**Responses by the Republic of Lithuania to the study of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the solutions to promote digital education for young people and to ensure their protection from online threats**

**1) What are the main challenges that young people in Lithuania face in accessing digital education? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.**

The main challenges that young people in your country face in accessing digital education in Lithuanian are:

1. inclusive education;
2. adequate ICT tools in schools and teachers with the needed digital competence and skills to use them effectively in classrooms.

**2) What steps is the Government taking to ensure that digital education is accessible and promoted among young people? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes directed at ensuring young people’s universal access to digital education.**

There are several measures taken to ensure that young people can equal access to digital education:

1. Universal Design for Learning approach is considered as the core for the transition from special (segregated) to inclusive education. This is particularly relevant in Lithuania, in the context of the amendments to the Law on Education, which will come into force on 1 September 2024, and which will oblige all schools to accept children with disabilities and related individual educational needs (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020). The International Disability Alliance (International Disability Alliance, 2021) notes that accessibility and personalisation are essential for an inclusive education process. Universal design for learning is a good approach for this, as it creates the preconditions for an inherently flexible teaching/learning process. This not only creates the conditions for a more open and motivating learning process for all and sundry, but also for the effective provision of individual needs. More and more school communities and municipalities are engaging in the use of Universal Design for Learning approaches.

All learners in Lithuania have equal access to the education, including students from SEC and students with learning difficulties – all public and private schools are obligate to follow the national curriculum and ensure its quality. As the net enrolment Rate of Primary school age children in Lithuania is over 99.6%, and in lower education -over 97%, there is not specific measures to support disadvantaged learners to develop environmental resilience. All students are enrolled into schools and have access to the same education.

1. Bringing researchers closer to schools to work and co-create together with teachers the means and tools necessary to support disadvantaged children aiming at improvement of the school practices in reducing inequality.

To address this challenge a national research programme in the field of education science has been established and launched in 2023, to be implemented by the Research Council of Lithuania. The research programme includes internships, development of doctoral and post-doctoral positions, applied research in 7 priority themes. One of the priority themes for research is the development of an inclusive education system to ensure the best educational opportunities for all (special needs, foreigners, returnees, etc.). The special conditions of the projects include the preparation of secondary analyses and public policy briefs, as well as the development of recommendations to public authorities based on the research findings. The results of the research will need to be implemented in the target groups and the projects need to be linked to study programmes in the field of education.

1. Improvement of pedagogical staff digital competencies in national programmes and master's degrees studies

The improvement of pedagogical staff competencies in national qualification improvement programmes and master's programmes is financed by the measures of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RFF) Enhancement Plan. The duration of national programmes is up to 270 academic hours, equivalent to 10 study credits. The competences acquired on completion of national programmes are credited within the curricula. National programmes are implemented only in priority areas of skills development. The following priority areas have been approved for 2023-2025: digital competences; competences required for the implementation of the principle of inclusiveness; civic competences; educational practice and didactic competences and leadership skills for education and learning. By the II quarter of 2026, 7,120 pedagogical staff (23.75% from total pedagogical staff ) will have completed training.

In September 2023, master's degree programmes were launched to enable pedagogical staff (school principals, their deputies in charge of education and organisation of educational departments, teachers and student support specialists) to strengthen their competences. The master’s programmes are implemented by higher education institutions that have been assessed as meeting the criteria for expert evaluation.

1. Targeted scholarships and support for future teachers

Applicants for state-funded bachelor's degree courses in shortage areas and related pedagogical studies have the opportunity to receive a monthly scholarship. From the 2022-2023 academic year, students in the final year of Bachelor's degree courses in pedagogy without specialisation and related pedagogical studies, as well as professional pedagogical studies, who have signed a pre-employment contract with a municipality or school, will have the opportunity to receive a monthly grant. By signing the contract, they commit themselves to work in a school for at least 3 years within a period of 5 years and at least 0.7 FTE.

1. Digital education transformation project EdTech

The project was launched In 2022 with support from the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RFF). The project focuses on the creation of digital teaching tools, the improvement of digital skills and the digitisation of higher education modules.

A key aspect of the project is to strengthen the digital literacy of educational staff by providing opportunities for educators to obtain a Master's degree in Computer Science or to acquire additional (computer science) skills. The project also aims to improve the digital skills of teachers and university lecturers.

EdTech's digital education transformation project is aiming at: promoting and implementing of the latest educational technologies in the education sector; increasing the digital competencies of teachers and lecturers (2700 educators will enhance digital competence); development of digital content and solutions for teaching (40% of curriculum content will be supported with digital learning resources.)

**3) What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people can realize their human rights online in a safe, empowering, and inclusive way?**

For the quality assurance provisions for digital education in schools there are prepared in 2022 September Guidelines for schools: <https://data.kurklt.lt/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Skaitmeninio-svietimo-gaires-_-galutinis-2.pdf>

ON THE ADOPTION OF A PROCEDURE FOR THE CONTROL OF SENSITIVE INFORMATION FOR PUBLIC USE ON COMPUTER NETWORKS AND THE DISSEMINATION OF RESTRICTED PUBLIC INFORMATION

<https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.B4A3ED74063A/asr>

Whereas to protect human rights, digital technologies in courts play an important role in Lithuania’s legal system by improving the accessibility to the justice system. It contributes to legal empowerment and ensures the possibility of promptly defending violated rights and freedoms while incurring less litigation costs. 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 get acquainted with the trial and material, deliver the court procedural documents, and confirm the court fee payments. Access to the 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, and the hearings of the case;
6. pay for the services of the court and etc.

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, which is especially important when a case is of large volume or in situations when the party does not have the opportunity to come to the court physically. 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/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.

There is also 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 teleconferences for organizing distant court hearings in Lithuania is growing.

In order to ensure better quality representation before of children in justice system, amendments to the Law on the State-Guaranteed Legal Aid were adopted in 2023 and came into force on 1 January 2024. The aim of these amendments are:

1. to promote the specialization of lawyers by offering special comprehensive training for lawyers providing state-guaranteed legal aid in sensitive cases (e.g., related to minors). The training will start first quarter of 2024;
2. to provide a more active role for the Lithuanian Bar Association, which will prepare practical recommendations for lawyers regarding the effective provision of legal aid in specific cases;
3. to improve the supervision of provided services.

 **5) What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people are protected from online threats? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes.**

The most relevant legal act regulating the protection of minors in this area is the Law on the Protection of Minors against Negative Effects of Public Information, which sets out the general criteria for public information negatively affecting minors. Article 4 of this law defines the concept of information that negatively affects minors: public information that may be harmful to the mental or physical health, physical, mental, spiritual, or moral development of minors. In addition, Article 7(4) of this law establishes the imperative for internet service providers to ensure the installation and operation of filtering measures for harmful internet content. However, ensuring a safe online space is complicated by the lack of a legal definition of „online threats to minors“.

As for the programmes, In the 2023 calendar of general prevention activities that must be implemented by officers of the Lithuanian police community, approved by the 17 February 2023 order No. 5-V-152 of the Lithuanian Commissioner General of Police, community officials are scheduled to organize lectures for minors titled "Internet culture. Prevention of bullying in the electronic space". 889 such lectures were given in 2023. The mentioned calendar also includes another measure - a lecture for minors entitled "Prevention of Hate Crimes", which talks about what hate crimes are, what the responsibility is, and also emphasizes that hate crimes committed online have the same consequences as in real life. 152 such lectures were given in 2023.

For the past 10 years Lithuania has implemented EK Safer Internet programme that was started in Lithuania in 2005. Since July 2012 Safer Internet consortium in Lithuania increased its activities and there are four officially involved partners: National Agency for Education, Communications Regulatory Authority of the Republic of Lithuania (RRT); “Vaikų linija” (Childline); association “Langas į ateitį” (LIA).

The overall objective is to deploy services that help make the Internet a trusted environment for children through actions that empower and protect them online. The specific objective is to set up and expand national platform to run a range of Safer Internet services providing:

1. An awareness Centre for informing children, their parents and teachers about better and safer use of the Internet, building on enhanced digital resource centres (repositories), from which specific awareness toolkits and services will be adapted and deployed, in cooperation with third parties (schools, industry). Agency is responsible for implementing an awareness raising events, create relevant tools, develop national SIC platform, using current www.draugiskasinternetas.lt website, which is the main awareness raising instrument intended for Lithuanian society and educational community Agency. Together with consortium partners Agency organize Safer Internet Day events, traditional annual conferences and seminars for target groups, maintain a Youth Panel where children and young people can express their views and exchange knowledge and experiences. Agency prepares Certification program based on the best European practice for Safer Internet Ambassadors in Lithuania. LIA implements safer internet training and awareness raising activities, such as development and promotion of awareness raising materials (app “Are you safe on the Internet?” of the European eSafety label program), training activities (online trainings to 1000 educators and school librarians, series of webinars for parents broadcasted to public libraries).
2. Online helpline services for reporting and dealing with harmful contact (grooming), conduct (cyberbullying) and content. Child line as helpline is providing psychological and emotional support for youth and children. It is going to raise public awareness about provided help on websites, social networks, and interviews in media.
3. Various promotional materials, including video about the helpline, will be produced and disseminated in Lithuanian schools and on websites (www.draugiskasinternetas.lt, [www.vaikulinija.lt](http://www.vaikulinija.lt)).
4. Child Line is the service providing free and anonymous help to the children and teenagers by phone and on-line. Children and teenagers may contact the service in case of various issues they have encountered, such as disagreement with friends, parents or teachers; conflicts; difficulties in learning; being abused or bullied; the feeling of being lonely or unloved, or any other difficulties or troubles calling for advice. In July 2011 the Child Line launched consultation services for children and teenagers on the safety of electronic environment.
5. A hotline for receiving and managing reports and data on online illegal child sexual abuse. RRT is the consortium partner in charge of operations of the hotline. Whilst prolonging activities started in recent projects the hotline is improving following activities: clear description of NTD procedure, closer cooperation with the ISPs with regard to the NTD procedure, monitoring period of time during which CSA images are taken down, etc. As a member of INHOPE the hotline of RRT actively participate in the activities of INHOPE.

Nationally, the SIC have a mature and well-established, multi-stakeholder network, involving the public sector, private sector and civil society, therefore with the capacity to deploy services that help make the Internet a trusted environment for children (and citizens at large) through actions that empower and protect them online. The work of the SIC Lithuania is aligned with the Children rights protection national policies contributing to the fulfilment of children protection from negative impact of public information: Information Society Development 2014-2020 Programme “Digital Agenda of the Republic of Lithuania” <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/a66c0760b04011e3bf53dc70cf7669d9/asr>,
National Digital Coalition for the Promotion of Digital Skills for Jobs in Lithuania (<http://www.skaitmeninekoalicija.lt/en/about.html>). The work of Child Line is related to the National Programme for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Assistance for Children for 2011–2015 <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/0cbb5ce0907011e48028e9b85331c55d?positionInSearchResults=0&searchModelUUID=284e4c90-a46a-4da6-8f9e-b8f7a0b5a296>.