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

 **“Women, Girls and the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment”**

**of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment**

1. *How are the climate, pollution, and biodiversity crises adversely impacting women and girls? What are the principal barriers facing these rights holders’ realization of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, a right that includes: clean air; a safe climate; access to safe water and adequate sanitation; healthy and sustainably produced food; non-toxic environments in which to live, work, study and play; healthy biodiversity and ecosystems; access to environmental and climate information; participation in environmental and climate decision-making processes; access to justice and an affective remedy when the aforementioned rights are violated.*

It is true, that climate change is already affecting Europe in various forms, depending on the region, which leads to biodiversity loss, forest fires, decreasing crop yields and higher temperatures. In Lithuania, changes in temperature (heat waves) and precipitation patterns (storms and floods) affect different economic activities and natural ecosystems (reduces crop yields, biodiversity loss, affect people‘s health). Coastal region is one of the most vulnerable regions in Lithuania. Lithuanian coast is in the south-eastern region of Baltic Sea which, according to studies, will undergo biggest changes in the 21st century, due to the sink of terrain and sea level rise.

The climate, pollution, and biodiversity crises adversely impacting women and girls 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. More women than men live in poverty in Lithuania. This is due to the still existing gap between women's and men's salaries, which also means lower pensions for women. 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.

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.

When developing measures and drafting any legal act in Lithuania, Article 3 of The Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men should be noted. This article states that it is the duty of state and municipal institutions to implement the equal rights of women and men in all legal acts drafted and adopted by them. In this way, the principle of equality of women and men is enshrined horizontally in all policy areas. Therefore Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania ensures that equal rights of women and men are established in strategic planning documents and in all legal acts and activities, or at least has to ensure that legal acts do not have a negative impact on the principle of equal opportunities (for 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, equal rights and opportunities to participate in the implementation of activities will be ensured).

There is also 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.

The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania guarantees access to justice: “Any person whose constitutional rights or freedoms are violated shall have the right to appeal to court”. There is no right to a clean, healthy, favourable, etc. environment directly enshrined in the Constitution but this right can be derived from other Articles of the Constitution.

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. 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.

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.

1. *What are the specific obligations of States and responsibilities of businesses in terms of adopting a gender-responsive approach to protecting (for States) and respecting (for businesses) women’s and girls’ rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment? Please provide specific examples of constitutional provisions, legislation, institutions, regulations, standards, jurisprudence, policies and programs that apply a gender-responsive approach to ensuring the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.*

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 gender equality and non-discrimination when preparing and implementing planning documents, gender mainstreaming must be taken into account at the stages of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, in order to prevent the creation of obstacles or limitations of opportunities that may cause undesirable consequences for women or men. 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.

Coordinators of horizontal principles are also appointed (sustainable development principle - Ministry of the Environment of the Republic of Lithuania, innovativeness (creativity) principle - Ministry of Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania, principle of equal opportunities for all - Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania), they systematically coordinate the inclusion of horizontal principles in national development programs, carry out monitoring progress indicators of the implementation of horizontal principles, provides expert assistance to other ministries, promotes the cooperation of institutions on issues of implementation of horizontal principles, in order to promote changes in behaviour and attitude in public sector institutions.

The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Republic of Lithuania and the Law on Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Lithuania provide that it is the duty of state and municipal institutions and bodies to ensure that equal rights of women and men are enshrined in all legal acts prepared and adopted by them; prepare and implement measures aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for women and men; to support the programs of public institutions, associations and charitable foundations, which help to realize equal opportunities for women and men, in accordance with the procedure established by law; not to violate the equal rights of women and men when providing administrative or public services.

Thus, all this creates the conditions to ensure the integration of the principle of gender equality in all policy areas, including the environment.

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.

Another legal act, which provisions are important when assessing the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is the Environmental Protection Law of the Republic of Lithuania. This legal act 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.

1. *If your State is one of the 156 UN Member States that recognizes the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment in law, has this right been recognized and/or interpreted in a way that clarifies the state’s obligations or businesses’ responsibilities with respect to the realization of rights with no discrimination based on sex and gender and other grounds*?

YES.

*4. What steps has your State, business, and/or organization taken to employ a gender-responsive, rights-based approach to addressing the impacts of the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises and to accelerate gender equality related to environmental decision-making processes, benefit-sharing processes, and outcomes? Please identify specific challenges that your Government, business, or organization has faced in these endeavours.*

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 include gender aspect and promotes equality between women and men and 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.

1. *Please identify specific ways in which the rights of particularly marginalized or vulnerable women and/or LGBTI persons are (or should be) recognized and protected to enable the realization of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment without discrimination based on sex or gender. "Marginalized women" include girls; women and girls in Indigenous local community, Afro-descendant and peasant communities, older women; differently abled women and girls, LGBTI women and girls, migrant, displaced, and refuge women and girls, unmarried, informally married and widowed women and women and girls living in protracted armed conflict. How can these populations be empowered to increase their impact as agents of positive environmental transformation?*

The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the Law on Equal Opportunities provide that it is the duty of state and municipal institutions and bodies to ensure that equal rights are enshrined in all legal acts prepared and adopted by them; prepare and implement measures aimed at ensuring equal opportunities; to support the programs of public institutions, associations and charitable foundations, which help to realize equal opportunities, in accordance with the procedure established by law; not to violate the equal rights when providing administrative or public services. This also applies to the realization of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment without discrimination based on sex or gender.

1. *What kinds of socioeconomic, cultural, legal, and/or institutional transformations would be required within your States’ national context to achieve gender parity that most directly impact environmental decision-making processes, benefit-sharing processes, and outcomes?*

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.

The biggest challenge is public involvement in the environmental law and policy making. Although the public consultations are available and should improve public participation and involvement in decision-making, the actual public involvement is rather low. There is no active dialogue with civil society on key environmental policy priorities, particularly at the local level. Often NGOs learn about regulatory initiatives belatedly, or may only be allowed to submit comments in writing, without discussion or only few comments are received during the consultations. Moreover, the environmental awareness of the population is below the EU average, partly due to the lack of a consistent approach to environmental education. Lithuania should consolidate public sources of environmental information and ensure regular reporting on the state of the environment. Municipalities should not only be more proactive in advancing the country’s agenda on climate change, circular economy and sustainable mobility but also they have to involve and educate the public on these issues, regardless of their age, gender, racial or ethnic origin.

1. *To what extent do the environmental ministries, nationally determined contributions, and national biodiversity strategies and action plans of your State include gender action plans, gender-responsive budgets or budgets specifically devoted to gender equality? At the global level, what changes to climate and biodiversity finance mechanisms are needed to ensure that these are gender-responsive and equitably inclusive of female beneficiaries?*

In 2020 Lithuania has approved the National progress plan (NPP) for 2021-2030, which is the main strategic planning document at the national level. This strategic document puts significant emphasis on equality, sustainable development and innovation as horizontal principles in the document. One of its three horizontal principles is “Equal opportunities for all” which will be measured through the gender equality index as well as other indexes. According to gender equality index Lithuania is in 23rd position in EU, our ambition is to become 15th by 2030. This horizontal principle guarantees that all NPP goals and targets will be implemented in accordance with different needs of men and women. Therefore, all central governmental institutions were obliged to consider the “Equal opportunities for all” principle when developing public policies and lower level strategic documents for specific areas. For example, this principle is mainstreamed into the Strategic Biodiversity document as well as to Strategic document on increasing the effectiveness of climate change policy. In practice it means that some measures that are planned in strategic documents will directly contribute to the implementation of this principle, with the aim of improving the position of vulnerable groups in society (part of the investments will be purposefully directed to persons experiencing social exclusion) or the measures and activities will not have a negative impact on this principle (for 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 characteristics, equal rights and opportunities to participate in the implementation of activities will be ensured).

1. *How can businesses best contribute to the realization of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, based on sex and gender? What policies or practices are already in place to ensure that business activities identify, assess, prevent, cease, mitigate, and effectively remedy adverse impacts to women’s and girls’ rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as articulated in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.*

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.

1. *Please share any good practices for: i) protecting women’s and girl’s rights to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment; ii) empowering women and girls to act as positive agents of environmental justice; and iii) encouraging men and boys to act as allies in these endeavours. In addition, please highlight the work of any women or girl environmental defenders. Good practices may occur at the international, regional, national, sub-national or local levels, and may include: the implementation of measures to ensure women’s participation in environmental decision-making processes; efforts to support women environmental defenders; measures to facilitate women’s access to climate or biodiversity finance; gender-responsive legislation, regulations, standards, jurisprudence, plans and policies; and initiatives to increase women’s access to and control over productive resources including land, forest resources, freshwater, credit, loans, and extension services. Examples that treat girls distinctly from adult women would be particularly appreciated.*

Partially covered in previous answers.

1. *What are the potential benefits of respecting, protecting and fulfilling women’s and girl’s rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment? Examples that treat girls distinctly from adult women would be particularly appreciated.*

We do believe, that ensuring an equal role for women and girls and fulfilling women‘s and girl‘s right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in sustainable growth are very important. It constitutes environmentally, socially and economically responsible behaviour of each State.  Therefore, a comprehensive legal framework has been introduced to this end, but a lot still needs to be done to fully implement it and to apply gender mainstreaming in policy making across different policy domains.

The most important benefit for adult women is to overcome already existing gender inequalities, to alleviate socioeconomic imbalances and to broaden the ecological mind-set. For girls – move to another level environmental culture by promoting eco-consciousness, supporting healthy and safe next generation.