.

However, the biggest challenge facing our organization was at the end of the year, when a very large number of Covid-19 sufferers flooded hospitals. Then we mobilised volunteers to work in hospitals and nursing homes, and helped as much as we could to free up doctors and other staff in these institutions from medically unskilled jobs.

Most importantly, despite the unexpected pandemic challenges, the Lithuanian Red Cross has managed to strengthen its forces and better prepare for the challenges ahead, both by making the necessary organisational changes and by mobilising a large pool of volunteers.

FORCES OF KINDNESS AGAINST THE VIRUS

Since the first lockdown, the Lithuanian Red Cross has joined forces to come to the aid of the state, under the rule of the pandemic and the most sensitive groups in society most affected by the virus. A volunteer reserve was set up – the "Goodness Against the Virus Force" – to help where the need

is greatest. Volunteers helped the elderly, foreigners who are harder to reach (due to the language barrier), and went to hotspots and provided assistance to medical and other staff.

I during the lockdown period

- **14 volunteers** were on duty at the airport and other hotspots: providing information to people returning from abroad, information on self-isolation and where to go if feeling symptoms, taking temperatures and calming the panicking people.
- Volunteers visited **274 marginalised people** in viral hotspots and provided psychological first aid and information on the importance of self-isolation.
- **18 volunteers** on duty at the Vilnius Municipality hotline provided information to more than **300 elderly** people about lockdown conditions and the possibility of food or medicines delivery.
- **46 volunteers** ensured the safe delivery of the necessary food to **612 elderly** people.
- **Emotional support for foreigners by phone – 2,940 calls** to foreigners during the 3 months of the first lockdown.
- We have translated information on changes to lockdown conditions for foreigners into 6 languages: English, Russian, Arabic, Turkish, Dari, Tigrayan.
- In partnership with UNHCR, we provided financial support to **70 vulnerable asylum seekers** who were particularly affected by the pandemic (losing their jobs or other income).

II during the lockdown period

- On 16 September 2020, we signed a cooperation agreement with the National Public Health Centre, in which we undertook to help the state by accepting citizens returning to Lithuania or arriving foreigners.
- **10 volunteers** helped the NVSC trace contacts by calling people.
- The Lithuanian Red Cross has provided the **Border Guard School** of the Lithuanian SBGS, where regime-affected people from Belarus have been quarantined, with an **on-call phone** so that they could **contact** the remaining **relatives in Belarus** from the first day of their arrival.
- On December 17-31, **100 volunteers** came to the aid of doctors at Santara Clinics. Total volunteering time was **399 hours**.
- In partnership with UNHCR, we provided financial support to **94 vulnerable asylum seekers** who were particularly affected by the pandemic (losing their jobs or other income).

ASSISTANCE FOR THE ELDERLY



WARM VISITS

In 2020, a difficult year for all, we continued the Lithuanian Red Cross national programme "Warm Visits" for lonely elderly people. Unable to visit the elderly due to lockdown, volunteers communicated with them from a safe distance and by means of remote communication. It was necessary to buy food and medicine for seniors, take care of household chores, and just keep in touch with them so they didn't feel alone. For

many of the elderly, lockdown has been going on for years, so attention and assistance in everyday life have been particularly important.

Programme in figures:

- **404 elderly** are visited regularly
- **269 volunteers** prepared and trained to visit the elderly
- **10,970** support calls
- **2,822** food and medicine parcels delivered to the visited elderly
- **Cities:** Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Panevėžys, Šiauliai, Utena, Visaginas, Rokiškis, Raseiniai, Simnas, Tauragė, Alytus, Vilkaviškis.

THE SURVEY WAS CARRIED OUT:

Together with the Institute of Sociology of the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, the survey "Older people living alone: life in the context of the coronavirus epidemic and lockdown" was carried out. Results of the research: https://www.lstc.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ATASKAITA_LSTC_LRK_2020.pdf

Important indicators from the survey:

- communication with volunteers of the Lithuanian Red Cross during lockdown was assessed as a very positive experience by as many as 86% of respondents;
- 84% of the survey participants reported that such visits by volunteers would also be of great help to older people living alone;
- 86% would confidently recommend these services to others.

SUICIDE PREVENTION AMONG OLDER PEOPLE

- Training for volunteers on "***Suicide Prevention: how and when to react?***" was prepared
- An **operational algorithm** has been developed for the actions of the volunteer in case of suicide risk (recognition and action plan).
- In cooperation with the Crisis Management Centre, **42 psychological counselling** sessions were provided to older people.

OTHER ACTIVITIES IN THE "WARM VISITS" PROGRAMME:

- **CHRISTMAS OF BRIGHT THOUGHTS:** invitation to communities to see the lonely people, 660 lanterns and parcels brought for the elderly, greeting of seniors during the LRT Greetings Concert.
- **AWARDS:** Warm Visits – SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PROJECT OF THE YEAR (Lithuanian Business Confederation Award).
- **AVIVA's** support has enabled the Lithuanian Red Cross to provide more assistance to vulnerable older people in the country. Thanks to AVIVA, LRC volunteers provided emotional support to the elderly, information on how to protect themselves from the virus, and help with door-to-door delivery of food and medicine.

NURSING AT HOME

Loneliness in older age poses many challenges. All the more so if a person has a disability or illness and needs care. So we also provided nursing services to the most vulnerable elderly in our care. Professional nursing staff looked after the health of the elderly, advising them on nursing care, healthy lifestyle and prevention of diseases and complications. And it made the elderly feel more confident and secure.

Programme in figures:

- **350** elderly under care
- **9** nurses
- **Cities:** Vilnius, Klaipėda, Tauragė, Alytus, Šiauliai

REFUGEE AND MIGRANT PROGRAMME

Helping refugees and migrants is one of the key activities of the Lithuanian Red Cross. As in other areas, there were many challenges in 2020. After the announcement of the lockdown, it was difficult even for Lithuanian citizens to track information on safe behaviour during the pandemic, to requirements that apply to mobility, self-isolation, etc. It was even more difficult for foreigners to follow this information, and here the Lithuanian Red Cross came to help – constantly informing foreigners about changing requirements through integration centres (operating in Kaunas and Klaipėda) and their electronic channels, in several foreign languages. We have been watching closely how the pandemic will affect refugees who work. For the most affected, those who have lost their jobs or were unable to find employment because of the pandemic, we have worked with UNHCR to provide financial support to help vulnerable refugee families stay out of poverty.

As in the " peaceful " years, the Lithuanian Red Cross continued to provide other services for the



successful integration of refugees and migrants during the pandemic years as well. We provided information and advice on how to navigate in our legal system, access public services (education, health, etc.), legal assistance, help to learn Lithuanian and better understand the civic and cultural nuances of our country, and help to

find housing and jobs. Training and services have been adapted to provide them remotely.

Psychological counselling has also been given great attention to help people who have suffered psychological injuries and experiences while fleeing war or other un.

Programme in figures:

- **1,420** foreigners, asylum seekers, people granted asylum
- **24** employees
- **100** volunteers
- **34 monitoring visits** were carried out to border control posts and barriers, the Aliens Registration Centre and the Refugee Reception Centre.
- We provided legal advice to 375 foreigners.
- Since August, we have helped **35 people** to contact their family members **175 times** by providing them with phones or calling cards.

- We took care of the integration of **154** asylum seekers in **9 municipalities**: No. Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Naujoji Akmenė, Jonava district, Palanga, Švenčionys district, Radviliškis, and Kaišiadorys.
- **190** foreigners were taught Lithuanian language.
- **Cities/towns**: Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, border checkpoints and posts on the border with Belarus, accommodation centres for asylum seekers in Pabradė and Rukla.

ADVOCACY

- Asylum seekers have the **right to work** after 6 months if the Department of Migration has not taken an asylum decision by then.
- On 16 April 2020, we presented the COVID-19 guidelines to public authorities to **manage the risk of COVID-19** in asylum seekers' accommodation centres.
- On 10 June 2020, a **cooperation agreement** was signed with the **State Border Guard Service**, which provides access to psychosocial and family relations restoration services at border checkpoints and the Foreigners Registration Centre for all foreigners, **regardless of their legal status**.
- At national level, **individual integration plans** for people who have received asylum have been introduced.
- The provision of **state-guaranteed legal aid** to all asylum seekers has been ensured.
- Together with other organisations, the situation of vulnerable refugees after the Moria camp fire on the island of Lesbos has been highlighted – Lithuania has committed to resettling **5 unaccompanied minors** from Greece.
- A **report** summarising the results of the **2017-2020 monitoring** exercise was presented.
- A qualitative **analysis of the needs of Belarusians** arriving on the humanitarian corridor was carried out in order to find out the difficulties faced by people fleeing the repressions, in Lithuania.

On 10 June 2020, we signed a **cooperation agreement with the State Border Guard Service**, in which we undertook to assist the State in the event of a large number of foreigners crossing the border.

On 16 September 2020, we signed a **cooperation agreement with the National Public Health Centre**, whereby we undertook to help the state by accepting citizens returning to Lithuania or arriving foreigners.

FIRST AID

In 2020, the training of first aid skills was the most challenging, as they are most effective in “live” situations. Training in resuscitation, artificial respiration, defibrillator use and other first aid skills requires both “live” tools and practice. Thus, in 2020, we organised less first aid training than usual – but nevertheless, after the first lockdown, we taught first aid skills to 4,770 people.

At the end of the year, we started to prepare a new strategy and plan actions to further develop first aid training in the event of a prolonged pandemic.

Programme in figures:

- First aid training was provided to **4,770 people**, with first aid training in **78 companies, 10 driving schools and 10 general education schools** (398 learners were trained in cooperation with the Lietuvos Draudimas insurance company).
- Hygiene training was delivered to **3,662 persons**.
- 124 persons received training on alcohol and drugs.
- **24** first aid instructors.
- **Cities:** Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai, Panevėžys, Visaginas, Raseiniai, Kuršėnai, Tauragė, Rokiškis, Naujoji Akmenė, Joniškis, Šilutė, Kėdainiai, Anykščiai.



HUMANITARIAN AID PROGRAM IN THE REGIONS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES IN THE DEPARTMENTS



In addition to the core programmes – Warm Visits, Refugees and Migrants, etc. – in each city, departments of the Lithuanian Red Cross also carry out additional activities aimed at solving the most severe problems in that particular city and reaching the people affected by the crisis in local communities. Expert knowledge of the social and health challenges faced by vulnerable people in the local area enabled the LSC departments to provide targeted assistance and to respond quickly to situations where people needed support.

In individual cities, LRC departments ran food assistance programmes for the most vulnerable members of their communities. The "Trust" cabinets continued to provide counselling and other support to people with addictions. These activities took into account the vulnerabilities of each city, each community, and were based on an assessment of individual needs.

Programme in figures:

- **40** children visited our day care centres in Kuršėnai and Raseiniai;
- **104** people with addictions received help in our branches in Visaginas and Alytus;
- Up to **25** people lived in our Raseiniai accommodation home every day;
- Up to **60** people visited the Visaginas community home every month;
- Up to **80** people received free meals every month at the charity canteen in Raseiniai;
- During the pandemic, **576** volunteers worked continuously at mobile stations, fever clinics, hospitals, care facilities, and provided assistance to the isolated, elderly, and at-risk population;
- **9,412** volunteering hours;
- **Cities:** Alytus city and district, Visaginas, Rokiskis, Kretinga, Šilutė, Kuršėnai.

SPONSOR SUPPORT

1.2% Private donors contributed EUR 61,630 to the campaign.

6,105 Private regular donors contributed EUR 514,519 to our organisation.

Businesses donated us EUR 111,728.

Fundraising campaigns:

- In August 2020, a crash in the Lebanese capital Beirut killed hundreds of people, injured thousands and left more than 300,000 homeless. The Lithuanian Red Cross invited the Lithuanian people to contribute to the humanitarian aid for the people of Beirut affected by the disaster, raising EUR 8,318. The donation was transferred to the International Federation of the Red Cross for the Lebanese Red Cross in Beirut.

The Permanent Sponsorship Project was supported by the Swiss Red Cross.