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

**the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers**

**on legal empowerment**

**Examples of legal empowerment modalities and innovations at the national level in Lithuania**

**Digital technology in courts** – as an important mechanism of the legal system in Lithuania which contributes to the legal empowerment and ensures the possibility to promptly defend violated rights and freedoms while incurring less litigation costs. The use of digital tools in the justice system is widespread and thus greatly improves access to justice. Lithuania’s procedural rules allow the use of digital technology in courts in civil, commercial, administrative and criminal cases in a wide range of situations, both regarding the participation of parties using communication technology, and the admissibility of evidence. Lithuanian courts are well equipped with electronic communication tools.

In Lithuania, there is an option to submit procedural documents and follow the progress of the case on the E-Service portal of Lithuanian Courts. By using this portal, a party of the proceedings can acquaint with the trial and material, deliver the court procedural documents, deliver the documents confirming the payments.

The access to portal allows to:

1. listen to the audio records of the court hearings;
2. familiarize with the court processes;
3. form and deliver the procedural documents to the court;
4. fill in the documents according to the prepared forms;
5. receive notices about: the admission of the documents, the discovered errors, the hearings of the case;
6. pay for the services of the court and ect.

Thus, the E-Service portal of Lithuanian Courts improves access to justice as all documents can be submitted to the court promptly, there is no need to bring documents to the court physically, what is especially important when a case is of large volume or in situations when the party does not have the opportunity to physically come to the court. In addition, Lithuania’s procedural rules stipulate that when documents are submitted to the court only by means of electronic communication and when a person expresses that he or she wants to receive procedural documents only by means of electronic communication, 75 percent of the amount of the stamp duty payable for the relevant procedural document is paid. In addition, the same stamp duty relief is applied when the parties settled the dispute through mediation before applying to court. When using mediation, disputes are usually resolved more quickly than in court, the parties incur less costs of dispute resolution, and the probability of restoring not only legal, but also social peace between the parties, especially in the case of a specific or sensitive disputes increases.

It is also worth to mention that there is a possibility to organize remote court hearings in Lithuania, which allows a party to attend the court hearing from any corner of the world. Statistical data shows that the use of video and tele conferences for organizing distant court hearings in Lithuania is growing.

**State-guaranteed legal aid system** is an important mechanism of the legal system which contributes to the legal empowerment of the most vulnerable members of the society who, due to their social situation, are unable to defend their rights properly. It should be noted that certain state-guaranteed legal aid services (legal information, legal consultation) are granted free of charge to every resident, whereas other state-guaranteed legal aid services (preparation of legal documents and representation of defense) are granted free of charge for vulnerable persons, for example, victims of crimes. Seeking to ensure the best quality legal aid services, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania has put in place additional measures which, among other things, are related to the promotion of the specialization of lawyers providing state-guaranteed legal aid. The draft Law on State-Guaranteed Legal Aid of the Republic of Lithuania aims at strengthening of the cooperation between the Lithuanian Bar Association and the State Guaranteed Legal Aid Service while organizing trainings for lawyers and paying greater attention to the representation of clients in “sensitive” cases, for example, when representing minors, victims of human trafficking, domestic violence etc. Also, in order to promote the specialization of lawyers, the additional payment for the provision of state-guaranteed legal aid services to persons from vulnerable groups is under consideration. Also, to ensure sufficient legal empowerment of vulnerable groups, it is vitally important to enable members of these groups to identify violations of their rights and freedoms. Therefore, in order to strengthen public respect for human rights and the ability of vulnerable groups to identify discrimination and other human rights violations, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania is funding NGO projects, aiming to reduce hate speech on the basis of nationality or sexual orientation through legal education activities. The allocated amount – 70 000 Eur was shared between two highest rated projects, which are implemented by “Human Rights Monitoring Institute” and “Lithuanian Human Rights Centre”.

**Legal Aid Information System (TEISIS)** is used to organize state-guaranteed legal aid in Lithuania. TEISIS makes it easier and faster to obtain state-guaranteed legal aid. TEISIS provides a possibility to request legal aid online with just a few clicks without the need to submit large sets of paper documents as all necessary information from other information systems is received directly. A person requesting state-guaranteed legal aid may choose legal aid provider according to his availability, areas of expertise and spoken languages, make a reservation for an in-person legal consultation or choose to consult remotely. The latter possibility might be more attractive to persons in need of legal services in more sensitive situations, such as domestic violence or human trafficking cases. When state-guaranteed legal aid is granted the legal aid beneficiary can follow the course of legal aid provision (for example, see the requests or legal documents prepared by the appointed advocate). If a person is not satisfied with the legal aid services, TEISIS provides him a possibility to request for a change of legal aid provider. After the end of the case and legal aid provision, the legal aid beneficiary is asked to evaluate the legal aid he received. This possibility to receive legal aid quickly and in a simple manner using TEISIS ensures that minor legal issues are addressed in a timely manner and do not escalate into serious legal problems.