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**Information provided by the Republic of Lithuania to**

**the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons on older persons in the context of climate change-induced disasters and building back better**

*1.* ***Legal, policy and institutional frameworks****:*

According to Article 53 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, it is mandatory to protect environment from harmful effects and Article 54 stipulates that the State takes care of the protection of the natural environment, fauna and flora, individual natural objects and particularly valuable areas, supervises their use, as well as their restoration and enrichment of natural resources, and that it is forbidden to devastate the earth, its depths, waters, pollute waters and make the environment radioactive and impoverish flora and fauna. It has to be noted, that Constitutional Court in its jurisprudence on Article 54 has stated that this norm is one of the goals of the state's activities - to ensure people's right to a healthy and clean environment. Also the Supreme Court of Lithuania has stated that “the individual’s right to health protection and safe environment is directly guaranteed in the norms of Article 53 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, which, among other provisions, establish the sate’s duty to take care of people’s health and the state’s and society’s duty as a whole to protect the environment from harmful effects”. Article 29 of the Constitution stipulates, that all persons shall be equal before the law, courts and other state institutions and officials. Human rights may not be restricted; no one may be granted any privileges on the grounds of gender, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, belief, convictions, or views.

Article 4 of the Law on Strategic Management of the Republic of Lithuania provides for the principle of non-discrimination when preparing and implementing planning documents. The Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania "On the Approval of the National Progress Plan for 2021-2030" provides for the horizontal principle “Equal opportunities for all”, the application of which ensures that all persons, regardless of their gender, nationality, racial or ethnic origin, citizenship, language, religion, faith , beliefs or views, disability, state of health, social status, age, sexual orientation or other features, have equal rights and opportunities to use services, infrastructure, transport and other means, and to participate in public life.

Lithuania has ratified Aarhus Convention and this convention is an integral part of the legal system of the Republic of Lithuania. Aarhus Convention enshrines following rights: the right to receive information, the right of the public to participate in decision-making, and the right to apply to courts on environmental issues.

The Environmental Protection Law of the Republic of Lithuania regulates public relations in the field of environmental protection, establishes the basic rights and duties of legal and physical persons in preserving the biological diversity, ecological systems and landscape characteristic of the Republic of Lithuania, ensuring a healthy and clean environment, rational use of natural resources in the Republic of Lithuania, its territorial waters, continental shelf and economic zone.

The above analysis of the norm regarding the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment allows us to say that even though the right is not directly stated in any legal act, ensuring a healthy and clean environment for all is an important goal of the state's activities and the legal path is drafted for its assurance. All these rights are guaranteed to all persons, regardless of their gender, nationality, racial or ethnic origin, language, religion, faith, belief or opinion, disability, health condition, social status, age, sexual orientation or other characteristics.

According to the Law on Administrative Proceedings of the Republic of Lithuania, any interested person can apply to a court for protection of their infringed right, contested right or interest protected under law. If there were a complaint in order to protect the public interest connected with the protection of the environment, this complaint should be admissible according to the Law on Environmental Protection of the Republic of Lithuania.

Seeking to avoid negative impacts on socio-economic activities, the existing infrastructure should be improved to adapt to the sea level rise. Seeking to reduce the impacts of climate extremes it is important to issue timely warnings for the public. Daily meteorological and hydrological observations and forecasts become more and more valuable in Lithuania. Even greater attention and funds from the local authorities are needed for coastal management and the protection of potentially flooded areas, as well as the measures that are being developed to preserve the coastal ecosystem. However, a lot depends on people’s ability to adapt to weather challenges. For example, in order to adapt to more and more frequent floods, flood protection technologies and infrastructure should be developed in areas with the highest risk of flooding. These areas have been identified and flood risk maps have been introduced in Lithuania. Interactive maps include the most important causes of flooding and indicate areas that may be flooded. With such technical improvements social and behavioural changes should come, that society would be capable to adapt to climate change impact and the effects of it. Moreover, such maps are also used in decision making processes, assessing necessary flood protection measures at the local and governmental levels.

Lithuania has started to devise investment plans for a transition into a more green, circular, and digital economy, which are required to reach the ambiguous 2050 climate neutral ambitions. Lithuania’s recovery and resilience plan will invest in more sustainable power generation and energy storage, promote green mobility, facilitate the 5G rollout and strengthen social protection. All reforms and investments must be completed by August 2026.

Recently, companies in Lithuania rather often focus on those areas of social responsibility that are related to responsible consumption and pollution reduction. Considerable attention is also paid to the development and education of the younger generation: sharing your "know how", training an organization's future employees or customers, introducing them to innovations is becoming a common direction chosen by organizations.

In our opinion, a modern socially responsible company is the one that voluntarily applies social and environmental principles and promotes the sense of community and transparent business. Key initiatives for change in business environment are also highlighted in Lithuania’s progress strategy “Lithuania 2030”. The society and authorities understand the importance of business for the economy and each individual, authorities appreciate the role of business and enterprises, recognizing and encouraging new innovative initiatives. It is noted, that Lithuania’s economic growth is based on principles of sustainable development and „green” concept of growth, so it does not adversely affect the environment and human health. Natural resources are used rationally to preserve natural biodiversity, cultural landscapes and reduce environmental pollution. It should be pointed out, that more and more business activities are aimed at promoting diversity, inclusion and equality and are high on the agenda within the companies in the Lithuanian Global Business Services sector. In parallel, socially responsible companies are acknowledged and appreciated by the State. The National Responsible Business Awards recognize socially responsible companies. Since 2013, companies have been presented with three nominations: “Workplace of the Year”, “The Most Socially Oriented Company of the Year”, and “Environmentally-Friendly Company of the Year”. Additional awards are presented to companies that made a progress in the areas of gender equality and the integration of the disabled. Corporate social responsibility is encouraged by arranging and financing training, consultations, personnel exchange, research and assessment, raising the awareness of society, organizing campaigns aimed at promoting corporate social responsibility, etc. The promotion of corporate social responsibility is aimed at increasing the responsibility of companies for their impact on the environment and society. Companies are encouraged to embrace social responsibility and apply the principles of responsible business, such as responsible use of resources, socially responsible management of human resources, occupational health and safety, equality between men and women, prohibiting discrimination on grounds of age, disability, etc.

*2.* ***Access to information****:*

Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania is constantly improving public awareness on environmental protection issues, which include climate change, biodiversity, pollution crises. For example, the improvement is carried out by providing relevant information on environmental protection to the public, also by implementing EU funded project on promotion of responsible and environmentally friendly behaviour. During this project, different integrated social communication campaigns are carried out which promote sustainable mobility, responsible consumption, wastewater management and communicate about dam damage. All of these campaigns promote non-discrimination and are planned in accordance with different consumption habits, perceptions and level of awareness and different needs of men and women. The project includes variety of topics for men and women of all ages. The project activities are planned in a way to reach the largest possible audience and form the awareness in the field of environmental protection to all Lithuanians, regardless of their age, gender, racial or ethnic origin. Communication campaigns are carried out through various channels: regional and local internet portals, publications with highest rates in male and female audience, social networks, broadcasts, video platforms and television as well as interactive events or social actions.

LT72 is a website intended to prepare Lithuanian residents for emergencies. Recently, an advertising campaign “We are a team. We have a plan" was launched, urging people to learn, and for those who know, to remember how to prepare for disasters and how to behave during them. People are informed about local air quality through receiving air quality alerts on phones, following local news. When air quality is low, there are public recommendations to stay indoor. These measures are universal not, targeted for older persons.

The [UNECE](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Economic_Commission_for_Europe) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) is implemented in the national legislation and the administrative bodies and courts have to implement its’ norms. The international treaties ratified by the Parliament (Seimas) are a constituent part of the legal system of Lithuania. In cases of dispute, international agreements have primacy over national law and parties can rely directly on international law.

*3.* ***Participation****:*

There is public involvement in environmental and climate decision making in Lithuania. Ministry of Environment provides drafts of new or amended legislation for comments to relevant government stakeholders, social and economic partners, associations and the public. In every round of consultation, the draft project is published on the electronic information system where interested institutions and the public can provide comments. After every consultation stage, the Ministry usually arranges a meeting to discuss comments, but is not required to do so.

But we lack engaging and empowering older people’s voices and actions in tackling the climate crisis. There is a huge room for improvement in building greater older people’s support for the climate movement.

*4.* ***Intersectionality****:*

There is a lack of relevant data on this issue. People and communities experiencing multiple causes of vulnerability are the most vulnerable. Older people who have cognitive disabilities like dementia can have a harder time responding to and coping with these events. Older people living in rural and low-income areas may be more effected. There are other factors important such as social and institutional context (levels of inequality and income, the strength of social networks, the cohesion of neighbourhoods, care regimes in nursing homes, etc).

The climate, pollution, and biodiversity crises adversely impacting people by causing direct impacts on their health and well-being. It exacerbates and accentuates already existing inequalities and deepens socioeconomic imbalances. An example in Lithuania is heat waves. The analyses of heat waves show that they are most dangerous for people over 75 years old, babies, small children and women. Due to the still existing gap between women's and men's salaries, pensions for women are lower. The statistical life expectancy of women is longer, so they are paid accumulated (and smaller than men's) pensions for a much longer period of old age. As the impacts of climate change intensify, women's greater economic disadvantage would make it more difficult for them to manage the consequences of climate change, such as heat waves. Fewer women could buy the necessary tools, health preparations, install ventilation or conditioning systems in their homes. Such opportunities are less accessible to women, especially those experiencing social exclusion.

The emergence of new diseases, new organisms and viruses in general is related to climate change, which has a direct and indirect impact not only on public health, but also on the health of each individual. Increased cardiovascular problems due to heat waves, ticks starting to work earlier in Lithuania due to the rising temperature, allergies suffering longer due to earlier flowering - these are just some of the changes that doctors already attribute to the effects of climate change. Experts predict that as the problems of climate change only worsen, it may manifest itself in Lithuania both in the exacerbation of already existing diseases and in the emergence of new diseases. From the risk of new viruses and cancers to pollution-induced lung disease and even increased accidents, the health impacts of climate change are wide-ranging and alarming.

The principal barriers at national level include a lack of extensive education and inter-institutional cooperation which leads to society-wide solutions, sustainable and coordinated government policies. Also, there is insufficient global cooperation to address and reduce contributors, including fossil fuel production, to climate change. The field of environmental protection is often dominated by men, so it is important to create a platform or at least not prevent women and girls from talking about climate change. Overcoming obstacles related to empowering women and girls to be active participants in environmental protection is also very important.

In Lithuania there is a lack of gender equality experts who specialize in the field of climate change and vice versa. Climate change and gender equality specialists are needed not only in national level institutions, but also in municipalities. In this way, it would be possible to carry out education more effectively, to raise competence by inviting foreign experts. We must not forget to talk about the greater inclusion of women at the national decision-making level including the Parliament and the ministries. Also encourage more women and girls to choose the so-called STEM sciences, which include natural sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics.