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VIEŠOJO SAUGUMO AKADEMIJA



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Mokslinis žurnalas

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NON-TRIAL MEDIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE DISPUTES IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract. *The development of modern society and the continuous expansion of legal relations have contributed to a gradual increase in the number and complexity of legal disputes. At the same time, the growing workload of courts and the prolonged duration of judicial proceedings have reinforced the significance of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Among the various forms of alternative dispute resolution, legal scholarship has recently devoted particular attention to the application of mediation in disputes between public administration authorities and private individuals.*

The concept of peaceful dispute resolution, based on dialogue and cooperation rather than adversarial confrontation, is primarily implemented through mediation procedures. Compared to judicial proceedings, mediation offers several advantages, including a more expeditious resolution of disputes, reduced financial costs, and greater procedural autonomy for the parties involved.

In Lithuania, the system of administrative justice incorporates both judicial and quasi-judicial models of administrative dispute resolution, including proceedings before the Regional Administrative Court and the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, as well as pre-trial dispute resolution institutions. The establishment of a mandatory pre-trial dispute-resolution mechanism in Lithuanian administrative law largely aligns with European standards for accessible and efficient administrative justice.

Under the current legal framework, certain administrative disputes are subject to mandatory examination by the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, which operates as a quasi-judicial body. It should be noted that the use of mediation within the Commission's activities has been gradually increasing. Although both Lithuanian and foreign scholars have analyzed mediation as a method of pre-trial administrative dispute resolution, insufficient attention has been paid to the practical functioning of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, the challenges arising in its operations, and the methods used in its dispute-resolution practice.

Accordingly, this article examines the general processes of mediation in administrative law, with particular emphasis on the legal regulation and operational aspects of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission.

Keywords: *non-trial mediation, administrative disputes, Lithuania, Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission.*

Introduction

Mediation is a dispute-resolution process in which an impartial third party, the mediator, assists the parties in reaching a mutually acceptable, peaceful agreement. As an alternative dispute resolution mechanism, mediation contributes to the development of a culture of consensual and non-adversarial dispute settlement within society. By enabling disputes to be resolved outside formal judicial proceedings, mediation reduces the workload of courts. It enhances the accessibility of judicial institutions for disputes that cannot be resolved amicably.

The advantages of mediation and conciliation for individuals, businesses, and public administration institutions are now widely recognized at both national and international levels.

These mechanisms are valued for their flexibility, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and their capacity to preserve cooperative relationships between the parties involved.

At the European level, the Working Group on Mediation of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ-GT-MED) has been actively contributing to the development of mediation practices since 2006. During its initial mandate, the Working Group conducted a comprehensive assessment of the implementation and impact of the Committee of Ministers' recommendations concerning family mediation, mediation in criminal matters, alternatives to litigation between administrative authorities and private parties, and mediation in civil disputes. In addition, the CEPEJ-GT-MED developed guidelines and practical measures to ensure the effective implementation of these recommendations within the member states of the Council of Europe.

In 2001, the Council of Europe issued recommendations Rec(2001)9 (Council of Europe, 2001) on alternative dispute resolution between public authorities and private parties. Recommendation Rec(2001)9 (Council of Europe, 2001) was intended to develop alternative dispute resolution procedures between administrative authorities and private parties. The practice of applying these recommendations has been continuously examined, and the recommendations have been improved. CEPEJ-GT-QUAL therefore decided to conduct a comparative study of the various systems of administrative mediation in Europe (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2022a). These documents state that Lithuania belongs to a group of countries where administrative mediation is based on a clear legal basis. After reviewing the study's results, the CEPEJ-GT-QUAL prepared a guide for administrative mediation to promote and facilitate its use in member States (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2022b).

In 2008, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the Law on Mediation of the Republic of Lithuania, thereby establishing the legal framework for mediation in private disputes. Nevertheless, for a considerable period, the possibility of applying mediation to administrative disputes remained controversial. Legal practitioners, scholars, and public administration representatives frequently expressed skepticism regarding the compatibility of mediation with the nature and principles of administrative law.

A significant development occurred in 2018, when amendments to the Law on Administrative Proceedings of the Republic of Lithuania were adopted, introducing the legal basis and conditions for the application of judicial mediation in administrative proceedings. These amendments marked an important step toward broader integration of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms into Lithuania's system of administrative justice.

The possibilities of applying mediation in the administrative process have been widely studied by foreign scientists, such as Vučetić (2016), Yaroshenko et al. (2021), Bankova and Angelova (2021), Boyron (2022), Karpiuk (2023), Luca De Lucia (2025), Chmielarz et al. (2025), and Liu, Chen and Lin (2025).

The application of mediation possibilities in the administrative process has been studied by such Lithuanian scientists as Kavalnė and Saudargaitė (2011); Trumpulis (2012); Paužaitė-Kulvinskienė (2013); Kaminskienė et al. (2013); Banys (2014); Meškys and Gerdvila (2015); Meskys and Mazvydas (2015); Šilvaitė (2018); Tvaronavičienė and Kaminskienė (2019); Tvaronavičienė and Milius (2020); Bilevičiūtė and Milius (Білевичуте & Мілюс, 2020); Tvaronavičienė and Mulevičienė (2021); Mulevičienė and Tvaronavičienė (2022).

Although both Lithuanian and foreign scholars have examined mediation in administrative proceedings, the practical implementation of non-trial mediation within the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission has received limited scholarly attention. In particular, there is a lack of research analyzing the functioning of this recently introduced

mechanism, its practical application, and the challenges arising from its use in administrative dispute resolution.

The scientific novelty of this article lies in its comprehensive analysis of the legal framework and practical application of non-trial mediation in the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission. The study contributes new insights by evaluating recent mediation practice and identifying the main challenges and development prospects of this dispute-resolution mechanism within the Lithuanian administrative justice system.

The article aims to examine the legal and practical aspects of judicial mediation in resolving administrative disputes, and to present and analyze the institution of non-judicial mediation in the context of Lithuanian administrative law theory and practice. The article also seeks to define and evaluate the objectives of the newly introduced legal regulation governing non-judicial mediation and to assess its potential as an alternative mechanism for the peaceful resolution of disputes within the Lithuanian administrative law system.

The research is based on the analysis of the works of Lithuanian and foreign scholars, applying comparative, systematic, and analytical methods. The comparative method was employed to identify similarities and differences between Lithuanian and European approaches to administrative mediation. The systematic legal analysis was used to evaluate the coherence of the legal framework governing non-trial mediation and administrative dispute resolution. The analytical-critical method was applied to assess scholarly opinions, legal regulation, and the practical operation of mediation before the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission. Furthermore, statistical data on mediation cases for the period 2021–2025 were analyzed to identify trends, effectiveness indicators, and challenges in the practical implementation of non-trial mediation in Lithuania. Also, the AI-powered software Grammarly was used to assist with grammar correction and stylistic editing in the paper's text.

Theoretical premises for the use of mediation in resolving administrative disputes

Mediation as an alternative dispute resolution method is a relatively new phenomenon in the Lithuanian legal system. In Lithuanian legal regulation, mediation is defined as a procedure for resolving civil or administrative disputes in which one or more mediators assist the parties in reaching a peaceful settlement. Except judicial mediation conducted by judges and non-judicial mediation carried out by the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission and its territorial divisions, mediation is considered a professional activity regulated by law (Law on the Mediation of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021). Mediation was adopted quite naturally in civil law. For example, Article 6.983 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania establishes that by means of a settlement agreement, the parties resolve an existing legal dispute through mutual concessions, prevent a future legal dispute, resolve the issue of enforcement of a court decision or other contentious issues (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania, 2000).

Paužaitė-Kulvinskienė (2013) argues that the necessity of a settlement agreement in the Lithuanian administrative process model is justified by the social needs of participants in public administration relations and the administrative courts' positive attitude towards this new institution. The establishment of the institute of settlement agreements should be viewed within the broader context of the doctrine of administrative agreements in public law and the dual nature of settlement agreements. The incorporation of settlement agreements into administrative proceedings creates the necessary preconditions for the development and application of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation and conciliation, within the administrative process. Trumpulis (2012) states that in resolving disputes and

conflicts within the sphere of administrative law, it is important to adopt dispute-resolution methods that eliminate tensions between the parties, reconcile differing interests, and facilitate outcomes acceptable to all participants, thereby contributing to social harmony and legal stability. Mediation is identified as one of the key methods capable of achieving these objectives. Banys (2014) states that classical mediation is focused, first and foremost, on the resolution of civil disputes; however, the universality inherent in this alternative to judicial proceedings implies broad possibilities for its application, *inter alia*, in administrative proceedings. The concept of non-trial mediation in administrative proceedings is a synthesis of the principles of classical mediation and those of administrative proceedings. This mediation is characterized by both general and special features. The general features of non-trial mediation in administrative proceedings could include those characteristic of classical mediation in civil dispute resolution.

Meškys and Gerdvila (2015) believe that some theorists note that the traditional model of administrative dispute resolution does not cope with the changed rhythm of life and social changes. During the administrative process, a dispute between a public administration entity and a private individual is resolved by conducting an internal review of the decision's legality. Most often, the conflict that has arisen cannot be resolved, which is why the dispute is further examined in pre-trial administrative dispute resolution institutions or specialized courts. Dispute resolution in these institutions and courts is often uneconomical, formal, and usually ensures only the restoration of legal peace. These reasons imply the need to adopt new measures to replace the traditional procedure for examining administrative disputes. One way to solve this problem could be mediation, which has the essential features and advantages of flexibility, cost-effectiveness, confidentiality, and the ability to restore or preserve legal and social peace. Šilvaitė (2018) states that alternative methods of resolving administrative disputes, such as the institute of amicable agreements, are gradually being established in the Lithuanian administrative process. The possibility for an administrative court to approve an amicable agreement cannot be equated with judicial mediation of administrative disputes, since the judge (unlike a mediator) is not authorized to participate in negotiations or otherwise to ensure the parties' cooperation. However, taking into account the fact that the conclusion of court proceedings by an amicable agreement is assessed as the use of an alternative method of dispute resolution, and the essence of an amicable agreement is described as finding a mutual compromise, it can be stated that by establishing the institute of amicable agreements in the law of administrative cases, the foundations for judicial mediation in administrative proceedings were simultaneously created. Bankova and Angelova (2021) claim that the advantages of Alternative Dispute Resolution through mediation are associated with minimal formality, privacy, discretion, confidentiality and friendliness, control over process and resolution by the parties in the dispute, use of experts, possibility to settle the dispute on the principle of fairness and based on the interests of parties. Mediation skills are very useful in the activities of administrative officials of various ranks. When properly applied, they can, through transformative mediation methods, resolve deep, hidden contradictions, the external manifestations of which differ from the essence of the real problems that hinder the work of the administrative structure.

Yaroshenko et al. (2021) examine the specifics of the application of the mediation procedure in administrative cases and argue that addressing government institutions regarding any legal conflict leads to an overload of courts and administrative bodies. The situation can be improved by using alternative legal dispute resolution methods, such as mediation. Chmielarz et al. (2025) argue that a successfully developed legal mediation system is an additional effective means of legal redress, contributing to the establishment of the rule of law. However,

the traditional model of alternative dispute resolution, developed for civil and commercial disputes, cannot be simply transferred to administrative or criminal justice. Systematic improvement is required: amendments to procedural legislation, the adoption of additional regulations, the establishment of organizational and financial prerequisites, and the implementation of information and educational initiatives. Luca De Lucia (2025) argues that the use of mediation for administrative dispute resolution poses certain problems. EU Member State laws often impose significant restrictions on public authorities' ability to reach agreements with private parties. The involvement of third parties is a complication. Most importantly, public administrations (and their managers) may be reluctant to take responsibility for negotiations and reaching an agreement when there is a possibility of resolving the dispute by a binding court decision. For mediation to be effective, it is not enough for this instrument to be established by law. A mandatory attempt at reconciliation could be provided for before the start of legal proceedings. Karpiuk (2023) claims that the aim of mediation is to resolve the dispute without requiring the administrative institution to use coercive measures and to apply peaceful solutions. Mediation is a new method of dispute resolution that falls under the category of alternative dispute resolution. It is fully justified by social rationality. It corresponds to the values that should underlie citizens' relations with public authorities in a democratic state governed by the rule of law. Mediation, as a non-confrontational way of resolving a dispute with the participation of an impartial and neutral entity, i.e., a mediator, establishes legal relations not only with the parties to the proceedings but also with the mediator.

Vučetić (2016) states that the overall goal of mediation is to achieve a future resolution of the dispute, allowing the parties to move forward and continue to work together. Mediation is a form of negotiation conducted by a neutral third party, called a mediator or an expert in a specific field. Unlike an arbitrator, a mediator does not have the authority to impose a decision or other measures on the parties to the dispute. The mediator uses various methods to initiate or improve the dialogue between the parties to the dispute and help them reach an agreement. As a neutral third party, the mediator must be independent and impartial. Another important feature of the mediation process is the confidentiality and secrecy of information (both before and after the mediation). Thus, the three essential elements of mediation are voluntariness, impartiality and confidentiality. Unlike a court proceeding, the essence of an administrative procedure is not to resolve a dispute between the parties, but to recognize rights or establish obligations for them, while protecting the public interest. Furthermore, a fundamental and highly controversial issue in administrative law is whether mediation is possible between private and public interests in administrative cases.

Tvaronavičienė and Kaminskienė (2019) point out that, as early as 2001, the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Rec(2001)9 (Council of Europe, 2001) called for the establishment and implementation of alternative administrative dispute resolution procedures. Mediation was mentioned as one of the most effective alternative dispute resolution procedures, helping reduce the number of disputes and the court workload, increasing access to justice, and enhancing parties' satisfaction with the dispute resolution process. Trial mediation was introduced in Lithuania in 2005, when the Council of Judges initiated a pilot project. The successful application of trial mediation in civil disputes has created the prerequisites for applying an analogous alternative dispute resolution method in administrative law. In Lithuanian administrative law, the prerequisites for trial mediation appeared only in 2013, when Article 51 of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Administrative Proceedings (2016) came into force, which established the possibility for the parties to the case to conclude the case by a settlement agreement at any stage of the process. In 2019, the provisions of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Administrative Proceedings,

which allow the use of trial mediation in administrative proceedings, came into force. However, the application of an alternative dispute resolution method focused on the peaceful resolution of administrative disputes in administrative law has sparked considerable debate among both scholars and practitioners (Tvaronavičienė & Kaminskienė, 2019). Bilevičiūtė and Milius (Білевичуте & Мілюс, 2020) claim that their article is the first scientific study in the cycle of extrajudicial mediation in the administrative process of Lithuania. The article describes the envisaged new legal regulation of non-judicial mediation in the Lithuanian administrative law process, analyzing the works of Lithuanian scholars in this field and new draft legal acts.

Tvaronavičienė and Milius (Tvaronavičienė & Milius, 2020) argue that the need to establish the institute of amicable agreements in the law of administrative cases arose from practice. Even before the changes in legal regulation under analysis, administrative courts approved amicable agreements by analogy with civil proceedings. Tvaronavičienė and Mulevičienė (2021) examined the mediation of administrative disputes in the context of the constitutional principle of responsible governance. They argue that mediation in administrative disputes has recently attracted particular interest. In 2021, with the entry into force of the new version of the Law on Mediation of the Republic of Lithuania (2021), the so-called quasi-trial mediation of administrative disputes was established in Lithuanian administrative law for the first time. However, under current regulations, only a portion of administrative disputes can be resolved through quasi-trial procedures. The suitability of mediation and the limits of its application in resolving administrative disputes raise several debatable issues. Administrative disputes are fundamentally different from civil ones because the relations between the parties are regulated by public law. Although maintaining the coherence of the principles of mediation and public administration is difficult, the Lithuanian legislator has preserved the identity of the mediation process. When establishing the legal regulation of its application in the administrative process, the main principles of this method were maintained, i.e., voluntariness, confidentiality, and the mediator's impartiality. Since 2021, Lithuania has created legal prerequisites for the application of extrajudicial mediation in administrative disputes. An original model has been applied in Lithuania, where extrajudicial mediation of administrative disputes is used when considering a complaint before the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission or its territorial bodies. Extrajudicial mediation is usually understood as the conciliatory processes initiated by the parties to the dispute before applying to a court or other similar institution competent to consider the dispute, which we often call quasi-trial. It can be argued that the Lithuanian model of extrajudicial mediation in administrative disputes is better described as a quasi-trial mediation model, because to initiate a mediation process in an administrative dispute, it must be filed with the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission. The possibility of applying administrative dispute mediation not only does not contradict the constitutional principle of responsible governance, which also includes the principle of good administration, but, as the public administration system and society modernize, it should become an integral part of it (Tvaronavičienė & Mulevičienė, 2021).

Boyron (2022) states that the introduction of administrative mediation triggered the rise of a separate system of administrative justice (with separate personnel, culture, ideology, pathways in and out of court, dispute practices and outcomes). Therefore, the practice of administrative mediation is emerging slowly, as it requires complex training for competent mediators and agreements among courts, mediation service providers, and public institutions. Mulevičienė and Tvaronavičienė (2022) analyze the possibilities of applying mediation in Lithuania not only as an intervention method in resolving administrative disputes that have already arisen, but also as a preventive measure that reduces the possibility of such disputes arising. In Lithuania, models of trial and quasi-trial mediation of administrative disputes are

already applied in administrative justice. However, there are many doubts about whether the wider application of mediation would violate the basic principles of public law and the public interest. The authors believe that the inclusion of mediation and mediation techniques in the activities of public administration institutions, especially at the early stage of a dispute, would improve the legal culture of society and public administration and could serve as an example of legal practice responding to the needs of the modern world.

Concept of Mediation

Mediation is one of the specific methods of conflict management and resolution, facilitated by a mediator who conducts negotiations between the parties and creates conditions for alternative dispute resolution. It is a procedure in which a third, neutral person helps the parties resolve their dispute. Mediation emerged as an alternative to the legal process and allows the parties to a dispute to achieve greater speed, cost savings, and efficiency in finding a solution than traditional litigation (Bankova & Angelova, 2021). The introduction of mediation in administrative litigation has indeed brought a new perspective to dispute resolution for all parties, including both individuals and agencies. The specific mediation processes and outcomes vary depending on case circumstances and agency policies, resulting in differing degrees of flexibility that cannot be uniformly prescribed (Liu, Chen and Lin, 2025).

The Law on the Mediation of the Republic of Lithuania (2021) provides a definition of mediation. Mediation is a procedure for resolving civil or administrative disputes, during which one or more mediators assist the parties to resolve the dispute peacefully. The law distinguishes: *extrajudicial mediation* is a procedure for resolving civil or administrative disputes, during which one or more mediators assist the parties to a dispute that is not resolved in court to resolve this dispute peacefully; *mandatory mediation* is mediation, which in cases established by law must be used before applying to court for the resolution of a civil dispute; and *trial mediation* is a procedure for resolving civil or administrative disputes, during which one or more mediators assist the parties to the dispute to resolve this dispute peacefully in a case pending in court’.

European Parliament Mediation Directive (European Parliament Directive 2008/52/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2008) establishes that ‘Mediation’ means a structured process, however named or referred to, whereby two or more parties to a dispute attempt by themselves, on a voluntary basis, to reach an agreement on the settlement of their dispute with the assistance of a mediator. This process may be initiated by the parties, suggested or ordered by a court, or prescribed by the law of a Member State.

The 2022 CEPEI documents (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2022a; European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2022b) also provide definitions of mediation. “Mediation is a structured and confidential process in which an impartial third person assists the parties by facilitating the communication between them for the purpose of resolving the issues in dispute. Mediation may concern an administrative dispute, or a dispute of an administrative nature between administrative authorities and private persons or public officials, the settlement of which is, in principle but not necessarily, the responsibility of the judge competent to settle administrative disputes. Administrative mediation can take three forms: institutional mediation, conventional mediation and jurisdictional or para-jurisdictional mediation. *Institutional mediation* is a process conducted by an institutional mediator, usually from the administration or with *ombudsman status*. It allows the resolution of a very wide range of disputes, not limited to administrative disputes in the strict sense of the term (those whose resolution is the responsibility of a court). *Conventional mediation* occurs when the parties agree to request a third-party mediator to help them resolve their dispute. *Jurisdictional* or para-

jurisdictional mediation occurs within the context of a lawsuit to resolve an administrative dispute. In such cases, the court has already been seized, but the parties decide, either by themselves or at the invitation of the judge, to attempt mediation” (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2022a). *Mediation* is a flexible process that involves a third party to reach a resolution to a dispute through a solution both parties agree to. In the Lithuanian legal system, the concepts of mediation and conciliation are not strictly separated (Kavalnė & Saudargaitė, 2011; Paužaitė-Kulvinskienė, 2013; Šilvaitė, 2018), but the CEPEJ proposes distinguishing between them. It is stated that “*conciliation*: a non-judicial procedure involving a third party with a view to reaching a solution acceptable to the parties; *mediation*: a non-judicial procedure involving a third party who proposes a solution to the dispute, in the form of a non-binding opinion or recommendation” (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2022b).

In 2018, the Lithuanian Council of Judges approved the Judicial Mediation Rules (Teisėjų taryba, 2018). The rules state that *judicial mediation* is carried out in accordance with the following principles:

The principle of voluntariness of the parties to the dispute – the judicial mediation process is possible only if both parties to the dispute agree to participate. No party to the dispute may be subjected to unlawful influence (coercion, psychological pressure, etc.) to induce it to choose the judicial mediation process or to participate in it.

The principle of confidentiality – both the parties to the dispute and other persons participating in the judicial mediation process, as well as the judicial mediator, undertake not to distribute, disclose or otherwise make public or otherwise use the information provided, collected or learned in the judicial mediation process.

The principle of mutual respect, tolerance, and forbearance – the judicial mediation process is based on mutual respect among the persons participating in it, and on refraining from actions and words that insult or humiliate another person.

The principle of impartiality and neutrality of the mediator – the mediator must act impartially towards the parties to the dispute.

The principle of cooperation – the parties to the dispute must cooperate with each other and with the court mediator during the judicial mediation.

The principle of qualified mediator activity means that mediators must be properly prepared and competent, act effectively, and comply with the performance standards applicable to mediators, as provided for in the Law on Mediation and other legal acts.

The principle of fairness – both the parties to the dispute and the mediator must act in such a way that judicial mediation is conducted honestly, transparently, and without deception.

Tvaronavičienė and Mulevičienė (2021) indicated that the principles of non-trial mediation for resolving administrative disputes are analogous in Lithuanian law.

Mediation is a voluntary dispute-resolution process in which an impartial third party, a mediator, assists disputing parties in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement. Mediator – a third impartial natural person who is entered in the list of mediators of the Republic of Lithuania and assists the parties to a civil or administrative dispute to resolve the dispute peacefully (Law on the Mediation of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021). The mediator seeks to help people negotiate more effectively than they would on their own. It is necessary to note that the joint, voluntary reaching of a decision by the parties with the help of the mediator has no legal force; it is based on moral and ethical principles and norms (Bankova & Angelova, 2021). The role of the mediator in the mediation process must be emphasized: “Whatever the form of mediation, the mediator is always an independent third person in relation to the parties. They must be impartial. They must have both legal and technical expertise to resolve the conflict. They must

conduct the procedure within a limited timeframe and respect the principle of confidentiality”. By focusing on collaboration, mediation helps preserve personal or business relationships, which can be particularly important in disputes involving ongoing interactions. They focus on dialogue and mutually acceptable solutions. The process relies on the goodwill of the parties, and once it has begun, their freedom to leave it at any time must be protected (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2022b).

Bankova and Angelova (2021) identify the main advantages of mediation that distinguish it from conflict resolution through judicial means:

- perception of conflict as an integral part of human and societal nature;
- use of dialogue as a constructive response to aggression, avoidance and subordination;
- cooperation – achieving common interests does not mean that each participant cannot achieve their own specific interests;
- development of self-regulation and self-control skills, helping parties to make independent decisions;
- democratic and equal participation, responsibility for conflict resolution lies with all parties;
- mutual understanding and empathy;
- active participation of the parties in the conflict.

The nature of administrative disputes

Administrative disputes or disputes of an administrative nature are understood to be disputes between administrative authorities and private persons, the settlement of which is the responsibility of the judge. It is hereby clarified that a broad definition of mediation based on three criteria: there is a dispute between the administration and a private person (the parties); intervention of a third party, i.e. a person independent of the parties, who will help them to resolve their dispute; the resolution of the dispute results from an agreement between the parties (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2022b).

Administrative dispute – a conflict between a person and a public administration entity or a conflict between public administration entities that are not subordinate to each other (Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Administrative Proceedings, 2016). Mulevičienė and Tvaronavičienė (2022) argue that in the field of public administration, several situations of potential dispute are distinguished depending on who initiates them. Firstly, these are situations in which a party that is not a public administration entity addresses them to achieve certain goals. Secondly, when a public administration entity, in the course of performing its functions, identifies tension between itself and a non-public administration entity. Administrative disputes refer to legal conflicts that arise between individuals (or organizations) and government authorities.

Administrative disputes refer to legal conflicts that arise between individuals (or organizations) and government authorities. Here are some key features:

Legal Basis. These disputes are grounded in administrative law, which outlines the actions government agencies must take and the rights of citizens.

Procedure. The process typically begins with the submission of a complaint to the relevant administrative body. If this does not resolve the issue, it can escalate to court.

Specialized Courts. In some countries, including Lithuania, specialized administrative courts handle these disputes, ensuring that decisions are made in accordance with administrative law.

Subject Matter. Disputes can cover a range of areas, including taxation, social security, licensing, land use, and more.

Article 14 of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Public Administration (2020) establishes that a person has the right to appeal an administrative decision made by a public administration entity or another response of a public administration entity to a person's request, complaint, or action (inaction), as well as a delay by a public administration entity in performing actions within its competence.

According to Article 51 of the Lithuanian Law on Administrative Procedure (2016), all administrative disputes can be mediated, with some exceptions: a peace agreement cannot be concluded in cases concerning the legality of normative administrative acts, appeals concerning violations of electoral laws and the Law on Referendum, in cases concerning requests of the municipal council to submit a conclusion if a member of the municipal council or the mayor has broken the oath and/or has not exercised the powers established by the law. Finally, it should be emphasized that mediation in Lithuania, whether judicial or extrajudicial, may be conducted by the judge himself, by a member of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, or by a mediator registered on the list of mediators. After the enactment of this legal norm, the parties to the dispute may resolve their dispute themselves, i.e., by reaching an agreement amicably and submitting the settlement agreement to the administrative court for approval. It should be noted that the settlement agreement in the administrative process does not apply to all disputes. The Law on Administrative Procedure establishes that a settlement agreement cannot be concluded in cases regarding the legality of regulatory administrative acts, in cases based on complaints regarding violations of electoral laws and the Law on Referendum, in cases regarding requests by the municipal council to submit a conclusion on whether a member of the municipal council, a member of the municipal council – mayor, for whom the procedure for loss of powers has been initiated, has broken the oath and (or) failed to exercise the powers established by law (Tvaronavičienė & Milius, 2020).

The term “administrative dispute” is used in the Law on the Mediation of the Republic of Lithuania. (2021) means a dispute examined by an administrative court in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Administrative Proceedings of the Republic of Lithuania, or a dispute examined by the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission in accordance with the procedure established by the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Pre-trial Examination of Administrative Disputes.

Lithuanian administrative dispute system

The CEPEJ study (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2022b) indicates that administrative mediation in Lithuania is grounded in a clear legal framework. “In Lithuania, two types of mediation coexist: one is jurisdictional, and the other is rather extra-jurisdictional (institutional). The first mediation measure in the Lithuanian legal system is the attempt to resolve administrative disputes amicably by concluding a contract. Indeed, “contract” is understood to mean the conclusion of a “peace agreement” - either during the proceedings or during the preliminary phase of the proceedings - between the administration and the private person concerned. It should be stressed that the “peace agreement” has the same legal value as a judgment, since it must be validated by the competent administrative court. The second possible mediation measure is conducted, not under the aegis of the court, but before the court is seized, by the members of two public bodies: the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission and the Tax Disputes Commission” (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2022b).

The Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Administrative Proceedings (2016) establishes the procedure for examining administrative cases involving disputes arising from administrative legal relations. The Lithuanian administrative dispute system has a two-level model:

1) a pre-trial quasi-judicial institution (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission) (see: Law on the Procedure for the Pre-trial Examination of Administrative Disputes of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020),

2) judicial review by administrative courts (the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania and the Regional Administrative Court) (see: Law on Courts of the Republic of Lithuania, 2002).

Table 1. A Comparison of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission and Administrative Courts

Source: Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Administrative Proceedings, Law on the Procedure for the Pre-trial Examination of Administrative Disputes of the Republic of Lithuania, Law on the Mediation of the Republic of Lithuania

Aspect	Administrative Disputes Commission	Administrative Courts
Nature	Quasi-judicial body	Judicial institution
Role	Pre-trial review of administrative acts	Judicial review and final adjudication
Purpose	Fast, simplified dispute resolution	Protection of legality and rights through
Procedure	Less formal, administrative procedure	Formal court procedure governed by the Law on Administrative Proceedings

In the Lithuanian legal system, the protection of individuals' subjective rights is ensured not only in court but also through extrajudicial procedures for resolving administrative disputes. The Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (LADC) was established as an institution for the preliminary consideration of disputes outside the court procedure. However, the model of extrajudicial consideration of disputes applied by the LADC should more accurately be called a quasi-trial model rather than an extrajudicial one (Bilevičiūtė & Pranevičienė, 2020; Tvaronavičienė & Milius, 2020). LADC is a quasi-judicial pre-trial institution that resolves disputes between individuals (or legal entities) and public administration bodies. It was established in 1999 to provide a faster, less formal mechanism for administrative dispute resolution, as a mandatory or optional preliminary stage before judicial review, depending on the type of dispute. The Lithuanian Administrative Courts were established in 1999 to ensure judicial control over administrative institutions. The administrative court system consists of the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania and the Regional Administrative Court of Lithuania. Administrative Courts are specialized judicial bodies within the court system that review disputes in the field of public administration. The Commission is intended to reduce court workload and promote efficient dispute resolution, while courts guarantee independent judicial control over public administration.

LADC examines complaints regarding individual administrative acts adopted by public authorities; actions or inaction of administrative bodies; violations of rights caused by administrative decisions; disputes between individuals and administrative institutions. It normally issues a decision within approximately 20 working days, making the procedure relatively rapid compared to court proceedings. However, its decisions may be appealed to administrative courts. Administrative courts examine: the legality of administrative acts adopted by ministries, agencies, municipalities, and other public bodies; tax disputes and financial sanctions; disputes involving civil servants and public administration bodies; claims for damages caused by unlawful administrative actions; and election-related administrative

disputes. They provide binding judicial decisions, and the Supreme Administrative Court's rulings are final and not appealable.

The relationship between these institutions can be illustrated as a two-stage administrative dispute resolution model: Administrative authority decision > Administrative Disputes Commission (pre-trial review) > Regional Administrative Court (first judicial instance) > Supreme Administrative Court (final appellate instance). Pre-trial review is often encouraged because it filters disputes before they reach courts, improving efficiency in administrative justice.

Mediation Process in Administrative Disputes: Administrative dispute arises > Application submitted to the Administrative Disputes Commission > Proposal to initiate mediation > Parties agree to participate in mediation > Appointment of a mediator > Mediation sessions (joint meetings and separate meetings) > Negotiation and clarification of interests > Possible outcomes: settlement agreement, partial agreement, or termination. The mediation process usually begins after a dispute is submitted to the Administrative Disputes Commission. If both parties agree to attempt mediation, a mediator is appointed. The mediator facilitates communication between the parties and helps them identify their interests and possible solutions. The aim is to reach a mutually acceptable agreement before a formal administrative decision is adopted.

Legal Basis for Mediation Proceedings Before the Administrative Disputes Commission

Mediation options for resolving administrative conflicts are based on statutory principles. Most of them are internationally recognized and included in the legal frameworks for mediation in various countries worldwide (Bankova & Angelova, 2021).

The establishment of the pre-trial dispute resolution procedure in Lithuanian law is based on a mechanism that is essentially in line with European standards. The European code of conduct for mediators (2004) sets out a number of principles to which individual mediators may voluntarily commit themselves, under their own responsibility. It may be used by mediators involved in all kinds of mediation in civil and commercial matters. The European Code of Conduct for Mediation Providers (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2018) sets out a number of principles to which mediation centres, institutes, or other mediation providers may voluntarily commit. It may be used by mediation providers (including all their employees and affiliated persons) that offer mediation services across different fields of dispute, such as civil, commercial, family, administrative, and penal matters. This code is coherent and may be used in conjunction with the European Code of Conduct for Mediators, developed in 2004 under the auspices of the European Union (European Code of Conduct for Mediators, 2004), and with the Council of Europe and the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) recommendations, guidelines and other instruments on mediation.

Article 15 of the Law on the Procedure for the Pre-trial Examination of Administrative Disputes of the Republic of Lithuania (2020) (*Referral of a Dispute for Resolution through Extrajudicial Mediation*) establishes, that the referral of a dispute to be resolved by extrajudicial mediation may be initiated by a member of the administrative dispute commission appointed as the rapporteur in the case, the administrative dispute commission or any party to the dispute. A dispute is referred for resolution by extrajudicial mediation when the parties to the dispute have given their consent or made a request to refer it for resolution by extrajudicial mediation. The parties to the dispute may submit a request to refer the dispute for extrajudicial mediation to the administrative dispute commission before, during, or after the commission's meeting, and after the adoption of a decision following the commission's examination of the complaint

(application). Article 16 (*Appointment of the mediator*) provides that a mediator shall be appointed to conduct non-judicial mediation in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Mediation of the Republic of Lithuania. When extrajudicial mediation is conducted by a member of the Administrative Disputes Commission, the member's consent to conduct the mediation shall be formalized in writing. Before giving consent to conduct extrajudicial mediation, the mediator has the right to receive information regarding the substance of the dispute and the parties to the case.

The Law on the Mediation of the Republic of Lithuania (2021) establishes the basic conditions for mediation of civil and administrative disputes, the functions of institutions in the field of mediation, the requirements for persons seeking to provide mediation services, the procedure for conducting mediation, the features of mandatory mediation and judicial mediation, and the disciplinary liability of mediators. This law applies to extrajudicial and judicial mediation of civil and administrative disputes, except for disputes arising from such rights and obligations, for which concluded peace agreements are considered invalid under the law.

The LADC Order of the Chairperson of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (2025) establishes the procedure for organizing and conducting non-judicial mediation in the Administrative Disputes Commission. It is claimed that non-judicial mediation is a process for resolving administrative disputes through *dialogue and negotiation between the parties*. The aim is to achieve a *mutually acceptable solution more quickly and at lower cost* while maintaining confidentiality.

Mediation Procedure in the pre-trial resolution of administrative disputes, see Figure 1. Mediation may be conducted by a member of the Administrative Disputes Commission who is included in the national list of mediators. The mediator acts as an independent and impartial facilitator assisting the parties in reaching an agreement. Mediation may be initiated by: a party to the dispute, the Commission examining the case, or a Commission member acting as rapporteur. The dispute is transferred to mediation only if both parties agree. If the other party does not consent, the case continues to be examined under the ordinary procedure. For the implementation of the mediation procedure, the Commission appoints a mediator and determines the time limit for mediation (usually up to 40 working days). During mediation, only the parties, their representatives and the mediator participate. The mediator may review the case file and, together with the parties, determine the course of the mediation. If the parties reach an agreement, they may enter into a settlement agreement that resolves the dispute amicably. If the parties reach an agreement, they may conclude a settlement agreement, which is subsequently approved by the Administrative Disputes Commission, provided that it does not violate mandatory legal provisions, does not contradict the public interest, and does not infringe the rights of third parties. If mediation resolves only part of the dispute, the remaining issues continue to be examined under the ordinary administrative dispute resolution procedure.

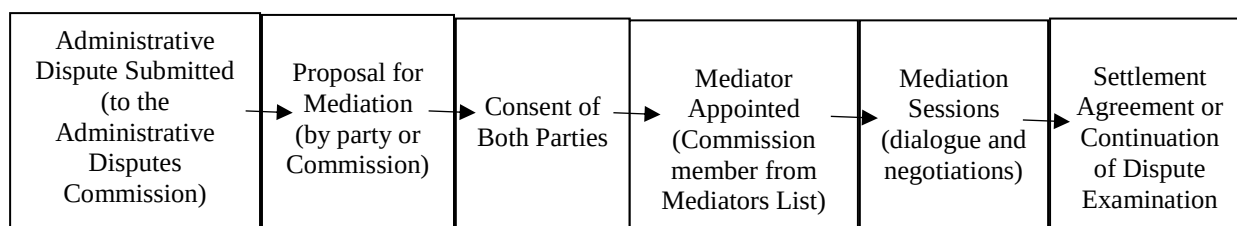


Figure 1. Mediation Procedure in the pre-trial resolution of administrative disputes

Source: Order of the Chairperson of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission on Approval of the Procedure for Organizing and Conducting Out-Of-Court Mediation in the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission and Its Territorial Departments

The potential and benefits of mediation in defending individual rights: constructive dispute resolution, fostering informal dialogue between people with disabilities and institutions, building trust in institutions and the state, seeking more tailored solutions that take into account each person's needs, etc. Table 2 shows the LADC statistics for the mediation process.

Table 2. LADC statistics for the mediation process

Source: Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission. <https://lagk.lrv.lt/lt/>

Mediation actions	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Mediation, total	11	13	16	20	36
Mediation, completed	7	10	12	16	30
Conclusion of a peace agreement between the parties	7	3	6	11	20
Applicant withdrew the complaint	2		1	1	1
Mediator terminated the process	1	1			3
Mediation deadline expired			2	3	5
Withdrawn from mediation	1		3	1	1
Requirements satisfied		5			

A deeper qualitative analysis of the empirical data presented in Table 2 reveals several critical shifts in the dynamics of non-judicial administrative mediation in Lithuania. First, the tripling of total mediation cases from 11 in 2021 to 36 in 2025 signifies a clear, progressive institutionalization of the process and a diminishing skepticism among the parties involved. While the overall percentage of mediated administrative disputes remains low (around 1–2%), the trajectory of completed mediations—surging from 7 in 2021 to 30 in 2025—demonstrates that once the process is initiated, there is a strong commitment from both private individuals and public authorities to engage fully rather than abandon the procedure midway.

The most remarkable qualitative indicator is the substantial rise in successfully concluded peace agreements, which grew from 7 in 2021 to 20 in 2025. This trend carries profound socio-legal implications. In the context of public law, administrative authorities have traditionally operated within strict statutory boundaries, often reluctant to compromise for fear of personal liability or of exceeding their legal mandate. The growing number of approved peace agreements suggests a cultural evolution within Lithuanian public administration institutions. It reflects an increasing willingness of administrative managers to move away from rigid, formalistic decision-making and embrace flexible, interest-based dialogue.

Concurrently, the data shows an increase in instances where the mediation deadline expired (from 0 in 2021–2022 to 5 in 2025) or the mediator terminated the process (3 cases in

2025). Qualitatively, this should not be interpreted as a failure of the mechanism, but rather as an indicator of the increasing complexity of the disputes being referred to mediation. As the tool becomes more widely known, parties are attempting to mediate multi-layered conflicts that require more extensive factual clarification and longer negotiation sessions. Even when a formal peace agreement is not signed, the qualitative benefit of the process remains high: the dialogue reduces adversarial tension, fosters mutual understanding, and transforms the legal culture into one based on collaboration rather than confrontation, aligning with the constitutional principle of responsible governance.

Challenges of Mediation in Administrative Disputes in Lithuania

1. Low use of mediation. Despite the possibility of mediation, it is used in a very small proportion of cases (around 1–2%). Parties often prefer a formal Commission decision to a negotiated settlement.

2. Limited culture of negotiation in administrative disputes. Administrative authorities traditionally rely on formal administrative decision-making. Public institutions may be reluctant to compromise due to concerns about legality, accountability and public interest.

3. Institutional and legal constraints. Mediation is possible only in disputes where settlement agreements are legally permissible. In some administrative matters, public law obligations limit the flexibility of authorities to negotiate.

4. Lack of awareness among parties. Applicants and public authorities may not fully understand the benefits of mediation. Mediation in administrative disputes is still a relatively new mechanism (introduced in 2021).

5. Need for stronger institutional promotion. More active encouragement by the Commission and mediators may increase mediation uptake.

Training and awareness-raising could strengthen the culture of consensual dispute resolution.

Conclusions

The Lithuanian administrative justice model combines administrative and judicial mechanisms for dispute resolution. The Administrative Disputes Commission provides accessible, quick pre-trial protection of rights, while administrative courts ensure full judicial review and the development of consistent case law in public administration matters.

Mediation is still rarely used in administrative disputes in Lithuania (around 1–2% of cases). The number of mediation proposals is much higher than the number of actual mediations, suggesting that parties often decline mediation. However, when mediation takes place, settlement rates and participant satisfaction appear relatively high. Recent statistics demonstrate the growing importance of mediation in Lithuania. Settlement agreements are reached in nearly half of mediation cases.

During mediation, people feel that they are being listened to more closely and often begin to understand the reasons and rationale behind the decisions made by public administration bodies. The discussion is less adversarial and more cooperative, as both sides seek a mutually acceptable solution. Also, the procedure remains confidential, and the parties themselves retain control over the final outcome. These characteristics make mediation particularly valuable in disputes involving public authorities.

To increase the use of mediation in administrative disputes, the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission should play a more active role in informing parties about the benefits and practical advantages of mediation at the initial stage of dispute examination. Standardized information materials and mediation awareness campaigns could contribute to a better understanding of this mechanism among both citizens and public authorities.

In order to address the limited culture of negotiation in public administration, targeted training programmes on mediation and consensual dispute resolution should be introduced for public officials and representatives of administrative institutions. Such training could strengthen institutional confidence in mediation and promote a more cooperative approach to dispute resolution.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to develop methodological guidelines for public authorities regarding participation in mediation procedures, clarifying the permissible scope of settlements in administrative disputes and ensuring compliance with the principles of legality and protection of the public interest.

Finally, regular monitoring of mediation outcomes and the publication of detailed statistical data could facilitate evidence-based evaluation of the effectiveness of mediation and support further improvements to the Lithuanian administrative dispute resolution system.

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KIBERNETINIŲ NUSIKALTIMŲ POVEIKIS ŽMOGUI

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Anotacija. XXI amžius vadinamas skaitmeniniu amžiumi, kuris iš esmės palietė įvairias žmonių gyvenimo sritis, valstybės valdymo procesus, kardinaliai pakeitė informacijos rinkimo, apdorojimo, sklaidos ir saugojimo procesus, formatus. Dar prieš trisdešimt metų, galimybė neišeinant iš namų nuotoliu užregistruoti verslo įmonę, gauti leidimus iš valstybinių institucijų tam tikroms ūkinėms veikloms vykdyti, atrodo nepasiekiamas svajonė, lyg iš fantastikos pasaulio nužengęs scenarijus. Sparčiais tempais besivystančios technologijos sukūrė galimybes komunikuoti nuotoliu, perduoti didžiulius informacijos kiekius per kelias sekundes iš vieno kontinento į kitą, atlikti finansines transakcijas, bet tuo pačiu sukūrė naujas grėsmes individų, visuomenės, valstybių saugumui. Tos grėsmės yra įvardijamos terminu „kibernetiniai nusikaltimai“ ir egzistuoja greta jau seniai žinomų grėsmių, įvardijamų terminais „korupcija“, „organizuotas nusikaltamumas“, „terorizmas“. Kibernetiniai nusikaltimai akademinėje literatūroje dar vadinami terminu „aukštųjų technologijų nusikaltimai“ ir daro didelę žalą tiek atskiram individui, tiek visuomenei, verslams, kuomet neteisėtais veiksmais, sukčiaujant ar kitaip, yra vykdomos tapatybės vagystės, duomenų vagystės, įvairūs finansiniai nusikaltimai, klaidinančios informacijos skelbimas, manipuliacija, kenkėjiškos programos, šnipinėjimas, įvairios atakos prieš valstybines institucijas ir kt. Europos Sąjungos (toliau – ES) teisėsaugos agentūra (toliau – Europol) pažymi, kad kibernetiniai nusikaltimai didžiausią pavojų kelia tiek valstybių nacionaliniam saugumui, tiek individualiems asmenims ir visuomenei. Kibernetiniai nusikaltimai tampa vis agresyvesni, o jų vykdomos veikos tampa vis pavojingesnės ir labiau organizuotos, koordinuotos, siekiant užsibrėžto konkretaus tikslo.

Šio tyrimo objektas yra kibernetinių nusikaltimų poveikis žmogui. Šio tyrimo objektas apsprendė ir šio tyrimo tikslą, kurio siekiant bus išanalizuotas kibernetinių nusikaltimų poveikis per asmeninio saugumo prizmę žmogui. Siekiant šio tyrimo tikslo atlikta mokslinių straipsnių publikuotų tiek Lietuvoje, tiek užsienyje analizė, įvardijanti kibernetinių nusikaltimų taikinius, kryptis ir poveikį žmogaus finansiniam stabilumui, psichologinei būsenai bei sukeltus neigiamus padarinius. Tyrimu nustatyta, kad pirmiausiai žmogus patiria žalą, kuri gali būti išmatuojama ir išreiškiama pinigine verte. Po to seka daug sunkiau pastebima, išmatuojama ir ne visada vizualiai pastebima neturtinė žala, pasireiškianti žmogaus psichinės sveikatos pablogėjimu, darančiu įtaką įvairioms žmogaus gyvenimo sritims. Šiame straipsnyje siekiama atsakyti į tyrimo iškeltus klausimus: kokias esmines žmogaus teises įtvirtintas nacionaliniuose ir tarptautiniuose teisės aktuose pažeidžia kibernetiniai nusikaltimai? Kokią žalą patiria žmogus tapęs kibernetinio incidento taikiniu? Kaip žmogus reaguoja į kibernetinę ataką? Kaip kibernetinis incidentas paveikia žmogaus finansinį stabilumą, psichiką, savijautą? Tyrime naudojami šie kokybiniai ir kiekybiniai tyrimo metodai: dokumentų analizė, lyginamasis, abstrakcijos, loginis ir kiti tyrimo metodai.

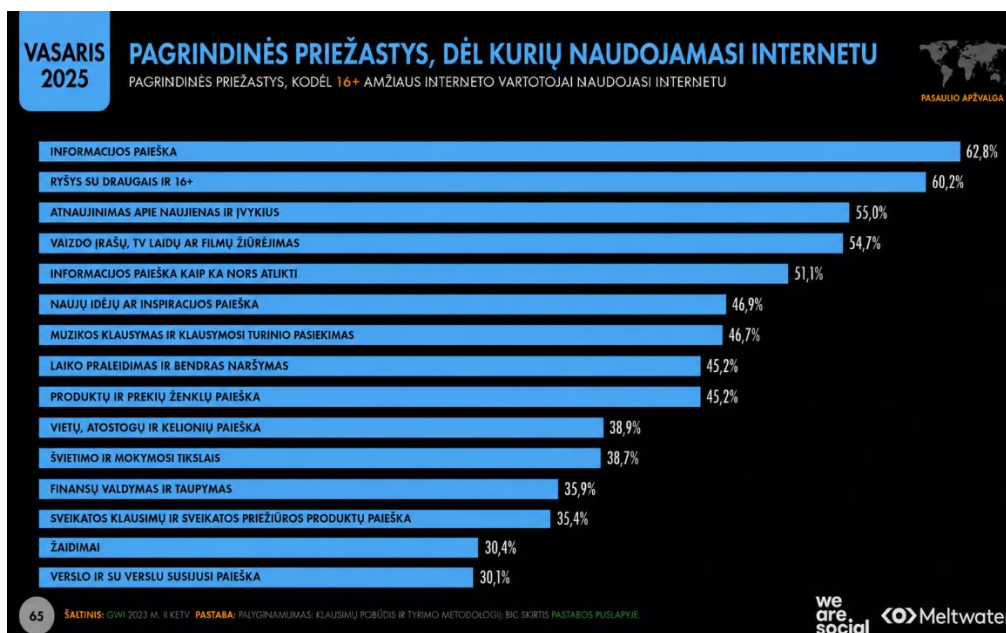
Pagrindinės sąvokos: kibernetiniai nusikaltimai, poveikis, žmogus, visuomenė, saugumo jausmas, žala, psichinė būseną.

Ivadas

Gyvenimą gali nugyventi dvejopai: taip, tarsi nieko nėra stebuklingo, arba taip, tarsi viskas yra stebuklinga.

(Albert Einstein)

Skaitmeninis amžius iš esmės pakeitė kasdienės informacijos pateikimą, sklaidą, apdorojimą, saugojimą bei supratimą, tačiau tuo pat metu sukūrė prieigas prie įvairių paslaugų gavimo nuotoliu, atlikti pavestas kai kurias užduotis būnant namuose. Daugelis valstybinių institucijų, privačių ūkio subjektų sudaro galimybes atlikti darbo užduotis darbuotojui nevykstant į darbą. Interneto vartotojų skaičius kasmet auga. Remiantis „Digital 2025“ tyrimo duomenimis, šiuo metu yra 5,56 mlrd. Interneto vartotojų – tai 136 mln. daugiau nei praėjusių metų ataskaitoje, o tai reiškia 2,5 % augimą. Palyginti su pasaulio gyventojų skaičiumi, tai sudaro 67,9 % visų planetos gyventojų. Jei šiuos skaičius suskirstytume pagal lytį, pastebėtume, kad yra skirtumas, 65,7 % visų vartotojų sudaro moterys, o 70 % – vyrai. Kyla klausimas, kokios priežastys skatina žmones naudotis internetu? Atsakymą pateikia „Digital 2025“ ataskaita, kurioje išvardijamos priežastys verčiančios naudotis internetu. Pirmiausiai, ieškoti informacijos, po to, palaikyti ryšius su draugais. Visos priežastys verčiančios naudotis internetu yra išvardintos pav. 1.



Pav. 1. Pagrindinės priežastys, dėl kurių naudojamas internetu

Kitą vertus, atsivėrusiomis galimybėmis naudotis internetu sumaniai pasinaudojo kibernetiniai nusikaltėliai, dar kai kuriuose tyrimuose įvardijami terminu „finansiniai sukčiai“. Terminijos vartojimas kibernetinėje erdvėje įvardijant asmenis darančius teisės pažeidimus, kaip kibernetiniai nusikaltėliai, finansiniai sukčiai, gali būti kito tyrimo objektu. Šio tyrimo autoriai terminą finansiniai sukčiai vartos kalbėdami apie kibernetinius nusikaltimus virtualioje erdvėje. Skaitmeninis amžius sukūrė ir naujas grėsmes žmonių, visuomenės, valstybinių institucijų ar net valstybių kibernetiniam saugumui. Kibernetiniai nusikaltimai daro didelę žalą plačiam spektrui skaitmeninių technologijų vartotojams, pradedant ūkio subjektais, valstybinėmis institucijomis ir baigiant fiziniais asmenimis, kuomet atskirų asmenų, ar

organizuotų grupių ar net valstybių neteisėtais veiksmais, sukčiaujant ar kitaip, yra vykdomos duomenų vagystės, įvairūs finansiniai ir ekonominiai nusikaltimai, klaidinančios informacijos skelbimas, kenkėjiškų taikomųjų programų platinimas, pramoninis šnipinėjimas, verbavimo operacijos diversijos aktų atlikimui, strateginę reikšmę valstybei turinčiuose objektuose.

Europolas, atlikdamas kasmetinį grėsmių vertinimą Europos Sąjungoje pažymi, kad kibernetiniai nusikaltėliai tampa vis agresyvesni, o jų vykdomos veikos vis pavojingesnės ir labiau organizuotos. Remiantis Europolo vykdomomis Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (toliau – IOCTA) metinėmis ataskaitomis, nuo 2023 m. iki 2024 m. pažymima, kad *milijonai žmonių ES šalyse kiekvieną dieną patiria įvairias kibernetines atakas. Labiausiai vyrauja išpuoliai prieš smulkius bei vidutinius verslus, taip pat skaitmeninės duomenų vagystės ir jų pardavimai, investiciniai sukčiavimai bei nepilnamečių išnaudojimo atvejai pornografijai, įskaitant dirbtinio intelekto sugeneruotą medžiagą.* Remiantis Europolo IOCTA metine ataskaita 2025 m. duomenų vagystės yra įvardijamos kaip didelė grėsmė ekonomikai, valstybinio valdymo procesams. Lietuvoje, remiantis Nacionalinio Kibernetinio Saugumo Centro prie Krašto Apsaugos Ministerijos (toliau – NKSC) teikiamomis metinėmis ataskaitomis apie fiksuotus kibernetinius incidentus, 2024 m. NKSC užregistravo 3 874 kibernetinius incidentus – tai 63 procentais daugiau nei 2023 m. Kibernetinio pobūdžio nusikaltimai yra auganti problema ES valstybėms narėms, kadangi daugumoje yra gerai išvystyta interneto infrastruktūra. Svarbu paminėti, kad *kibernetiniai nusikaltimai įgauna vis didesnę geopolitinę pobūdį – jie taip pat tampa ir viena iš hibridinio karo priemonių. Valstybės vis dažniau pasitelkia kibernetines atakas siekdamos daryti neigiamą įtaką kitoms šalims, pradedant nuo politinių ar ekonominių sistemų, baigiant karinėmis. Tokiu būdu kibernetinės operacijos peržengia tradicines konfliktų ribas ir perauga ne tik į nusikalstamumo, bet ir tarpvalstybinių konfliktų šiuolaikišką formą ir tampa „skaitmeniniu frontu“, kuriame valstybėms tenka ginti savo nacionalinį saugumą ne tik pasitelkiant kariuomenės pajėgas, bet ir skaitmeninės erdvės priemones*

Elektroninė erdvė suteikia naujų galimybių daryti nusikaltimus, sudaro sąlygas atsirasti naujiems nusikaltimų būdams ir vykdyti naujas veikas, iki tol nežinomas teisinėje praktikoje. Kibernetinės atakos tampa viešojo bei nacionalinio saugumo klausimu, o tokių atakų staigus progresavimas didina nepasitikėjimą skaitmenine aplinka ir valstybių gebėjimu joms atsilaikyti. Šiuolaikinės kibernetinės atakos vis dažniau nukreipiamos tiek į asmenų duomenų vagystes, tiek į valstybių kritinę infrastruktūrą ir viešąsias sistemas.

Sutinkamai su Maslow poreikių hierarchija, kuri yra psichologijos idėja, pasiūlyta amerikiečių psichologo Abraomo Maslow 1943 m. straipsnyje „Žmogaus motyvacijos teorija“ žurnale „Psychological Review“, *saugumo poreikis yra vienas iš esminių žmogaus poreikių hierarchijoje.* Būtent saugumo jausmo nebuvimas ir veda prie to, kad žmonės gana dažnai yra nepatenkinti teisėsaugos institucijų darbu, naujovėmis darbe ir kasdieniniame gyvenime, kurios susijusios su naujų technologijų atsiradimu ir skirtos palengvinti tam tikrų užduočių atlikimą, padidinti darbo produktyvumą.

Žmogus, kuris pajudina kalną, pirmiausia pradeda nešti mažus akmenis.

(Konfucijus)

Kibernetinių nusikaltimų poveikis žmogui

Kibernetiniai nusikaltimai nėra suprantami vien tik kaip techninės prigimties incidentai, jie taip pat akcentuoja ir esminius asmens teisių pažeidimus. Skaitmeninėje erdvėje atliekamos nusikalstamos veikos, dažnai tiesiogiai pažeidžia Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijoje

įtvirtintas žmogaus teisės. Pvz., Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijos 21 str. skelbia, kad „*Žmogaus orumą gina įstatymas*“, o skaitmeninėje erdvėje tai gali apimti priekabiavimą, šmeižtą, patyčias, intymaus turinio platinimą. Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijos 22 str. skelbia, kad „*Žmogaus privatus gyvenimas neliečiamas*“, taip pat „*Asmens susirašinėjimas, pokalbiai telefonu, telegrafo pranešimai ir kitoks susižinojimas neliečiami, o informacija apie privatų asmenų gyvenimą gali būti renkama tik motyvuotu teismo sprendimu ir remiantis įstatymu*.“ Kibernetinių nusikaltimų kontekste tai apima neteisėtą prisijungimą prie paskyrų ar jų perėmimą, šnipinėjimą, duomenų nutekinimą. Tokios veikos be teisėto pagrindo pažeidžia asmens privataus gyvenimo bei susižinojimo neliečiamumą. Skaitmeniniai nusikaltimai taip pat gali pažeisti ir Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijos 23 str., skelbiantį, kad „*Nuosavybė neliečiama*“ ir „*Nuosavybės teisės saugo įstatymai*.“ Tai reiškia, kad neteisėtas skaitmeninėje erdvėje esančio turto (lėšų, kriptoturto vagystės, paskyrų užvaldymas) pasisavinimas nėra tik techninė žala, tokie veiksmai kvalifikuotini kaip konstituciškai saugomos nuosavybės teisės pažeidimas, kuomet dėl nusikalstamų veikų yra patirta turtinė žala. Svarbu paminėti, kad kibernetinė erdvė sukuria ploną ribą tarp informacijos laisvės ir netinkamo informacijos skleidimo. Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijos 25 str. nurodo, kad „*Žmogui neturi būti kliudoma ieškoti, gauti ir skleisti informaciją bei idėjas*“, tačiau aiškiai numatomi ribojimai, kuomet „*Laisvė reikšti įsitikinimus ir skleisti informaciją nesuderinama su nusikalstamais veiksmais – tautinės, rasinės, religinės ar socialinės neapykantos, prievartos bei diskriminacijos kurstymu, šmeižtu ir dezinformacija*.“ Tai leidžia teisėtai riboti apgaulingą ar žalingą turinį, neteisėtai gautų duomenų sklaidą ar sukčiavimų mechanizmą, kuomet tai tiesiogiai žeidžia Konstitucijoje ginamas vertybes.

Jeigu kibernetiniai nusikaltimai pažeidžia šalies pagrindiniame įstatyme - Konstitucijoje ginamas žmonių teises ir laisves, valstybės pozityvioji pareiga – jas aktyviai ginti. Tačiau skaitmeniniame amžiuje kibernetinis nusikalstamumas yra plačiai paplitusi problema, kuri virsta iššūkiu tiek visuomenei, tiek valstybei ir nacionaliniam jos saugumui. Kad būtų užtikrintas žmonių kibernetinis saugumas, svarbi tinkama kompetentingų institucijų veikla. Kibernetiniai nusikaltimai neigiamai veikia beveik visus valstybinius sektorius. O tai savo ruožtu paveikia ir žmones. Sutinkamai su Europos Sąjungos kibernetinio saugumo agentūros (ENISA) duomenimis, 2024 m. pagrindinė grėsmė Europoje buvo DDoS atakos, kurios paveikė viešojo administravimo, transporto, bankininkystės ir skaitmeninės infrastruktūros sektorius, taip pat pastebima, kad informacijos manipuliavimo kampanijos daugumoje fiksuotų incidentų, buvo nukreiptos į visuomenę. Todėl kibernetinių nusikaltimų valdymas tampa viešosios politikos bei nacionalinio saugumo klausimu, kuomet valstybės turi užtikrinti efektyvias priemones kovoje su kibernetiniu nusikalstamumu ir tikslu apsaugoti valstybę ir jos žmones (K. Garuckaitė, (2025)). Ryan Shandler ir Miguel Alberto Gomez (2022) pastebi, kad didesnę grėsmę valstybei sukuria ne pati kibernetinė ataka ar „fizinė katastrofa“, o pirmiausia mažėjantis visuomenės pasitikėjimas valdžia bei institucijomis. 2020 m. ransomware kibernetinio viruso pagalba buvo sutrikdyta Diuseldorfo universitetinės ligoninės (Vokietijos Federacinė Respublika) veikla. Dėl atakos sustabdžius dalį paslaugų, pacientai buvo nukreipiami į kitas įstaigas. Atlikus empirinį tyrimą ir po incidento apklausus 707 gyventojus, nustatyta, kad po kibernetinių atakų, ypatingai tokiose įstaigose, ženkliai sumažėja visuomenės pasitikėjimas valdžios gebėjimu apsaugoti nuo kibernetinių išpuolių. Pabrėžiama, kad po kibernetinių atakų, vyriausybės negali tikėtis vieningumo valstybėje, nes visuomenė linkusi manyti, kad valstybė nepakankamai pasirengusi gintis nuo tokio pobūdžio nusikalstamų veikų ir ateityje. Visuomenėje susidaręs požiūris, kad vyriausybė yra atsakinga už kritinės infrastruktūros ir viešųjų institucijų apsaugą kibernetinių atakų kontekste. Tačiau net ir turint pačias sudėtingiausias kibernetinio saugumo priemones, vienas vartotojas, ignoruojantis

saugumo nurodymus ir paspaudęs užkrėstą nuorodą, gali atverti kelią žalingai atakai. Pažymima, kad priklausomai nuo užpuoliko motyvų, pagrindinis atakos tikslas gali būti baimės sėjimas ir visuomenės pasitikėjimo vyriausybės gebėjimu apsaugoti savo piliečius silpninimas (kiberterorizmas). Išskiriama ir kita kibernetinių atakų savybė – jos sukelia bejėgiškumo jausmą. Kalbant apie tradicinius smurto veiksmus, pavyzdžiui raketų ar kitų ginklų atakas, visuomenė žino, kaip nuo jų apsisaugoti – eiti į slėptuves ar vengti tamsių gatvių. Tačiau kibernetinėje erdvėje, dėl jos sudėtingumo kyla bejėgiškumo jausmas, kadangi susidaro įspūdis, kad susiduriama su visagaliais užpuolikais, ir tai gali pakeisti žmonių reagavimo modelius ir paveikti visuomenės pasitikėjimą. Kad būtų užtikrintas saugumas ir kova su nusikaltimais skaitmeninėje erdvėje veiktų kuo efektyviau, svarbus tinkamas valstybės institucijų ir teisės saugos vaidmuo.

Lietuvoje kibernetinio saugumo užtikrinimas padalytas į politiką formuojančių, ją įgyvendinančių bei priežiūrą vykdančių institucijų sistemą, kurių sąveiką reguliuoja Lietuvos Respublikos kibernetinio saugumo įstatymas. „Kibernetinio saugumo politiką formuoja jos įgyvendinimą organizuoja, kontroliuoja ir koordinuoja Lietuvos Respublikos krašto apsaugos ministerija. Kibernetinio saugumo politiką įgyvendina Nacionalinis kibernetinio saugumo centras, Lietuvos policija ir Valstybinė duomenų apsaugos inspekcija.“ Nacionalinis kibernetinio saugumo centras aptinka grėsmes, analizuoja kibernetinio saugumo spragas ir incidentus, valdo juos pagal Vyriausybės tvirtinamą nacionalinį planą, teikia įspėjimus ir pagalbą subjektams, o prireikus gali duoti nurodymus paslaugų tiekėjams riboti paslaugas ar blokuoti kenkėjiškų svetainių domenus, taip ribojant jų poveikį bei plitimą. Valstybinė duomenų apsaugos inspekcija vykdo kibernetinio saugumo politiką asmens duomenų apsaugos srityje, atlieka priežiūros institucijos užduotis pagal bendrąjį duomenų apsaugos reglamentą (toliau – BDAR) – taip užtikrinant duomenų apsaugos ir kibernetinio saugumo sąveiką bei nuosekliai valdant asmens duomenis paveikusius incidentus. Lietuvos Policija sustiprina ir įgyvendina kibernetinio saugumo politiką ir turi teisę gauti bei tvarkyti duomenis ar informaciją apie incidentus nusikalstamų veikų, prevencijos, analizės, tyrimo ar atskleidimo tikslais bei gauti informaciją iš kibernetinio saugumo subjektų, reikalingą analizuojant ir vertinant, ar incidentas turi nusikalstamos veikos požymių. Taip pat, jei elektroninių ryšių tinklų ir (ar) viešųjų elektroninių ryšių paslaugų gavėjas dalyvauja ar jo naudojama informacinių technologijų įranga naudojama nusikalstamai veikai, turi teisę duoti nurodymą riboti paslaugų teikimą (ne ilgiau kaip 48 valandoms) (K. Garuckaitė (2025)).

Kibernetinių nusikaltimų poveikis neišvengiamai kelia grėsmę žmonių saugumui ir yra nukreiptas į šias tris kryptis: finansinę, psichologinę bei reputacinę. Finansinė žala suprantama, kaip dėl patirtų kibernetinių atakų norint atgauti užšifruotus duomenis tenka mokėti išpirkas, kenkėjiškomis programomis sutrikdyta įmonių veikla lemia negautas pajamas, taip pat pagal suklaidotus laiškus atlikti piniginiai mokėjimai patenka į sukčių banko ar virtualių pinigų sąskaitas ir pan. Tuo pat metu gana dažnai patiriamas netiesioginis finansinis poveikis. Pavyzdžiui, paslaugų ar paskyrų praradimas. Lietuvos Pinigų plovimo prevencijos kompetencijų centras išskiria penkis sukčiavimo būdus daromus kibernetinėje erdvėje: 1) romantinis, 2) investicinis, 3) telefoninis, 4) avansinis ir 5) phishingas

2023-2025 m. statistiniai duomenys rodo, kad kibernetiniais nusikaltimais padaroma vis didesnė žala vertinant pinigine išraiška. Pvz., Jungtinių Amerikos Valstijų Federalinio Tyrimo Biuro (toliau – FTB) parengtoje internetinių nusikaltimų ataskaitoje (2025) nurodoma, kad 2024 m. buvo gauta 859 532 skundų dėl įtariamų internetinių nusikaltimų, o nuostoliai viršijo 16 mlrd. JAV dolerių. Tai 33 % daugiau nei 2023 m. Trys dažniausiai pasitaikantys kibernetiniai nusikaltimai, skaičiuojant pagal 2024 m. pareiškėjų nukentėjusių nuo kibernetinių nusikaltimų pateiktų skundų skaičių, buvo: 1) sukčiavimas elektroniniu būdu

(phishing/spoofing), 2) reketas, 3) asmens duomenų pažeidimai. Didžiausius nuostolius – iš viso daugiau nei 6,5 mlrd. JAV dolerių – patyrė investicinio sukčiavimo aukos, ypač susijusios su kriptovaliuta. Vokietijos internetinė platforma „Statista“, kurios specializacija yra duomenų rinkimas ir vizualizavimas, pateikia duomenis apie kibernetiniais nusikaltimais padaromą žalą, įvertindama tai pinigine išraiška. Remiantis skaičiavimais, 2025 m. kibernetiniai nusikaltimai kainavo 10,29 trilijono JAV dolerių visame pasaulyje, o iki 2029 m. ši suma, kaip prognozuojama, išaugs iki maždaug 16 trilijonų JAV dolerių. „Cybersecurity Ventures“ (2020) prognozuoja, kad per ateinančius penkerius metus pasaulinės išlaidos, susijusios su kibernetiniais nusikaltimais, augs 15 procentų per metus ir 2025 m. pasieks 10,5 trilijono JAV dolerių per metus, palyginti su 3 trilijonais JAV dolerių 2015 m. Tai yra didžiausias ekonominės gerovės perkėlimas istorijoje, keliantis grėsmę inovacijų ir investicijų skatinimui, ir yra eksponentiškai didesnis už per metus stichinių nelaimių padarytą žalą ir bus pelningesnis nei visų pagrindinių nelegalių narkotikų pasaulinė prekyba kartu sudėjus. Kibernetinių nusikaltimų išlaidos apima duomenų sugadinimą ir sunaikinimą, pavogtus pinigus, prarastą produktyvumą, intelektinės nuosavybės vagystę, asmeninių ir finansinių duomenų vagystę, pasisavinimą, sukčiavimą, įprastos verslo veiklos sutrikdymą po atakos, kriminalistinį tyrimą, įsilaužtų duomenų ir sistemų atkūrimą bei ištyrinimą ir reputacijos pažeidimą.

Kibernetiniai nusikaltimai pasireiškia įvairiomis formomis – tarp jų yra sukčiavimas elektroniniu paštu, išpirkos reikalaujantys virusai, prisijungimo duomenų vagystės, sukčiavimas ir kt. Iš pateiktos informacijos nėra aišku, ar į sąvoką „kibernetiniai nusikaltimai“ įtraukiami ir kibernetiniai incidentai, nusikalstamos veikos, apie kurias nebuvo pranešta teisėsaugos institucijoms. Kibernetiniai incidentai ir kibernetiniai nusikaltimai nėra tapatūs reiškiniai. Lietuvos Respublikos krašto apsaugos ministro 2023 m. spalio 16 d. įsakymu Nr. V-840 „Dėl tipinio kibernetinių incidentų valdymo ypatingos svarbos informacinėse infrastruktūrose plano patvirtinimo“ 2 punkto „Vartojamos sąvokos“ 2.1 papunktyje pateikiama „kibernetinio incidento“ samprata, kuri išdėstoma taip: *„Kibernetinis incidentas – įvykis ar veika kibernetinėje erdvėje, galintis sukelti arba sukeliantis grėsmę arba neigiamą poveikį ryšių ir informacinėmis sistemomis perduodamos ar jose tvarkomos elektroninės informacijos prieinamumui, autentiškumui, vientisumui ir konfidencialumui, galintis trikdyti arba trikdkantis ryšių ir informacinių sistemų veikimą, valdymą ir paslaugų jomis teikimą.“* Atkreiptinas dėmesys, kad ne kiekvienas kibernetinis incidentas turi nusikalstamos veikos požymių (informacijos sunaikinimas ar pakeitimas, kompiuterių tinklo trikdymas, neteisėtas prisijungimas ir informacijos pasisavinimas, neteisėtas disponavimas kitais įrenginiais ir duomenimis ar pan.). Taigi, jei kibernetinis incidentas nepriskiriamas incidentų kategorijai, turinčiai nusikalstamos veikos požymių, tai į nusikalstamų veikų registrą nepatenka. Tik baudžiamasis kodeksas/ baudžiamasis įstatymas nustato kriterijus, kas gali būti laikoma nusikalstama veika. Pvz., Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamojo kodekso 2 str. 2 d. skelbia, kad šis kodeksas: 1) apibrėžia, kokios veikos yra nusikaltimai ir baudžiamieji nusižengimai, bei jas uždraudžia. Žmogus, ketinantis padaryti nusikalstamą veiką įvertina ir tikimybę būti nubaustas kriminaline bausme už kėsiniąsi į baudžiamuoju įstatymu ginamas vertybes. Naujausių technologijų pasiekimai suteikia pakankamai geras galimybes išvengti baudžiamojo persekiojimo, o dalies socialinių grupių, ypatingai senyvo amžiaus, kibernetinės higienos pradmenys nėra pakankami. Mokslininkai Sergiu Cernomoreț ir Andrei Nastas (2023, p. 54), analizuodami kibernetinius nusikaltimus ir baudžiamosios atsakomybės taikymo ypatumus akcentuoja, kad šiuolaikinėje teisinėje sistemoje kibernetiniai nusikaltimai pasižymi tam tikromis ypatybėmis ir kelia tam tikrus iššūkius atskleidžiant aukštųjų technologijų nusikaltimus, o būtent:

1. Techninis sudėtingumas. Kibernetiniai nusikaltimai dažnai susiję su pažangių ir sudėtingų technologijų, pavyzdžiui, įsilaužimo ar kenkėjiškų programų, naudojimu. Tai kelia sunkumų nustatant ir sekant nusikaltėlius, renkant skaitmeninius įrodymus bei suprantant su nusikaltimais susijusias technines detales;

2. Tarptautinis pobūdis. Internetas nepripažįsta sienų, o tai reiškia, kad kibernetiniai nusikaltimai gali būti padaromi nuotoliniu būdu, o nusikaltėliai gali būti kitose jurisdikcijose. Tai kelia jurisdikcijos ir tarptautinio bendradarbiavimo klausimus atliekant nusikaltimų tyrimą ir baudžiamąjį persekiojimą;

3. Anonimiškumas ir pseudonimiškumas. Naudojimasis internetu leidžia nusikaltėliams veikti anonimiškai arba paslėpti savo tikrąją tapatybę už pseudonimų ar netikrų IP adresų. Dėl to tampa sunkiau identifikuoti nusikaltėlius ir patraukti juos baudžiamojon atsakomybėn;

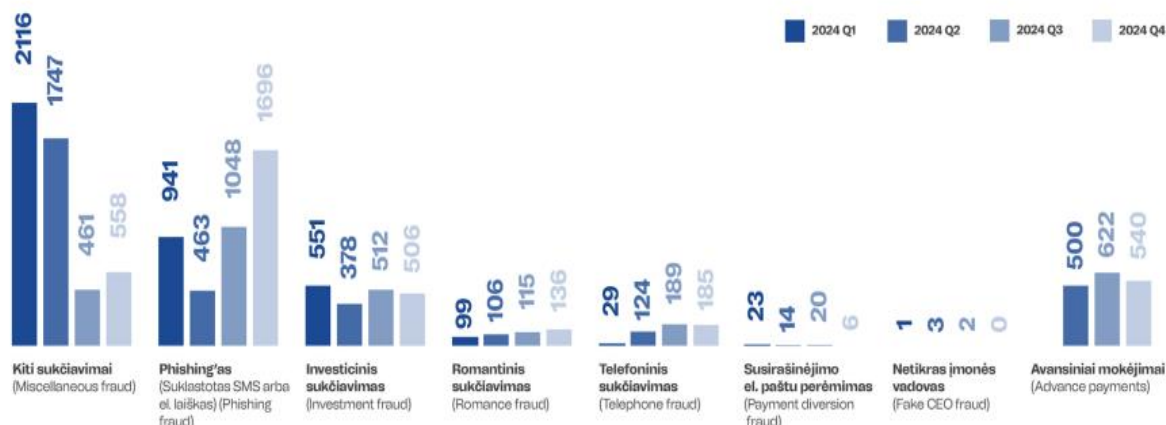
4. Žalos nematerialus pobūdis. Kibernetinių nusikaltimų atveju žalą gali būti sunku įvertinti, nes ji dažnai yra nematerialaus pobūdžio, pavyzdžiui, informacijos vagystė, reputacijos sugadinimas ar duomenų praradimas. Tai gali turėti įtakos baudžiamojo persekiojimo procesui ir žalos atlyginimui;

5. Technologijų pokyčių sparta. Technologijos sparčiai tobulėja, o kibernetiniai nusikaltėliai nuolat randa naujų būdų nusikaltimams daryti. Baudžiamosios teisės sistema turi nuolat prisitaikyti prie šių pokyčių ir atnaujinti teisės aktus, kad galėtų reaguoti į naujas grėsmes.

Visuma veiksmų, išvardintų šiame tyrime aukščiau, skatina kibernetinius nusikaltėlius perkelti savo veikas iš materialaus pasaulio į virtualų.

Lietuvos Respublikos Pinigų plovimo prevencijos kompetencijų centro atlikta analizė nurodo, kad Lietuvoje didžiausią riziką verslams kelia socialinės inžinerijos pagrindu vykdomos nusikaltimų schemos, kurios apima investicinį, telefoninį sukčiavimą, elektroninių paštų perėmimą, „netikrą įmonės vadovą“. Kibernetinės atakos dažnai yra nusitaikiusios į įmonių darbuotojus ir finansinius procesus. Nuostoliai susidaro ne tik iš į sukčių sąskaitas pervestų lėšų, bet ir iš operacinių trikdžių ir skiriamų išteklių siekiant atkurti sutrikdytą veiklą.

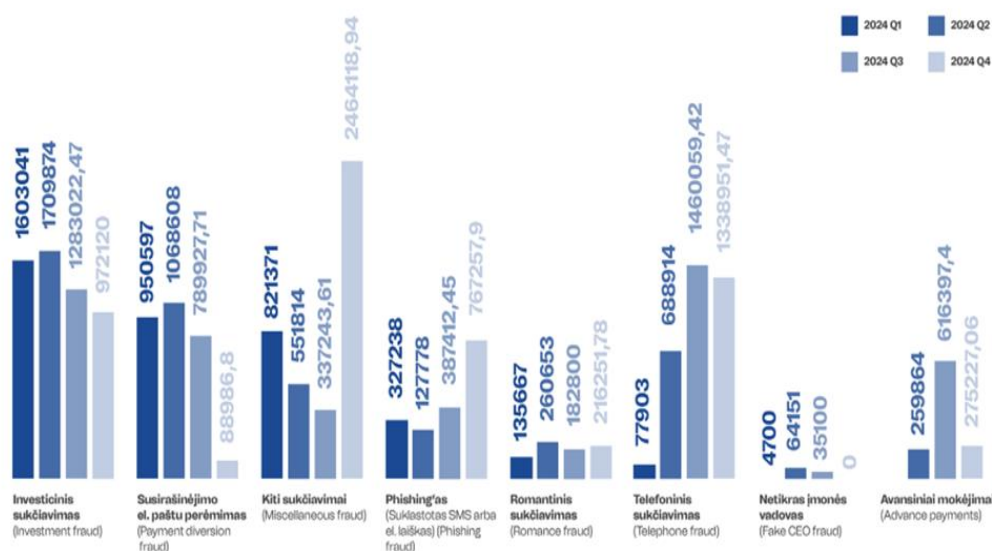
Lietuvos Respublikos Pinigų plovimo prevencijos kompetencijų centras (toliau - PPPKC) pagal iš finansų įstaigų AB „Swedbank“, Revolut Bank, AB SEB banko, UAB, Luminor Bank AS Lietuvos skyriaus, AB Šiaulių banko, OP Corporate Bank plc. Lietuvos filialo, AS „Citadele bankas“ Lietuvos filialo ir UAB URBO banko pateiktus duomenis 2024 m. pateikia sukčiavimo atvejų analizę ir išsamią statistikos analizę apie finansinių sukčių vykdomas neteisėtas veikas kibernetinėje erdvėje. PPPKC atlikta analizė rodo, kad sukčių atakos kibernetinėje erdvėje tampa vis intensyvesnės. Pvz., pirmąjį 2024 m. ketvirtį finansiniai sukčiai kėsinosi išvilioti 6,9 mln. Eur, o antrąjį ketvirtį ši suma išaugo iki 8,3 mln. Eur. Trečiąjį ketvirtį siekiama išvilioti suma pasiekė 8,9 mln. Eur. O ketvirtą 2024 m. ketvirtį ši suma siekė net 10,1 mln. Eur. Pateikti statistiniai duomenys vaizdžiai iliustruoja kibernetinių nusikaltimų mastus, daromą žalą žmogui ar tai būtų fizinis asmuo, ar ūkio subjekto vadovas. Finansiniai sukčiai taikosi apgaulės būdu išvilioti turtą, kuris yra išmatuojamas pinigine išraiška. Žemiau pateikiamos dvi lentelės apie sukčiavimo tipologijas pagal incidentų skaičių, matuojant vienetais ir pagal iš gyventojų išviliotas lėšas, matuojamas pinigine išraiška – Eurais, suskirstant 2024 m. į keturis ketvirčius - 2024 m. 1 ketvirtis (sausis - kovas) toliau - Q1, 2 ketvirtis (balandis-birželis) toliau - Q2, 3 ketvirtis (liepa-rugsėjis) toliau Q3 ir 2024 m. 4 ketvirtis (spalis-gruodis) toliau - Q4.



Pav. 2. Sukčiavimo tipologijos pagal incidentų skaičių, vnt.

Šaltinis: Pinigų plovimo prevencijos kompetencijų centras, „Sukčiavimo atvejų statistikos analizė: 2024 m. IV ketvirtis“, <https://amlcenter.lt/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2024-m.-Sukciavimo-atveju-analize-IV-ketvirtis.pdf>.

Kaip matome iš pav. 2 pateiktų duomenų apie sukčiavimo tipologijas pagal incidentų skaičių tai 2024 m. spalio – gruodžio mėnesiais dominavo „Phishing’as“ (suklastotos SMS arba el.laiškai) (angl. Phishing fraud), kurie sudarė 1 696 atvejus.



Pav. 3. Sukčiavimo tipologijos pagal iš gyventojų išviliotas lėšas, Eur

Šaltinis: Pinigų plovimo prevencijos kompetencijų centras, „Sukčiavimo atvejų statistikos analizė: 2024 m. IV ketvirtis“, <https://amlcenter.lt/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2024-m.-Sukciavimo-atveju-analize-IV-ketvirtis.pdf>.

Kaip matome iš pav. 3 pateiktų duomenų apie sukčiavimo tipologijas pagal iš gyventojų išviliotas lėšas Eurais, tai 2024 m. Q4 pastebimas ženklus sumažėjimas, kai finansiniai sukčiai išgaudavo lėšas perimdami susirašinėjimą elektroniniu paštu, tačiau telefoninis sukčiavimas kelia nerimą. 2024 m. Q3 išviliota suma siekė virš 1.4 mln. Eur, Q 4 – virš 1.3 mln. Eur.

Kibernetiniais nusikaltimais greta turtinės žalos, kurią įmanoma iš dalies įvertinti pinigine išraiška, dar padaroma ir neturtinė žala. Kibernetinio incidento, teisės pažeidimo atveju nukentėjęs asmuo gali patirti ir dvasines, psichines kančias bei specifinius fiziologinius pokyčius. Visa tai neigiamai veikia dvasinę žmogaus savijautą. Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijos 30 str. skelbia, jog asmeniui padarytos materialinės ir moralinės žalos atlyginimą nustato įstatymas. Taigi, Lietuvos Respublikos piliečių priimta 1992 m. spalio 25 d. referendume Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucija įtvirtino Lietuvos teisės istorijoje moralinės žalos atlyginimo nuostatą Konstituciniu lygmeniu. Šiuo atveju kyla klausimas, kas tai yra moralinė žala? Ar moralinė žala ir neturtinė žala yra vienas ir tas pats? Mokslininkas A. Rudzinskas pateikia neturtinės žalos sampratos paaiškinimą, kuris skamba taip: *„neturtinė žala yra ne kas kita kaip pakenkimas fizinio asmens sveikatai, tiksliau – psichinei sveikatai, kuri yra valstybės teisinės apsaugos objektas.“* Taigi tiksliausiai neturtinę (moralinę) žalą apibūdintume kaip psichinę žalą, nes tada aiškiai suprastume, koks teisinės apsaugos objektas yra pažeistas. A. Rudzinskas atkreipia dėmesį, jog terminai „neturtinė žala“ ir „moralinė žala“ neatspindi, kokioms vertybėms padaroma žala, o tarpusavyje jie skiriasi tik lingvistine prasme. Šiuo metu galima konstatuoti, jog dabar teisės sistemoje ir teisininkų sąmonėje stipriai įsitvirtinę du terminai – „moralinė žala“ ir „neturtinė žala“, kurie vartojami kaip sinonimai. A. Rudzinskas apibendrinęs neturtinės žalos sampratą tiek užsienio, tiek Lietuvos konstatavo, jog neturtinė žala – tai tam tikri glausti neigiami asmens psichikos pakitimai, kurie būtinai įvyksta jo sąmonėje pažeidus asmenines neturtines ir turtines vertybes. Tai gali pasireikšti nemaloniais kūno pojūčiais (pakilusiu kraujo spaudimu, pykinimu ir pan.), sutrikusiomis emocijomis, elgesio pakitimais, nerviniais tikslais. Visa tai paveikia fizinio asmens savijautą. Nukentėję nuo kibernetinių nusikaltimų žmonės dažnai patiria emocinę ir psichologinę įtampą. 2019 m. Jungtinėje Karalystėje apklausus 2 450 sukčiavimo ir kibernetinių nusikaltimų aukų, net 83 proc. teigė jaučiantys pyktį, 73 proc. – nerimą, o beveik pusė apklaustųjų nurodė sumažėjusį pasitikėjimą kitais (48 proc.) ir 29 proc. – mažesnę norą naudotis internetu. Kibernetinio smurto ar nusikaltimų kontekste, reputacinė žala paveikia galimybes susirasti darbą ar būstą, taip pat gali būti panaudojama kaip spaudimo ir šantažo instrumentas (Muaadh Mukred, Umi Asma' Mokhtar, Fahad Abdullah Moafa, Abdu Gumaei, Ali Safaa Sadiq, Abdulaleem Al-Othmani (2024), 1-18). Tapimas kibernetinio nusikaltimo auka gali turėti daug neigiamų pasekmių. Pavyzdžiui, finansinių nuostolių ir psichologinio poveikio (Sarkki (Pirkka) P.A.H. & others (2025)).

Mokslininkai Whitty M. T. ir Buchanan T. interviu būdu 2016 m. apklausė 20 nukentėjusiųjų nuo kibernetinių nusikaltimų Jungtinėje Karalystėje. Whitty M. T. ir Buchanan T. apklausos rezultatus padalino į 7 kategorijas (šiame tyrime autoriai pristato tris kategorijas asmenų nukentėjusiųjų nuo kibernetinių nusikaltimų, kurie akcentavo patirtą neturtinę žalą, jos padarinius psichinei būsenai). 1. „Emocinė/psichologinė būsena po romantinio sukčiavimo“. Visi apklaustieji, neatsižvelgiant į tai, ar jie patyrė turtinę/neturtinę žalą buvo neigiamai paveikti romantinio sukčiavimo. Jie patyrė emocinius išgyvenimus – gėdos jausmą, sumišimą, šoką, pyktį, susirūpinimą ir stresą (ypač tie, kurie buvo įtraukti į pinigų plovimą ar padėjo nusikaltėliams įgyti vizą), baimę ir pyktį dėl to, jog buvo psichiškai išprievartauti. 2. „Kiti asmenys nukentėjusiųjų gyvenime“. Svarbūs asmenys romantinio sukčiavimo aukai, pavyzdžiui nukentėjusiojo šeima, draugai, bendradarbiai dažniausiai nesuteikė socialinės paramos. Aukos teigia, jog kiti asmenys galvojo, jog jos yra kvailos, jie buvo pikti ar nusivylę dėl to, jog aukos patyrė turtinę žalą (iššvaistė jų palikimą) ir dėl to nesuteikė jokios socialinės paramos. Didžioji dalis respondentų dėl galimo neigiamo požiūrio *į juos apie tai, jog buvo apgauti nepranešė niekam išskyrus teisėsaugos institucijų pareigūnus bei apklausos atlikėją*. 3. „Nukentėjusiojo pasikeitimas ir socialinė situacija“. Nukentėjusieji patvirtino, jog jų elgesys

pasikeitė. Tai buvo neigiamo pobūdžio pasikeitimas. Kai kuriems šis pasikeitimas sumažino pasitikėjimą kitais žmonėmis. Taip pat nukentėjusieji sumažino bendravimą su savo draugais, aplinkiniais asmenimis. Taigi, minėtas tyrimas patvirtino, kad nukentėjusieji romantinio sukčiavimo modelio metu patiria ne tik turtinę, bet ir psichologinę žalą.

Taip pat atkreiptas dėmesys, kad kibernetinių nusikaltimų kontekste pažeidžiamiausių asmenų grupei priskiriami vyresnio amžiaus žmonės, tačiau labai svarbu paminėti augantį ir nerimą keliantį vaikų išnaudojimą skaitmeninėje erdvėje. Finansinių veiksmų darbo grupės (FATF) ataskaitoje (2025) „**Detecting, Disrupting and Investigating Online Child Sexual Exploitation**“ konstatuojama, kad seksualinis vaikų išnaudojimas tampa dominuojančia bei kibernetiškai sudėtinga nusikalstama veika. Išskiriami du šio nusikaltimo tipai: tiesiogiai transliuojamas seksualinis vaikų išnaudojimas, siekiant finansinės naudos, kai vaikas vaizduojamas užsiimantis seksualine veikla vienas ar su kitais asmenimis, o vartotojai moka, kad galėtų tokį turinį stebėti nuotoliniu būdu ir finansinis vaikų seksualinis šantažas, kuris apima grasinimus pavišinti vaikų seksualinio pobūdžio nuotraukas ar vaizdo įrašus, jei aukos nepatenkins finansinių reikalavimų. Pabrėžiama, kad šių nusikaltimų mastas yra labai didelis ir 300 mln. vaikų visame pasaulyje, arba 1 iš 8 vaikų, kasmet patiria seksualinį išnaudojimą ir prievartą internete. Padariniai aukoms ir jų šeimoms yra sunkūs ir ilgalaikiai, o kai kurios situacijos netgi baigėsi savižudybe. Įdomu tai, kad tokiomis veikomis užsiima tiek vyrai, tiek moterys, o seksualiai išnaudojančios vaikus moterys itin dažnai pačios turi vaikų. Ataskaitoje aprašomi realūs pavyzdžiai, kaip vyksta seksualinis vaikų išnaudojimas internete. Dažniausiai pasitaikantys atvejai, kuomet vaikams virtualiai bendraujant su nepažįstamu asmeniu jis įgauna vaiko pasitikėjimą, tuomet atsiunčia intymaus turinio nuotraukas ir prašo to paties iš vaiko, vaikui įvykdžius nusikaltėlio prašymą, gaunama žinutė su nuoroda sumokėti tam tikrą pinigų sumą, kitu atveju nuotrauka bus pavišinta internete. Aukų pranešimai yra daugelio nusikaltimų atskleidimo būdas, tačiau šiuo atveju taip nėra, kadangi aukos jaučia gėdą ir nenori, kad kas nors apie tai sužinotų. Ataskaitoje teigiama, kad seksualinis vaikų išnaudojimas internete yra mažai pranešamas nusikaltimas, nors jo mastas yra didelis. Pasak šio straipsnio bendraautorės K. Garuckaitės (2025) susidariusi situacija kelia didelį susirūpinimą, kadangi nusikaltėliai veikia koordinuotai ir organizuotai, o mažas pranešimų kiekis jiems leidžia ir toliau netrukdomai vykdyti amoralias nusikalstamas veikas, kuriose figūruoja ir vaikai. Mokslininkų Babu J., Justin, P. J., Rejina P. V. & kitų (2025) atliktas tyrimas nustatė, kad tarp neigiamą poveikį asmenims sukeliančių veikų skaitmeninėje erdvėje, išskiriamas ir virtualus smurtas. Jis gali apimti kibernetines patyčias, neapykantos kurstymą ar intymaus turinio platinimą, tokie veiksmai daro ne tik psichologinę, tačiau ir reputacinę žalą, kuri pasireiškia socialine atskirtimi ir sukelia kliūčių įsidarbinti ar susirasti būstą. Pastebimas ryšys tarp kibernetinių patyčių ir depresijos, nerimo bei savižudiškų minčių, o tai ilgainiui mažina visuomenės įsitraukimą ir pasitikėjimą skaitmenine erdve.

Kibernetinių nusikaltimų latentiskumas visame pasaulyje yra didelis. Priežastys, veiksniai sąlygojantys tokią situaciją yra įvairūs. Dalis jų įvardintos Cernomoret S. ir Nastas A. (2023, p. 54) jau cituotos šiame straipsnyje, kita priežastis, kuriai šio tyrimo autoriai irgi pritaria, yra ta, kad teisėsaugos veikloje pirmenybė teikiama sudėtingiausiems ir didžiausią rezonansą sukeliantiems atvejams, kuriuos reikia **nedelsiant išspręsti** (Komarov, A. A. 2024). Kaip matome, tik tam tikra dalis kibernetinių nusikaltimų tampa matomais, t. y. užregistruoti pranešimų apie nusikalstamas veikas registre. Kita dalis lieka už oficialiosios statistikos. Kodėl? Šio tyrimo vienas iš bendraautorius G. Bučiūnas atliko interviu su dviem verslininkais, esant jų sutikimams apie situacijas, jeigu kibernetinis nusikaltimas būtų nukreiptas prieš juos ar jų įmones. Šio tyrimo bendraautorius uždavė klausimą: ar jie iš karto informuotų teisėsaugos institucijas apie kibernetinį nusikaltimą? Pvz., finansinių sukčių išviliotus pinigus iš jų

asmeniškai ir iš jų įmonės. Respondentai atsakė, kad jie gerai pagalvotų, prieš kreipdamiesi į teisėsaugos institucijas. Pirmiausia, tai gėdos jausmas, reputacijos išlaikymas tarp kolegų verslininkų. Dabartinėje visuomenėje svarbu išlaikyti sėkmingo žmogaus statusą, o čia sukčiai išviliojo pinigus gana įprastoje situacijoje. Kitas klausimas, ar policija gebės ištirti, kiek laiko man teks su jais bendrauti, o jei jau policija užregistruos nusikalstamą veiką, tai kas gali paneigti, kad neteks turėti reikalų su kitomis valstybinėmis institucijomis. Pvz., Valstybinė Asmens duomenų inspekcija. Bendravimas su policija, kitomis institucijomis pareikalaus laiko sąnaudų. Taigi, vien tik iš šio interviu galima išskirti keletą priežasčių, kodėl nenorima kreiptis į teisėsaugos institucijas ir informuoti apie įvykį. McLeodas, daugiau kaip 30 m. dirbantis kibernetinio saugumo srityje įvardijo žmogaus nenorą informuoti apie kibernetinį nusikaltimą įvykdytą jo ar ūkio subjekto atžvilgiu. *Verslo atstovai stengiasi apie tai kuo mažiau kalbėti, jie nerimauja dėl jų reputacijos verslo aplinkoje. Kai tai nutinka pavieniams asmenims, atsiranda visai kitas veiksnys, verčiantis žmones apie tai tylėti. Dažniausiai tai susiję su gėda ir nepatogumu* (David Burke, CBC News, 2019).

Taigi, nusikaltimai skaitmeninėje erdvėje nėra vien tik techniniai incidentai, jie pažeidžia Konstitucijoje, kituose teisės aktuose ginamas vertybes ir padaro žalą asmenų informaciniam saugumui. Asmuo, patyręs kibernetinę ataką, ne visada tai pajaučia tiesiogiai, pvz., sulėtėjęs kompiuterio darbas. Fizinis asmuo pastebi kibernetinį nusikaltimą, pirmiausiai kai pajunta turtinę žalą. Pvz., pinigai iš jo banko sąskaitos nukeliavo finansiniams sukčiams. Galima kita situacija, kuomet gali kilti finansiniai nuostoliai paviešinus internete tam tikrą informaciją apie fizinį asmenį. Pvz., apie jo sveikatos būklę. Gavus iš kibernetinių nusikaltėlių reikalavimą mokėti pinigus ar praradus pinigines lėšas reikia priimti sprendimą. Iškyla dilema: viešinti faktą, kad buvai apgautas ar palikti tai paslapyje. Jei viešinti, tai kam patikėti informaciją. Ar įtraukti šeimos narius, artimiausius draugus į neigiamą įvykio aptarimą, sprendimų paiešką. Tai sukelia stresą, koreguoja psichologinę asmens būseną. Tai gali pasireikšti užsidarymu, suirzimu, nenoru bendrauti. Tai gali sukelti papildomų neigiamų pasekmių nuo kibernetinio nusikaltimo finansiškai nukentėjusiam žmogui. Aplinkiniai tai gali priimti kaip arogantiškumo, pasipūtimo ženklus, o jeigu paviešinsi – tai galimos patyčios, ypač tai aktualu jauno amžiaus asmenų grupėse. Naujausi tyrimai rodo, kad Lietuvoje patyčių mokyklose ir internete mastas išlieka vienas didžiausių Europoje – patyčias patiria trečdalis paauglių (Luščinskytė, J., Bieliauskaitė, K., LRT RADIO laida „Lietuvos diena“, LRT.lt. (2025). Jei priimtas sprendimas nesikreipti į teisėsaugos institucijas dėl patirtos turtinės žalos, tai siekis suvaldyti neturtinės žalos padarinius, pablogėjusią nuotaiką, suirzimą, veda į paieškas priemonių, kurios padėtų atstatyti psichologinę pusiausvyrą, suvaldyti stresą. Įvairiose socialinėse grupėse. Pvz., verslininkų, paauglių tarpe labiau gerbiami sėkmingi asmenys, o ne tie, kuriems nepasisėkė. Juo labiau, kad daugelis yra socialinių tinklų vartotojai, susieti vienas su kitu ir vyraujantis interneto reiškiny, kuris įvardijamas terminu „patinka kultūra.“ Socialinių tinklų vartotojų aktyvumas ir socialinis pripažinimas vertinami pagal statistinius rodiklius (kiek kartų paspausta nuoroda „patinka“, kiek buvo pasidalijimų, peržiūrų skaičius). Žmogus dažnai negyvena uždaroje erdvėje, o siekia būti tam tikrame rate, dar kitaip galima pavadinti informaciniame burbule. Tai skatina jį kurti tam tikrą skaitmeninį turinį internete, pvz., patalpinant nuotraukas, pasidalijant savo įspūdžiais apie kelionę ir platinti tam tikrame rate. Pvz., socialiniame tinkle „Facebook“ draugų rate ir žinoma sulaukti paspaudimų „patinka.“ Tai pakelia nuotaiką, savivertę. Juk retas kuris išdrįs pateikti informaciją, kad buvo apgautas finansinių sukčių, ir laukti aplinkinių reakcijos. Neturtinės žalos poveikis padaromas fiziniam asmeniui sunkiai gali būti įvertinamas pinigine išraiška. Priežastys, kodėl fizinis asmuo nenori kreiptis į teisėsaugos institucijas, šio tyrimo autorių nuomone, remiantis praktinio darbo patirtimi teisėsaugos srityje tiriant nusikalstamas veikas gali būti įvairios, pradedant gėda, juk tokioje paprastoje situacijoje

kvailai pasielgiau, pasiteisinant, kad buvo užkluptas staiga, netinkamu laiku ir vietoje. Kita dažna priežastis stabdanti pavišinti informaciją, kad tapai kibernetinio nusikaltimo taikiniu ir nukentėjai yra stoka pasitikėjimo teisėsaugos institucijomis. Pvz., policijai trūksta įgūdžių ir žinių, specialios programinės įrangos nustatyti kibernetinius nusikaltėlius ir beveik netikint kad pavyks susigrąžinti išviliotus pinigus. Reputacijos praradimas taikytinas tiek ūkio subjektams/ pvz., įmonės bijo, kad atskleidus apie kibernetinio saugumo pažeidimą įmonės informacinėje sistemoje, ar elektroninių duomenų pavogimas, sumažins jų reputaciją, klientų pasitikėjimą ir įmonės rinkos vertę. Tai dar gali patraukti institucijų, atsakingų už kibernetinį saugumą, duomenų apsaugą dėmesį. Fiziniai asmenys, ypač paaugliai, ar asmenys užimantys visuomenės hierarchijoje aukštą vietą, pvz., sėkmingas verslininkas ir tuo pačiu verslo draugijų narys gerai įvertins rizikas, keliančias jo reputacijai, prieš viešindamas faktą, kad nukentėjo nuo finansinių sukčių. Kita priežastis nesikreipti, gali būti patirtos turtinės žalos suma dėl kibernetinio nusikaltimo. Jei suma nedidelė vertinant ūkio subjekto apyvartos mastu, tai nukentėjusysis gali laikyti nusikaltimą pernelyg nereikšmingu, kad vertėtų kreiptis į teisėsaugos institucijas. Kita priežastis dėl kurios nukentėjusieji nesikreipia, tai dėl žinių stokos apie kibernetinę higieną, dažnai žmonės net nesuvokia, kad tapo kibernetinės atakos taikiniu.

Kibernetinių nusikaltimų poveikis žmogui pasireiškia ne tik finansiniais praradimais, o taip pat, tiesiogiai daro įtaką žmogaus sveikatos būklei, pradedant pablogėjusia psichine būkle. Oliveira, C., Saka, M., Bone, L. and Jacob, R. (2023) atliko tyrimą, kuriuo siekė išnagrinėti psichinės sveikatos ir prarasto darbo našumo sąsajas. Atlikus tyrimą buvo rasta aiškių įrodymų, kad prasta psichinė sveikata, paprastai vertinama kaip depresija ir (arba) nerimas, buvo susijusi su darbo našumo sumažėjimu, kuris Lietuvoje dar stipriai atsilieka nuo ES vidurkio (**Assessment of the labour productivity developments in Lithuania and the EU, 2022**). Su žmogaus saugumo jausmu yra susijęs ir Pasaulio laimės indeksas (angl. World Happiness Report), kuriame Lietuvos Respublika nukrito iš 16 vietos 2025 m. net į 28 vietą 2026 m. (World Happiness Report 2026). Laimės vertinimo indeksas paprastai siejamas su šešiais pagrindiniais veiksniais, iš kurių su šiuo tyrimu sietini šie du veiksniai: laisvė priimti sprendimus ir pasitikėjimas valdžia. Ekonomistas Nerijus Mačiulis neseniai analizavo, kodėl Lietuva nusmuko Pasaulio laimės indekso vertinime, juk nebuvo drastiškų pokyčių šalyje. Lietuvos Respublikos vertinime didelės įtakos turėjo socialinės paramos veiksnys, pagal jį iš 3 nukrista į 33 vietą. Tai siejama su saugumo jausmu, o būtent kiek žmogus jaučiasi palaikomas aplinkos, o ne tik su gaunamomis pašalpomis ar finansine parama.

Pažymima, kad kibernetiniai nusikaltimai daro kompleksinį poveikį asmenims, apimančią tiek psichinę būklę, tiek finansinę padėtį. Tyrimai rodo, kad nukentėję nuo kibernetinių atakų asmenys dažnai patiria padidėjusį stresą, nerimą, miego sutrikimus bei sumažėjusį saugumo jausmą, nes tokio pobūdžio nusikaltimai pažeidžia asmens privatumo ir kontrolės suvokimą (Bada, M., Nurse, J. R. C. (2019)). Be to, daugelis kibernetinių nusikaltimų yra paremti socialinės inžinerijos metodais, kurie kaip jau buvo minėta, išnaudoja žmogaus emocijas - pasitikėjimą, baimę ar skubos jausmą, todėl aukos neretai susiduria su kaltės, gėdos jausmais bei sumažėjusiu pasitikėjimu savimi. Tokios patirtys gali lemti ilgalaikius psichologinius padarinius, panašius į potrauminio streso simptomus. Kartu kibernetiniai nusikaltimai turi tiesioginį poveikį asmens finansinei padėčiai, nes dėl sukčiavimo ar tapatybės vagystės patirti nuostoliai dažnai nėra visiškai kompensuojami, o tai gali sukelti ilgalaikį finansinį nestabilumą. Finansiniai sunkumai savo ruožtu didina psichologinę įtampą, nerimą ir socialinę atskirtį, taip sukurdami uždarą neigiamų pasekmių ratą, kuriame ekonominiai praradimai stiprina psichologinius sunkumus, o pastarieji mažina asmens gebėjimą efektyviai atkurti savo finansinę padėtį (Council of the European Union, 2024).

Išvados

Nusikaltimai skaitmeninėje erdvėje nėra vien tik techniniai incidentai, jie taip pat sistemingai pažeidžia Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucijoje ginamas vertybes.

Kibernetiniais nusikaltimais padaroma turtinė žala, kuri gali būti išmatuojama pinigine išraiška ir neturtinė žala, kurios deja ne visada įmanoma įvertinti pinigais.

Neturtinė žala sietina su žmogaus psichine būkle, kuri daro įtaką tiek fizinio asmens sveikatai, tiek darbo našumui, taip pat daranti įtaką šalies gebėjimui konkuruoti pasaulyje.

Kibernetiniai nusikaltimai dėl įvairių priežasčių pasižymi latentiskumu ir paveikia žmogaus nuostatas į įvairius procesus.

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THE IMPACT OF CYBERCRIME ON HUMAN BEINGS

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Summary. The 21st century is known as the digital age, which has fundamentally impacted various aspects of people's lives and government processes, and has radically transformed the processes and formats of information collection, processing, dissemination, and storage. Just thirty years ago, the possibility of remotely registering a business and obtaining permits from government agencies to carry out certain economic activities without leaving home seemed like an unattainable dream, a scenario straight out of a science fiction story. Rapidly developing technologies have created opportunities for remote communication, the transmission of vast amounts of information from one continent to another in a matter of seconds, and the execution of financial transactions; yet, at the same time, they have created new threats to the security of individuals, society, and nations. These threats are referred to as "cybercrimes" and exist alongside long-established threats such as "corruption," "organized crime," and "terrorism." Cybercrime, still referred to in academic literature as "high-tech crime," causes significant harm to individuals, society, and businesses when identity theft, data theft, various financial crimes, the dissemination of misleading information, manipulation, malware, espionage, various attacks against state institutions, and more. The European Union (hereinafter "EU") law enforcement agency (hereinafter "Europol") notes that cybercrime poses the greatest threat to both national security and to individuals and society. Cybercriminals are becoming increasingly aggressive, and their activities are becoming more dangerous and more organized and coordinated, aimed at achieving a specific goal. The subject of this study is the impact of cybercrime on individuals. The subject of this study also determined its objective, which is to analyze the impact of cybercrime on individuals through the lens of personal security. To achieve the objective of this study, an analysis was conducted of scientific articles published both in Lithuania and abroad regarding the targets, trends, and impact of cybercrimes on individuals' financial stability, psychological state, and the resulting negative consequences. The study found that, first and foremost, individuals suffer harm that can be measured and expressed in monetary terms. This is followed by non-pecuniary damage, which is much harder to detect, measure, and is not always visually apparent, manifesting as a deterioration in an individual's mental health that affects various aspects of their life. This article aims to answer two questions raised by the study: which fundamental human rights enshrined in national and international legal acts are violated by cybercrimes? What harm does a person suffer when they become the target of a cyber incident? How do people react to cyberattacks? How does a cyber incident affect a person's financial stability, mental health, and well-being? The study employs the following qualitative and quantitative research methods: document analysis, comparative analysis, abstraction, logical analysis, and other research methods.

Keywords: cybercrimes, impact, individual, society, sense of security, harm, mental state.



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GROWTH METRICS, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE OVERLOOKED CONDITIONS OF SOCIETAL SECURITY

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Abstract. Regional development policy across the European Union continues to rely predominantly on growth-oriented metrics such as GDP, employment rates, investment absorption and productivity indices to evaluate whether regions are progressing. Yet these measures are structurally blind to two conditions fundamental to long-term societal security: social sufficiency floors, meaning minimum acceptable standards of well-being and inclusion, and environmental sustainability ceilings, meaning maximum levels of ecological pressure compatible with stable, liveable communities. This paper argues that this measurement gap constitutes a genuine security vulnerability: one that allows regions to appear successful on paper while social deprivation deepens and environmental conditions deteriorate.

Drawing on the beyond-GDP economics literature, human and societal security studies, and EU cohesion policy evaluation research, the paper develops three interlocking arguments. First, dominant evaluation frameworks are structurally insensitive to social shortfalls and environmental overshoot: regional well-being measures and GDP diverge systematically at NUTS-2 level, and cohesion policy assessments anchored in growth metrics fail to detect environmentally meaningful progress. Second, these omissions correspond to documented security pathways: persistent regional inequality erodes institutional trust, fuels populist voting and generates political instability, while environmental deterioration creates deferred but compounding insecurity through climate exposure, health burdens and transition risk. Third, a dual-boundary approach that assesses regions against explicit social sufficiency floors and environmental sustainability ceilings as joint necessary conditions offers a principled and practically feasible direction for evaluation reform. This approach adapts the intellectual lineage running from Rockström et al. (2009) and Dearing et al. (2014) through Raworth's Doughnut Economics (2017), translating the insight that the central policy question should be not merely how much growth, but whether societies are operating in a space that is simultaneously sufficient and sustainable, into the EU regional development and cohesion policy context.

These arguments are illustrated at two territorial scales. At the national level, a comparison of Lithuania and the Netherlands demonstrates that GDP convergence and dual-boundary performance are empirically decoupled: Lithuania records strong GDP growth yet fails its social sufficiency floor, while the Netherlands meets social conditions but presses its environmental ceiling. At the urban level, Rotterdam illustrates the same decoupling within a single prosperous city: strong aggregate economic performance coexists with concentrated social deprivation in specific districts and one of Europe's largest sources of industrial greenhouse gas emissions. The main finding is that current metrics systematically reward growth while remaining insensitive to the structural conditions upon which durable regional security depends, and that this failure is detectable at both national and urban scales.

Keywords: regional development; societal security; beyond-GDP; social sufficiency; EU cohesion policy; dual-boundary approach

Introduction

In 2022, the European Commission's eighth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion (European Commission 2022) confirmed a familiar pattern: decades of structural fund investment had reduced GDP per capita disparities between EU member states, yet significant regional inequalities persisted, and environmental performance across EU regions remained deeply uneven. The headline finding summarised as convergence in economic output was presented as progress. Yet within many of the converging regions, poverty rates remained high, energy poverty was worsening, institutional trust was declining, and emissions trajectories were incompatible with the EU's own climate commitments. Growth metrics had done their job: they had recorded economic activity. What they had not recorded was whether the conditions for durable, liveable and politically stable regional communities were actually being built.

This paper argues that this is not an incidental measurement failure. It is a structural feature of evaluation systems that were designed to track economic performance and have been extended, by institutional habit and analytical convenience, to serve as proxies for regional development more broadly. GDP per capita, employment rates, investment absorption and productivity indices capture what they were designed to capture: marketed economic activity. They are blind by design to the social sufficiency conditions that determine whether communities can function with dignity and resilience, and to the environmental sustainability conditions that determine whether regional development remains viable over time (Holmes and Widuto 2025). When these blind spots are combined, they create a particular kind of governance failure: one that generates false reassurance about the health of regions that are, in fact, accumulating serious and compounding vulnerabilities.

The security dimension of this failure is the specific focus of this paper. Regional inequality and social deprivation are not merely development problems; they are generators of insecurity in a direct and empirically documented sense. Persistent deprivation erodes institutional trust, fuels distributional grievances and contributes to the political volatility that has reshaped European democratic landscapes over the past decade (Lipps and Schraff 2021; Algan et al. 2017). Environmental deterioration creates its own security pathways: through health burdens, climate exposure, resource stress and the political crises that follow when communities bear the costs of ecological overshoot without warning or support.

These dynamics operate at multiple territorial scales simultaneously. At the national level, Lithuania's rapid GDP convergence has not lifted its population above the social sufficiency threshold: with 25.8 per cent of its population at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024, it records one of the highest rates in the EU despite two decades of economic growth (Eurostat 2025a). At the urban level, Rotterdam, one of Europe's most economically significant cities, presents a metropolitan GDP that masks deep internal inequality: Rotterdam-Zuid, home to 200,000 residents, is the most deprived area in the Netherlands (CBS 2024b), while the port complex that generates much of the city's economic identity accounts for approximately 14 per cent of all Dutch CO₂ emissions (Port of Rotterdam Authority 2024). A regional evaluation framework that cannot detect these dynamics at either scale is not only analytically incomplete: it is a governance instrument that systematically fails to alert policymakers to the conditions most likely to generate instability, and fails to direct policy resources toward preventing them.

The paper makes a conceptual case for extending existing regional evaluation by adding a dual-boundary dimension: an assessment of regional development against explicit social sufficiency floors, understood as minimum acceptable standards of well-being and inclusion, as well as environmental sustainability ceilings, interpreted as maximum levels of ecological pressure compatible with stable, liveable communities. Drawing on the beyond-GDP

economics literature (Holmes and Widuto 2025), human and societal security studies (Lipps and Schraff 2021) and EU cohesion policy evaluation research (European Commission 2022; Ferrara et al. 2022), it argues that this extension is both conceptually sound and practically necessary. It is conceptually sound because the dual-boundary logic captures the structural conditions for security that growth metrics miss. It is practically necessary because EU policy architecture, which includes cohesion policy, the European Green Deal and the just transition mechanism, already implicitly aspires to these dual conditions, yet lacks the evaluation framework needed to make them measurable and accountable.

The conceptual architecture of the dual-boundary approach developed here draws on three established bodies of scholarship, which it adapts rather than adopts wholesale. The first is the planetary boundaries framework, introduced by Rockström et al. (2009) and subsequently elaborated to identify nine biophysical limits within which human societies can operate sustainably, including climate stability, biodiversity integrity and freshwater use. The second is the social foundations literature, represented most fully by Dearing et al. (2014), who operationalised a set of minimum social thresholds below which human well-being is systematically compromised. Taken together, these two frameworks define a "safe and just operating space": a zone above the social floor and below the environmental ceiling. The third body of scholarship is the synthesis offered by Raworth (2017) in *Doughnut Economics*, which brought these two frameworks together into a unified evaluative model and, crucially, proposed a fundamental reorientation of the central policy question: not how much economic growth is being generated, but whether societies are operating within this space. This mindset shift, from growth as the objective to the dual-boundary zone as the target, is the specific intellectual contribution this paper applies to the evaluation architecture of EU regional development policy. The analysis adopts the boundary logic and the evaluative reorientation that Raworth articulates, while translating them into the vocabulary of EU regional development assessment, where the goal is not to replace GDP-based analysis but to add the dual-boundary dimension as a necessary complement to it.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews what current regional development metrics measure and what they systematically miss, establishing the empirical case for the measurement gap. Section 3 develops the security argument, showing how the omitted dimensions, social floors and environmental ceilings, correspond to documented pathways from regional deprivation and ecological deterioration to institutional distrust, political instability and societal insecurity. Section 4 sets out the research methodology, explaining the literature review approach and the rationale for the two-level comparative case analysis. Section 5 illustrates the dual-boundary argument at two territorial scales: first through a national-level comparison of Lithuania and the Netherlands, then through an urban-level analysis of Rotterdam, demonstrating that the decoupling between economic metrics and dual-boundary performance is detectable both between countries and within a single prosperous city. Section 6 introduces the dual-boundary evaluation approach, distinguishes it from existing beyond-GDP frameworks, and develops its implications for EU cohesion and just transition governance. Section 7 discusses limitations and the challenges of operationalisation. Section 8 concludes with the core argument restated and a set of concrete policy implications.

What Regional Development Metrics Currently Measure and What They Don't

Regional development policy in the European Union has long been shaped by a deep institutional logic: structural funds target regions where GDP per capita falls below 75 per cent of the EU average, embedding growth as the foundation of both eligibility and performance

assessment. This architecture was designed to address economic convergence, and it has achieved measurable success on its own terms. But as Widuto (2016) observes, GDP does not account for social and environmental costs, nor does it reflect social and territorial inequalities, a limitation that is structural rather than incidental, rooted in what the indicator was designed to measure rather than what regional policy is intended to achieve.

Standard regional evaluation captures employment rates and investment absorption, but it does not assess whether regions are meeting minimum social conditions: whether poverty is falling below socially tolerable levels, whether households can afford adequate heating, whether access to health services and decent housing is sufficient for communities to function with stability and resilience. These sufficiency dimensions can deteriorate, or remain persistently inadequate, within regions that simultaneously record positive GDP and employment trajectories, a decoupling that the beyond-GDP literature has documented across EU member states over successive programming periods (Holmes and Widuto 2025). The European Social Progress Index (EU-SPI), developed by the European Commission specifically to capture non-economic dimensions of regional development, offers a direct empirical test of this gap. Beltrán-Estevé et al. (2023), analysing the EU-SPI across EU NUTS-2 regions, confirm that the index and GDP per capita are positively correlated but not substitutes: each captures dimensions of regional performance that the other misses, particularly in the domains of basic human needs and individual opportunity. Their analysis provides direct evidence that GDP-based evaluation, however refined, cannot serve as a proxy for the social conditions that regional development policy is ultimately intended to improve.

The measurement gap does not end with the social dimension. An analogous structural blindness applies to the environmental consequences of regional economic activity. Production-based indicators such as territorial GDP and associated emissions inventories measure economic activity at its point of origin but cannot detect the ecological footprint that regional consumption imposes on wider systems. Wilting et al. (2021), constructing subnational consumption-based environmental accounts for EU regions, find that 88 per cent of EU regions import more than half of their total greenhouse gas footprints and 71 per cent import more than half of their land-related biodiversity footprints. Production-based regional metrics therefore substantially understate the environmental responsibility associated with regional economic activity, creating a systematic blind spot in both evaluation and accountability that extends well beyond what territorial GDP can capture.

At the level of policy assessment, the consequences are direct. Albanese et al. (2024), in an influential multidimensional evaluation of the 2007–13 EU Cohesion Policy period, find an overall near-zero effect on environmental outcomes when development is assessed across economic, social, health, education and environmental dimensions simultaneously. This does not mean that cohesion policy failed to generate economic activity; it means that growth-based evaluation frameworks were unable to detect, and therefore unable to incentivise, environmentally meaningful progress. Coscieme et al. (2020), examining GDP across EU-28 countries, confirm the deeper structural relationship: GDP relates inversely to indicators of environmental sustainability, meaning that regions pursuing GDP growth are, on average, moving away from rather than towards the environmental conditions that underpin long-term liveable communities.

This measurement asymmetry has consequences beyond the academic critique of indicator design. When evaluation systems are insensitive to social shortfalls and environmental overshoot, they cannot generate the accountability signals necessary to redirect policy towards preventing those outcomes. Regions can present positive development profiles, including growing GDP, rising employment and high structural fund absorption, while the foundational

conditions that determine their long-term stability and security are eroding. The problem extends below the regional scale. Urban agglomerations present an analogous measurement challenge: city-level aggregate indicators can obscure severe intra-urban disparities in precisely the same way that regional aggregates obscure national-level variation. In municipalities with significant internal economic contrasts, poverty in specific neighbourhoods can become statistically invisible because adjacent prosperous districts inflate the city average, causing deprived communities that would qualify for support on any sufficiency-based assessment to fall below the threshold of policy attention (CBS 2024b; NPRZ 2023). This is not an incidental data artefact; it is the structural consequence of using aggregate metrics for accountability purposes. The argument developed in the following section is that these omissions are not merely suboptimal from a development perspective but constitute genuine security vulnerabilities operating at every territorial scale.

Why This Is a Security Problem, Not Just a Development Problem

The claim that metric blindness in regional policy evaluation constitutes a security problem rather than merely a development shortcoming requires a clear conceptual grounding. Security, in the broad tradition of human security scholarship, extends well beyond the absence of military conflict or criminal violence. Drawing on the foundational contributions of Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998) within the Copenhagen School, societal security refers to the capacity of communities to maintain their essential character, cohesion and functioning under conditions of stress and change. At its core, this requires that basic social conditions are met and that the environmental foundations of liveability are preserved.

The regional scale is a particularly important locus for this analysis. Security outcomes, whether measured in terms of institutional trust, political stability, social cohesion or resilience to economic shocks, are not evenly distributed across national territories. They are shaped powerfully by the specific social and environmental conditions that prevail in particular places. A region that records positive aggregate economic performance while concentrating deprivation in peripheral sub-areas, or that absorbs EU structural funds while its emissions trajectory remains incompatible with climate targets, is not building durable security. The evaluation frameworks that fail to see this are not merely incomplete; they are producing false reassurance about the security foundations of regional communities.

Understood in this light, evaluation frameworks function as early-warning systems, or as substitutes for them. A framework that cannot detect social floor violations or environmental ceiling breaches does not merely fail to warn; it actively reassures, signalling regional health where structural vulnerabilities are accumulating. The distinction between an evaluation architecture that generates early warnings and one that generates false reassurance is, from a security governance perspective, the central distinction that this paper addresses. The following paragraphs document the empirical mechanisms through which this substitution produces measurable and consequential harm.

The pathways through which persistent social deprivation translates into measurable insecurity outcomes are now well-documented empirically. At the most fundamental level, regional inequality erodes the institutional trust that makes governance effective and legitimate. Lipps and Schraff (2021), in a panel study covering 209 NUTS-2 regions across 24 EU member states from 2010 to 2016, find that living in an economically declining, left-behind region carries a direct and sizeable negative effect on trust in EU institutions, operating over and above the effect of individual income or national-level inequality. The regional dimension of

deprivation matters independently: it is not sufficient to track national averages. Regions that fall behind generate trust deficits that national-level social transfers alone cannot repair.

Nordic and Baltic comprehensive security doctrines offer a pertinent parallel. Finnish, Swedish and Estonian security strategy frameworks identify societal resilience as a foundational layer of national defence that requires sustained cultivation across the full fabric of community life rather than improvised mobilisation in moments of crisis (Prime Minister's Office Finland 2017; Swedish Defence Commission 2023). Social sufficiency constitutes, in this doctrine, a security precondition rather than a welfare amenity: the institutional trust, community cohesion and participatory governance that make societies resilient under pressure must already be present when pressure arrives. Where evaluation architecture cannot detect the erosion of these conditions, it contributes to a gap in the early-warning function of European security governance.

The mechanism linking deprivation to institutional distrust is partially mediated by the quality of public institutions themselves. Van de Walle and Migchelbrink (2022) find that process quality, and particularly the perceived absence of corruption, is a more powerful driver of trust in public administration than service output improvements. A one-standard-deviation improvement in perceived absence of corruption raises the odds of trusting public administration by approximately 39 per cent, compared to 22 per cent for equivalent improvements in service outcomes. This finding carries an important implication for regional policy: regions that perform well on growth metrics but poorly on governance quality are likely to experience trust erosion even as their headline development indicators improve. Palmisano and Sacchi (2024), examining EU-28 countries over 2003 to 2019, confirm that rising income inequality significantly reduces trust in national governments, providing a direct longitudinal link between the social shortfalls that growth metrics miss and the institutional legitimacy that regional security requires.

When institutional trust erodes sufficiently, downstream political consequences follow. Algan et al. (2017), exploiting pre-crisis construction exposure as an instrumental variable, demonstrate causally that regional unemployment increases during the Great Recession raised votes for non-mainstream, especially populist, parties while simultaneously lowering trust in national and EU institutions, with virtually no effect on interpersonal trust, indicating that the mechanism is specifically political-institutional rather than general social fragmentation. This is the pathway through which social shortfalls, undetected by GDP-centric evaluation systems, become threats to political stability. Duque Gabriel et al. (2023) demonstrate that austerity consolidations, which effectively breach social floors in affected regions, increase extreme-party vote shares and depress turnout, amplifying political distrust and weakening democratic accountability precisely in the regions most dependent on policy support.

The environmental dimension of insecurity operates through a parallel but distinct set of pathways. Environmental deterioration, whether measured in terms of air quality, ecosystem degradation, resource stress or the trajectory of emissions relative to climate targets, imposes direct costs on regional communities that GDP not only fails to measure but in some cases actively rewards, as established in the previous section (Coscieme et al. 2020). This means that regions pursuing conventional development paths are, in many cases, simultaneously accumulating environmental liabilities that will eventually materialise as costs, to health, to liveability and to productive capacity, that neither their current metrics nor their policy frameworks are designed to anticipate. The European Environment Agency's regional assessments confirm that climate-related risks are unevenly distributed across EU territories, with some regions facing compounding exposure to heat stress, flooding and water scarcity that is entirely absent from standard cohesion policy evaluation criteria.

The security implications of environmental overshoot are most visible in the context of climate-related risks and energy vulnerability. Regions with high dependence on carbon-intensive industries face both transition risk, meaning the economic disruption associated with decarbonisation policies, and physical risk from climate impacts. When evaluation frameworks fail to track environmental trajectory, they cannot identify which regions face the most severe combinations of these risks, and cohesion policy cannot be calibrated to address them. This is not a hypothetical concern: the EU's just transition mechanism was established precisely because the distributional consequences of the green transition were not adequately anticipated by conventional regional evaluation systems. Environmental overshoot generates a particular form of insecurity: one that is diffuse, deferred and largely invisible to growth-oriented metrics until it materialises as acute economic shock or political crisis.

Rodríguez-Pose et al. (2023) provide granular evidence for this territorial differentiation: in small EU regions, each one-percentage-point increase in annual GDP per capita growth is associated with approximately 0.5 percentage points lower far-right vote share, with the political penalty for economic decline being markedly larger in regions with higher immigrant shares. This finding illustrates how the interaction of social deprivation with place-specific demographic conditions amplifies the security consequences of measurement blindness: evaluation frameworks that treat all regions through the same growth lens cannot detect the specific configurations of risk that make some places disproportionately vulnerable. A genuinely security-sensitive evaluation framework must be territorially differentiated, sensitive to the distinct ways that social and environmental conditions are violated in different types of places.

The evidence reviewed in this section establishes a clear and empirically grounded case: the measurement gap described in the previous section is not merely an analytical inconvenience. It corresponds to real and consequential security vulnerabilities, including erosion of institutional trust, political destabilisation, climate exposure and the spatial concentration of disadvantage in places that existing frameworks systematically overlook. These dynamics are detectable at the national scale and within prosperous cities at the neighbourhood scale, as the empirical analysis in Section 5 demonstrates. Section 4 sets out the methodological approach used to investigate them, explaining the rationale for the two-level comparative design and the data sources on which the analysis draws.

Research Methodology

This paper combines two complementary methodological approaches. The first is a systematic conceptual analysis of the academic and policy literature on regional development evaluation, beyond-GDP measurement frameworks, human and societal security studies, and EU cohesion policy assessment. Literature searches were conducted in six thematic rounds using systematic search protocols, covering: EU cohesion policy metrics and their limitations; GDP limitations for regional development evaluation; the relationship between social deprivation and institutional trust; the relationship between regional inequality and political stability; boundary-based measurement frameworks; and beyond-GDP applications to EU regional contexts. Sources were selected for direct relevance to the paper's conceptual argument, emphasis on EU regional evidence, and quality of empirical grounding. This literature provides the conceptual and empirical backbone of Sections 2 and 3.

The second approach is an illustrative comparative analysis conducted at two territorial scales. At the national level, Lithuania and the Netherlands are compared using publicly available Eurostat and European Environment Agency data. At the urban level, Rotterdam is

analysed as an intra-city case using data from Statistics Netherlands (CBS), the Port of Rotterdam Authority and the National Programme Rotterdam Zuid (NPRZ). This two-level design serves a specific and limited purpose: to demonstrate, with real data, that the measurement gap identified in the conceptual argument is empirically visible at both the country and city scale, and that it produces distinct, policy-relevant failure modes at each. The national case pair was selected deliberately. Both countries have been subject to the same EU cohesion policy and evaluation regime. They represent contrasting positions within the EU development spectrum: Lithuania as a converging lower-income member state, the Netherlands as a high-income institutionally stable economy. They are countries in which the first author has direct biographical and professional familiarity. Crucially, they illustrate two distinct national-level failure modes: one country breaching social floors despite positive GDP trajectories, the other meeting social floors but pressing environmental ceilings. Rotterdam was selected as the urban case because it directly illustrates the intra-city dimension of the argument: as Europe's largest port and a major contributor to Dutch GDP, it performs well by conventional aggregate economic metrics, yet simultaneously concentrates severe social floor violations in Rotterdam-Zuid while hosting an industrial complex responsible for approximately 14 per cent of total Dutch CO₂ emissions. The first author's direct professional and biographical familiarity with Rotterdam, including residence in the city, enables more grounded contextualisation of the data than would otherwise be possible.

Four indicators are used, drawn from the most recent available Eurostat and European Commission data at the time of writing. Social floor indicators are: the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) rate, which captures multidimensional poverty and social exclusion and is the primary monitoring indicator under the European Pillar of Social Rights; and the share of the population unable to keep their home adequately warm, which operationalises energy poverty as a specific social sufficiency floor dimension of particular relevance to Northern and Eastern European contexts. Environmental ceiling indicators are: net greenhouse gas emissions per capita (including land use, land-use change and forestry), which measures territorial emissions intensity relative to the EU average and the Paris Agreement trajectory; and the gap between projected 2030 GHG reductions and national climate targets under the EU's Effort Sharing Regulation, which captures the degree of environmental ceiling overshoot on a policy-relevant timescale. GDP per capita in purchasing power standards (PPS, EU average = 100) is included as a reference indicator to contextualise both countries' position under conventional evaluation frameworks.

The comparison is illustrative rather than causal. No claim is made that differences in indicator values are attributable to specific policies or governance choices. The purpose is to demonstrate that growth convergence and boundary-relevant security conditions are empirically decoupled in ways that conventional evaluation frameworks cannot detect, and that the decoupling takes different forms in different regional contexts.

Illustrating the Gap at Two Scales: National and Urban

The dual-boundary argument holds that growth metrics systematically fail to detect two distinct types of regional insecurity: social floor violations where economic convergence has not translated into adequate social conditions, and environmental ceiling pressures where prosperity has been built on an ecologically unsustainable basis. The following analysis illustrates these failure modes at two territorial scales: first at the national level through a comparison of Lithuania and the Netherlands, then at the urban level through an analysis of Rotterdam. Both levels draw on publicly available official statistics and demonstrate the same

core finding: that GDP and related growth metrics present a positive picture while dual-boundary conditions are being violated.

Table 1. Social floor and environmental ceiling indicators: Lithuania and the Netherlands

Indicator	Lithuania	Netherlands	EU average	Source
GDP per capita in PPS (EU27=100), 2024	87	134	100	Eurostat, 2025
At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (AROPE, %), 2024	25.8 (p) ¹	15.4	20.2	Eurostat, 2025
Unable to keep home adequately warm (%), 2024	18.0	7.1	9.2	Eurostat, 2025
Net GHG emissions per capita (tCO ₂ -eq, incl. LULUCF), 2024	7.7	8.3	7.6	EC, 2025

Source: Eurostat (2025a/b/c); European Commission Climate Action Progress Report factsheets (2025).

Viewed through a conventional evaluation lens, both countries present as broadly successful cases within the EU framework. Lithuania has achieved remarkable GDP convergence over the past two decades, rising from around 50 per cent of the EU average in PPS terms at the time of accession to approximately 87 per cent by 2024, one of the fastest convergence trajectories in the EU. The Netherlands consistently records GDP per capita well above the EU average, strong institutional quality, low unemployment and high scores on composite well-being indices. By the metrics that EU cohesion policy uses to determine eligibility and assess performance, neither country presents an urgent or unambiguous signal of concern.

The social floor indicators tell a different story for Lithuania (Fig. 1). With 25.8 per cent of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024, among the top five highest in the EU, and more than 5 percentage points above the EU average of 20.2 per cent, Lithuania's social floor position has remained deeply problematic throughout its GDP convergence period. Energy poverty is particularly acute: 18.0 per cent of the Lithuanian population reported being unable to keep their home adequately warm in 2024, the third highest rate in the EU and nearly double the EU average of 9.2 per cent. This is not a residual legacy problem on the verge of resolution; it is a structural condition that GDP growth has, in the language of the dual-boundary framework, failed to lift above the social sufficiency floor. The security implications, as established in Section 3, are direct: regions with this depth of social deprivation exhibit elevated institutional distrust, heightened political volatility and the kind of distributional grievance that makes communities disproportionately vulnerable to populist mobilisation.

¹ (p) Provisional value.

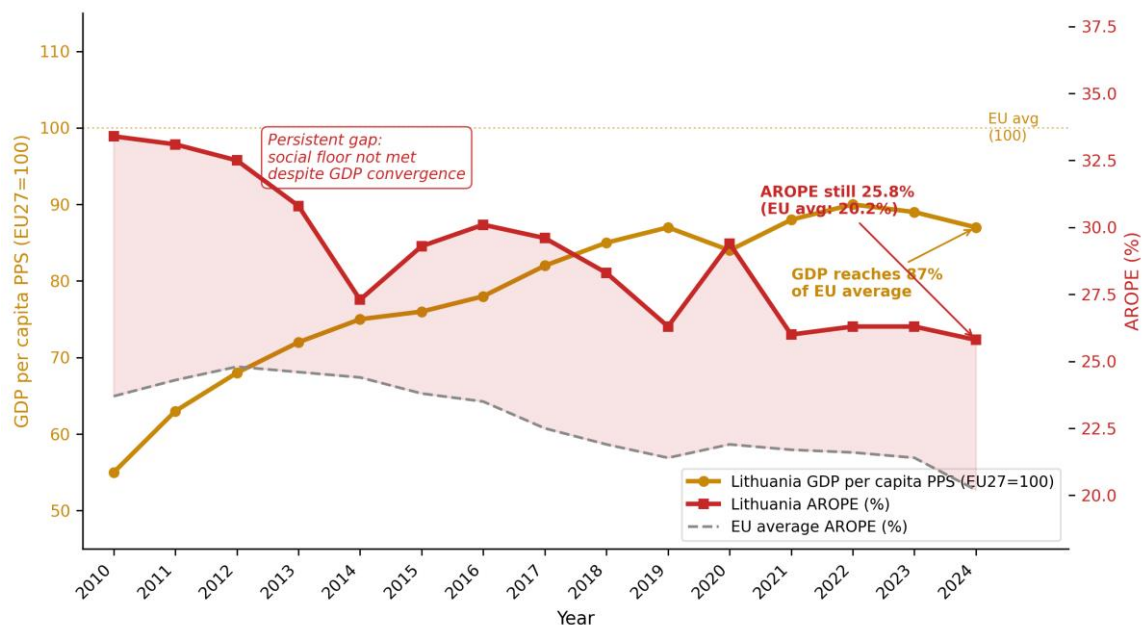


Fig. 1 Lithuania: GDP Convergence and Social Floor Performance, 2010–2024²

Source: GDP per capita in PPS: dataset tec00114; Eurostat (2025b) — At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion (AROPE): dataset ilc_peps01n. 2024 data provisional (p)

The environmental ceiling indicators tell a different story for the Netherlands. With net GHG emissions of 8.3 tonnes of CO₂-equivalent per capita in 2024, above the EU average of 7.6 tonnes, and with current policies projected to deliver only a 46 to 52 per cent reduction by 2030 against a statutory target of 55 per cent, the Netherlands faces a significant and acknowledged gap between its emissions trajectory and the environmental ceiling that the Paris Agreement implies. The 10-percentage-point shortfall against its Effort Sharing Regulation target is the largest projected deficit in the comparison pair. This is not primarily a problem of economic stagnation or social deprivation; social floor indicators for the Netherlands are among the best in the EU, but of a high-consumption development model that has not yet been adequately decoupled from its ecological footprint. The security implications are also direct: regions and countries whose emissions trajectories remain incompatible with climate targets are accumulating transition risk, physical climate exposure and the political instability that follows when the costs of inadequate mitigation eventually materialise.

The most significant observation from this comparison is not what the individual indicators show about each country in isolation, but what the comparison itself reveals about the relationship between economic growth and dual-boundary performance. Lithuania's GDP convergence has been real and substantial, yet it has not been sufficient to lift the country above its social sufficiency floor. The Netherlands' economic prosperity has been real and sustained, yet it has not been compatible with staying within its environmental sustainability ceiling. In both cases, GDP per capita, the primary indicator used in EU cohesion policy evaluation, tells an essentially positive story: convergence in Lithuania, high performance in the Netherlands. The dual-boundary indicators tell a more differentiated and, from a security perspective, more accurate story: one country is failing its citizens on basic social conditions; the other is failing

² The left axis (amber) shows Lithuania's GDP per capita convergence toward the EU average (EU27=100). The right axis (red) shows the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate.

its obligations on environmental sustainability. Neither failure is visible from the vantage point of conventional growth metrics.

It should be noted that this comparison operates at the national level, while the full analytical force of the dual-boundary framework is intended for NUTS-2 and NUTS-3 regional analysis. National aggregates conceal significant within-country variation: Lithuania's two statistical regions differ in their social floor conditions, and the Netherlands' twelve provinces differ considerably in their emissions profiles and environmental pressures. The regional-level operationalisation of the dual-boundary framework, using comparable subnational indicators for social floors and environmental ceilings across the full range of EU regions, is the empirical agenda that this illustrative comparison is intended to motivate. The following section establishes the conceptual logic of the framework formally, explains why these specific boundary dimensions were selected, and distinguishes the approach from existing composite well-being indices.

The economic context is worth establishing before examining the failure modes. Zuid-Holland, the province in which Rotterdam is located, is the second largest provincial economy in the Netherlands, contributing 20.6 per cent of Dutch national GDP in 2024 (CBS 2024c). Within this, the Port of Rotterdam alone accounts for approximately 6.2 per cent of Dutch national added value, a figure that rises to double the conventional estimate when the forwards indirect effects, meaning economic activities enabled elsewhere in the Netherlands by the port's presence, are included (Erasmus University Rotterdam / Port of Rotterdam Authority 2018). Rotterdam is not a lagging region seeking convergence; it is a high-value node in one of Europe's most prosperous provincial economies. This makes the following observations considerably more striking.

Rotterdam provides a particularly instructive illustration of how these security dynamics operate within a prosperous urban economy rather than only in peripheral or lagging regions. As Figure 2 illustrates, the city records an employment rate of 68.9 per cent, more than ten percentage points below the Dutch national average of 79.3 per cent, and a poverty rate of 6.2 per cent, the highest of any major Dutch municipality and double the national figure (CBS 2024a; CBS 2024b).

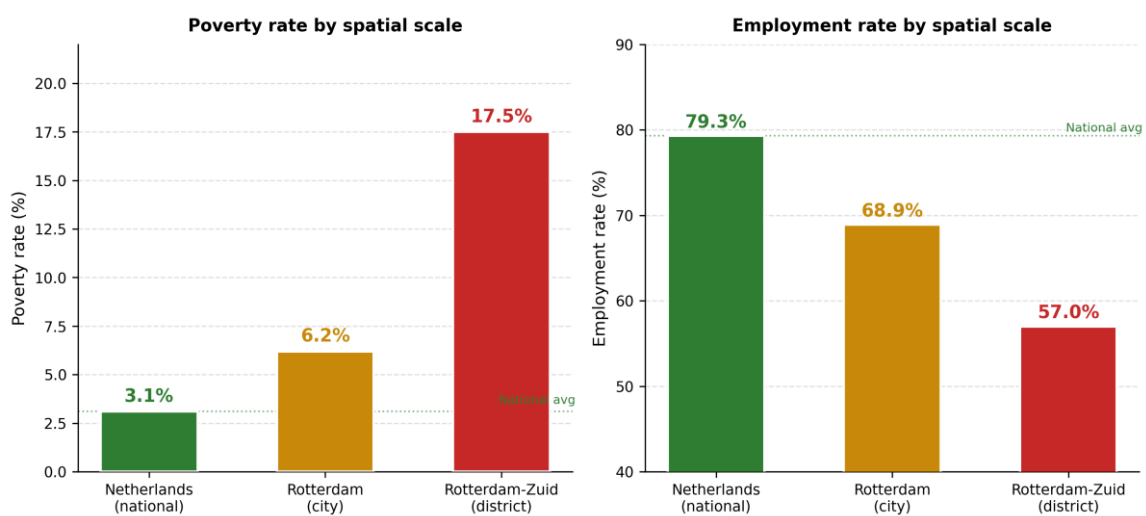


Fig. 2 The Measurement Gap Within a Prosperous City: Rotterdam, 2023

Source: CBS (2024a) *Armoede en Sociale Uitsluiting 2023*; CBS (2024b) *New Method of Measuring Poverty*; NPRZ (2023) *Uitvoeringsplan NPRZ 2023–2026*.

Rotterdam-Zuid, home to approximately 200,000 residents, concentrates approximately 40 per cent of the city's entire welfare caseload despite representing roughly 30 per cent of its population. The National Programme Rotterdam Zuid (NPRZ), a 20-year government intervention running since 2011 with national and municipal co-financing of €260 million in its first decade alone, exists precisely because conventional evaluation frameworks that measure Rotterdam's aggregate economic performance were generating no accountability signal about these conditions (NPRZ 2023). The security implications identified in Section 3, including institutional trust erosion, distributional grievance and political fragmentation, apply in concentrated form to the communities of Rotterdam-Zuid, located at a literal distance from some of the most expensive real estate in the Netherlands. This is not a problem that aggregate growth metrics can detect, and it is therefore not a problem they can motivate policy to prevent.

Toward a Dual-Boundary Approach to Regional Evaluation

The argument developed in the preceding sections points toward a specific evaluative reorientation. If growth metrics are structurally blind to social sufficiency floors and environmental sustainability ceilings, and if this blindness generates security vulnerabilities, then the corrective logic is to build those boundaries explicitly into how regional development is assessed. The dual-boundary approach proposed here does not require abandoning existing evaluation frameworks or replacing GDP as an economic indicator. It requires adding a second evaluative dimension: one that asks not only how much economic activity a region generates, but whether that region is simultaneously meeting minimum social conditions and staying within maximum environmental limits.

The intellectual foundations of this approach rest on three bodies of work introduced in the opening section of this paper, whose combined contribution is more than the sum of their parts. Rockström et al. (2009) established the biophysical science: nine planetary boundaries within which human civilisation can operate sustainably, including climate stability, biodiversity integrity, land system change and freshwater use. Dearing et al. (2014) operationalised the social dimension: minimum thresholds below which human well-being is systematically compromised across twelve dimensions including food, water, health, energy and political voice. These two frameworks together define a safe and just operating space. What they did not provide was an evaluative instrument: a way of using that space as an accountability framework rather than merely as a descriptive or scientific concept.

That is Raworth's specific contribution in *Doughnut Economics* (2017), and it is the reason this paper treats the Doughnut not simply as one reference among several but as the conceptual pivot of the dual-boundary approach. Raworth's central argument is an evaluative reorientation: the right question for assessing whether economies are working is not how much growth they generate, but whether they are operating within the space defined by the social floor and the environmental ceiling simultaneously. This shifts the accountability question from a continuous ranking, where more is always better, to a threshold question, where the objective is to be inside the zone, not above it. A region that records strong GDP growth while breaching its social floor is not succeeding; it is failing by a criterion that growth metrics cannot see. A region that stays within its environmental ceiling while allowing social conditions to erode is equally failing. It is this conjunctive logic, that both conditions must be met at the same time, that makes the Doughnut framework analytically powerful for security-oriented evaluation. The dual-boundary approach developed here adapts this logic to the regional scale, where both sets of limits take territorially specific forms and where EU policy instruments provide the leverage to act on them.



Fig. 3 The Dual-Boundary Evaluation Framework: Safe and Just Operating Space for Regional Development

Source: Authors' own elaboration, adapting the conceptual framework of Rockström et al. (2009), Dearing et al. (2014) and Raworth (2017)

Boundary-based thinking offers several practical advantages over both pure GDP evaluation and composite well-being indices when applied to EU regional policy contexts. First, it makes thresholds explicit. Rather than aggregating performance across dimensions into a single score, which can obscure the compensatory dynamics that allow strong performance in one area to mask failure in another, a boundary approach identifies specific conditions that must be met simultaneously. A region that exceeds its environmental ceiling while meeting social floors is not in a safe-and-just zone; neither is a region that maintains environmental sustainability while failing to provide basic social conditions. The distinction matters for policy because the interventions required are fundamentally different.

Second, the boundary logic is well-suited to accountability. Unlike composite indices, where a change in overall score may reflect movement in any of a large number of sub-indicators, boundary conditions are binary in principle: a region either meets a floor or it does not, either stays within a ceiling or it exceeds it. This creates clear accountability signals: regions, national governments and EU institutions can be assessed not just on whether they are improving their headline scores, but on whether they are moving toward or away from a defined zone of sufficiency and sustainability. This maps directly onto the security argument developed in the previous section: security vulnerabilities are created specifically when floors are breached or ceilings are exceeded, not by modest movements within acceptable ranges.

Third, the boundary approach is capable of revealing the trade-offs that growth metrics conceal. A region may simultaneously make progress on social foundations, including reducing poverty, improving health access and expanding educational opportunity, while accelerating environmental overshoot through energy-intensive development. Conversely, a region may maintain strong environmental performance while allowing social floors to erode through austerity or demographic decline. Both configurations represent insecurity of different kinds, and both are invisible to evaluation systems that aggregate performance into a single growth-

oriented score. Making both dimensions explicit allows policy to address the specific failure mode that a given region faces, rather than applying undifferentiated cohesion spending to heterogeneous problems.

It is important to distinguish the dual-boundary approach from the broader family of composite well-being indices and sustainability dashboards that have proliferated in the beyond-GDP literature. Frameworks such as the OECD Better Life Index, the UN Human Development Index, the EU Social Progress Index and the various sustainable well-being indices reviewed in the beyond-GDP literature represent genuine advances over pure GDP evaluation. They are multidimensional, they capture social and environmental dimensions that GDP misses, and their application to EU regional contexts, as demonstrated by Beltrán-Estevé et al. (2023) on the EU Social Progress Index, produces empirically meaningful insights.

The dual-boundary approach differs from these frameworks in three important respects. First, it is explicitly threshold-based rather than continuous. Composite indices rank regions on a scale of relative performance; the boundary approach asks whether absolute conditions are met. This distinction has policy implications: a region that ranks eightieth out of a hundred on a well-being index may still be well above the social floor and within the environmental ceiling; conversely, a region that ranks twentieth may be breaching both. Relative rankings do not tell us what we need to know for security-oriented evaluation. Second, the dual-boundary approach combines social and environmental dimensions as joint necessary conditions rather than additively aggregating them. A region must meet both simultaneously to be considered secure; a high score on one dimension cannot compensate for failure on the other. This is the key structural difference from composite indices, which typically allow trade-offs across dimensions. Third, the boundary approach is explicitly oriented toward policy accountability rather than academic ranking. Its purpose is not to describe which regions are performing better or worse in relative terms, but to identify which regions are failing to meet the structural conditions for long-term security, and to hold policy responsible for addressing those failures.

The EU policy architecture, encompassing cohesion policy, the European Green Deal, the just transition mechanism, the Social Pillar and the emerging sustainable and inclusive well-being agenda, already implicitly aspires to something close to the dual-boundary logic. Cohesion policy seeks to ensure that all regions meet minimum standards of economic and social development. The European Green Deal seeks to ensure that the environmental trajectory of the EU remains within planetary limits. The just transition mechanism seeks to ensure that the green transition does not impose disproportionate social costs on vulnerable regions. What is missing is an evaluation framework that makes these aspirations explicit, measurable and jointly accountable.

The Rotterdam analysis presented in Section 5 illustrates that the dual-boundary framework has direct relevance at the urban scale, not only the regional one. Applying it at city or sub-city level requires indicators available at neighbourhood resolution and a threshold logic that identifies failure modes at that granularity rather than averaging them away. This is technically feasible given the statistical infrastructure already available through CBS Wijken en Buurten and the Port of Rotterdam's emissions monitoring, and is directly relevant to the governance challenges identified by the NPRZ. The present paper establishes the conceptual and security rationale for that empirical agenda at both scales.

Discussion and Limitations

The argument developed in this paper is conceptual and directional in nature. Its value lies in clarifying what a security-sensitive evaluation framework for EU regional development

should measure and why, rather than in providing a fully operationalised methodology ready for immediate application. This scope is deliberate: before measurement systems can be improved, the evaluative logic that should guide them must be clearly articulated. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge several limitations and practical challenges that any attempt to implement the dual-boundary approach would need to confront.

The first challenge is data availability. Social and environmental indicators with genuine boundary-relevant content, meaning those that track proximity to sufficiency floors and sustainability ceilings rather than relative performance, are considerably less developed at NUTS-2 and NUTS-3 levels than nationally. Energy poverty data are unavailable for most subnational units. Subnational consumption-based emissions accounts of the kind constructed by Wilting et al. (2021) remain research outputs rather than official statistics. Significant gaps remain, particularly in areas such as granular health outcome data and spatially disaggregated measures of ecosystem pressure. Even for a domain as policy-relevant as population health, data completeness at regional level is uneven and the methodological challenges of cross-country comparability are substantial. These data constraints do not invalidate the dual-boundary approach, but they define the practical boundaries within which any near-term operationalisation must operate.

The second challenge concerns the setting of legitimate thresholds. The dual-boundary approach depends on identifying specific floors and ceilings that can serve as evaluative anchors, but the question of how those thresholds are set, by whom and on what normative basis is non-trivial. Different methodological approaches are available: compliance-based thresholds draw on existing EU and national policy targets, such as the EU poverty reduction goals embedded in the European Pillar of Social Rights or the emissions trajectories implied by the Paris Agreement; sufficiency-based thresholds draw on evidence about minimum conditions for human functioning and well-being; science-based thresholds draw on biophysical research on ecological limits. Each approach has different implications for the stringency, comparability and political acceptability of the resulting framework. The risk of technocratic capture, meaning threshold-setting that becomes an expert exercise disconnected from democratic deliberation about what regional communities actually need and value, is real and must be acknowledged. A robust implementation of the dual-boundary approach would require transparent, participatory and contestable processes for threshold-setting, not merely technical optimisation.

The third challenge is the attribution problem. Even where regional performance relative to social floors and environmental ceilings can be reliably measured, attributing observed outcomes to specific policy interventions is methodologically demanding. EU cohesion policy is delivered alongside a complex mix of national, regional and local instruments, and the causal contribution of any single policy stream to observed changes in social or environmental conditions is difficult to isolate. This is not a problem unique to the dual-boundary approach; it applies equally to GDP-based evaluation, but it is worth stating clearly that boundary-based assessment tells us whether regions are moving in the right direction, not necessarily why. Distinguishing the contribution of policy from structural factors, global trends and place-specific characteristics requires rigorous counterfactual evaluation design, and that frontier would need to be extended to social and environmental boundary indicators. The Rotterdam analysis introduced in this paper further illustrates a fourth challenge that the national-level comparison does not raise: the sub-city spatial resolution problem. Rotterdam-Zuid's social floor failure is not visible from Rotterdam's aggregate statistics, just as Rotterdam's aggregate statistics are not visible from Dutch national statistics. Applying the dual-boundary framework meaningfully at urban scale therefore requires neighbourhood-level data availability that varies considerably across EU member states and is not systematically produced for policy purposes.

in most countries. This is a specific data infrastructure challenge that must be acknowledged alongside the more general data availability issues discussed above.

A fifth consideration stands apart from the preceding technical challenges, addressing instead a question of conceptual framing. Describing metric gaps as security vulnerabilities, as this paper does, is a deliberate rhetorical and conceptual choice that carries risks alongside its advantages. The security framing is intended to elevate the urgency of evaluation reform by connecting it to an audience and a policy community, namely public security governance, that is not typically engaged in debates about regional development metrics. This is a genuine contribution: the security literature has much to learn from the regional development and beyond-GDP fields, and vice versa. But the securitisation of development challenges also carries the risk of justifying disproportionate or coercive responses, or of framing what are fundamentally distributional and political questions as technical-security problems amenable to expert solutions. The argument here is that evaluation frameworks should be made more sensitive to the conditions that generate insecurity, not that security imperatives should override democratic processes of priority-setting or regional self-determination.

These limitations do not undermine the central argument of the paper. They define the work that remains to be done. The conceptual case for extending regional evaluation toward a dual-boundary logic is strong, grounded in a substantial empirical literature, and responsive to genuine governance failures in the current system. The practical challenges of operationalisation, threshold-setting and attribution are real but tractable, and they are the appropriate focus of the empirical research agenda that this conceptual paper is intended to motivate.

Conclusions

This paper has developed a conceptual argument with three interlocking claims. First, that the dominant metrics used to evaluate EU regional development, including GDP, employment rates, investment absorption and related growth-oriented indicators, are structurally blind to two conditions that are fundamental to long-term regional viability: social sufficiency floors and environmental sustainability ceilings. This is not a minor technical shortcoming. It is a systematic bias built into the evaluation architecture of EU cohesion policy, one that allows regions to record positive headline performance while social deprivation deepens and ecological pressures accumulate.

Second, that this measurement gap is not merely a development problem but a security problem. The empirical literature on EU regional dynamics is unambiguous: persistent inequality and social deprivation erode institutional trust, generate political instability, and fuel the kind of distributional grievances that manifest in populist voting, disengagement from democratic institutions and loss of legitimacy for the European integration project itself. Environmental deterioration creates its own security pathways: through climate exposure, health burdens, transition risk and the political crises that follow when communities bear the costs of decarbonisation without adequate support. Evaluation frameworks that cannot see these dynamics cannot generate the accountability signals needed to address them.

Third, that a dual-boundary approach, building on the intellectual lineage from Rockström et al. (2009) and Dearing et al. (2014) through Raworth (2017) established in the Introduction, contributes the translation of that evaluative insight into the specific context of EU regional development assessment and funding allocation. It demonstrates that the dual-boundary logic can be applied at national and urban scales, that it reveals failure modes invisible to GDP-centric evaluation, and that it aligns with governance ambitions already embedded in

EU cohesion policy, the European Green Deal and the just transition mechanism. The question of which indicators should operationalise floors and ceilings at regional and sub-city scales remains open; it is the primary task for the empirical research agenda this paper motivates.

The illustrative comparison of Lithuania and the Netherlands, presented in Section 5, confirms that this decoupling is not a theoretical abstraction but an empirically visible and policy-relevant reality. In Lithuania, strong GDP convergence coexists with one of the highest poverty and social exclusion rates in the EU and acute energy poverty. In the Netherlands, high prosperity coexists with greenhouse gas emissions above the EU average and a projected ten-percentage-point shortfall against its 2030 climate target. Both cases illustrate why evaluation reform requires a framework capable of detecting both failure modes simultaneously, and why no single composite score can substitute for the explicit, joint assessment of social and environmental boundary conditions.

Operationalising a dual-boundary framework for EU regional policy, including selecting indicators, setting defensible thresholds, developing comparative assessment tools and building the data infrastructure needed to support rigorous evaluation, requires empirical work that goes well beyond what a conceptual argument can deliver. That work is the appropriate next step in a research agenda that takes seriously the proposition that regional development policy should be accountable not only for generating growth, but for building the durable social and environmental foundations on which genuine and lasting regional security depends.

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ETHICS AS A MANAGEMENT TASK: DEONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF POLICE MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

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Abstract. This article examines the pressures of economization, organizational subcultures, corruption risks, public scrutiny, and technological innovation for the police. In this context, the study asks to what extent deontological ethics can provide a viable normative foundation for police management. A related question concerns the organizational and leadership implications that follow from this perspective in contemporary policing. Methodologically, it combines a structured literature review with qualitative content analysis of 23 German- and English-language sources identified through a systematic search across major academic databases and library catalogs. The analysis shows that deontological ethics offers a robust framework for police management by anchoring action in duty, human dignity, proportionality, and the unconditional validity of moral principles. At the same time, the findings indicate that ethical policing cannot be secured through rule adherence alone. It requires institutionalized ethical reflection, transparent decision-making structures, integrity-oriented leadership, constructive error culture, and continuous ethics training. The review further suggests that emerging coercive technologies and intensified public accountability increase the need for ex ante ethical assessment and clear normative standards. The article concludes that ethics should be understood not as a supplementary concern, but as a constitutive principle of police leadership and organizational governance.

Keywords: deontological ethics, police management, police leadership, qualitative literature review

Introduction

Policing in democratic constitutional systems rests on a dual mandate. On one hand, the lawful exercise of coercive authority and on the other hand, the ethical justification of that authority. Police management is increasingly shaped by efficiency logics, performance indicators, and organizational control mechanisms (results-oriented) that do not capture the normative demands of public security governance. This creates a substantive problem for police leadership because managerial rationality can conflict with obligations to moral principles such as fairness, responsibility, and human dignity, as well as ethical principles (Figure 1).

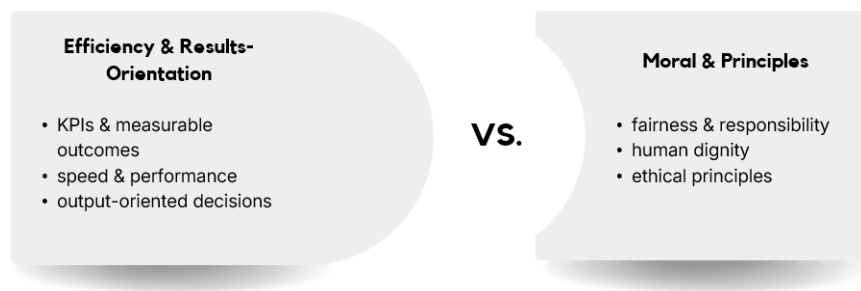


Figure 1. Efficiency and result orientation vs. moral and principles.

Source: Own representation.

Since the early 1990s, the German police have increasingly oriented themselves towards economic principles in the context of the introduction of the New Control Model (Behr, 2021). These reforms aimed to streamline internal processes and increase police output. In practice, it has been shown that many task forces can only reconcile these economic targets with the real requirements of everyday police work to a limited extent (Wehe & Siller, 2023).

The economization of the police thus intensifies the tension between efficiency requirements and ethically sound action in accordance with the rule of law. At the same time, current discussions about racism and violence within the police culture make it clear that ethical challenges result not only from individual fallibility but also from structural framework conditions like an officially guided police culture (Behr, 2020a).

Every day, police officers face situations that require not only legal decisions but also profound moral ones. In doing so, they are increasingly coming under ethical pressure, especially in a society that is increasingly critical of police action (Behr, 2020b).

A central area of tension also arises from the divergence between the official model of the police, characterized by fairness, professionalism, and the rule of law, and unofficial subcultures, such as the so-called "cop culture", which develops its own pragmatic norms and values. Empirical studies suggest that emergency services personnel often employ individual coping strategies in stressful situations that may not always align with established ethical guidelines for action (Seidensticker, 2019).

Cop culture (blue code) and the growing social debate on police culture (red code), as shown by the data (Figure 2), also underscore the need for a stable ethical framework.



Figure 2. Analysis of the terms cop culture & police culture (04.2021-04.2026).

Source: Google Trends, 2026.

Figure 2 does not merely contrast two abstract ideal types but visualizes a real governance dilemma in contemporary policing. From a management perspective, the central challenge is

not whether efficiency matters at all, but whether it is allowed to become the dominant criterion when fundamental moral principles are at stake. In this sense, Figure 2 marks the analytical starting point of the article. It frames deontological ethics as a corrective to one-sided result orientation and as a normative safeguard against reducing police action to measurable performance alone. This increased interest in police culture makes it clear that questions of ethics today not only affect internal discussions but also form part of a broader social debate (Glesmann, Huschbeck & Markovic, 2021).

The existing literature deals with police ethics, misconduct, integrity, and organizational culture, but the normative foundation of police action at the management level remains underdeveloped. It is not clarified which ethical framework can provide a stable basis for leadership decisions when operational pressures, informal subcultures, corruption risks, public scrutiny, and technological innovation converge. The resulting gap is not merely conceptual. It affects how ethical standards are translated into organizational practice, how leadership responsibility is defined, and how police institutions respond to morally ambiguous situations.

This article addresses that gap by examining whether deontological ethics can serve as a coherent normative framework for police management. The study focuses on the implications of deontological principles for strategic leadership, organizational culture, error culture, integrity management, and the deployment of coercive means. Its purpose is to determine whether and how a duty-based ethical perspective can strengthen the normative grounding of police leadership beyond compliance-oriented approaches.

Accordingly, the article is guided by the following research question: To what extent can deontological ethics provide a viable normative foundation for police management? A related question concerns the organizational and leadership implications that follow from this perspective in contemporary policing. These questions are addressed through a structured literature review and qualitative content analysis of relevant German- and English-language sources.

The article contributes to the literature in two ways. First, it consolidates deontological ethics as a management-relevant framework for policing. Second, it specifies the organizational consequences of this framework for ethically responsible police leadership. In doing so, the article argues that ethical orientation in policing is not an adjunct to effective management but a constitutive condition of legitimate leadership in democratic public security institutions.

Methodology

To answer the research question, the current state of research must be identified and analyzed using qualitative content analysis, as outlined by Mayring (2022). Therefore, a structured literature review will be conducted. At the start of the qualitative content analysis, a search must be conducted for suitable material. The following databases were used for the systematic literature search:

- Academic Journal Guide
- Beck-Online
- De Gruyter
- Electronic Journals Library
- Google Scholar
- Google Search
- Nomos eLibrary
- PROQuest

- Statista
- SCOPUS
- Web of Science
- WISO

In addition to several library visits, a literature search is also carried out in the following library catalogs:

- Dandelon
- DeepDyve
- German Central Library of Economics
- German National Library
- HSPV NRW Digital Library
- Karlsruhe Virtual Catalog
- NRW Digital Library
- NRW-University Library Center
- Open WorldCat

To this end, the following search terms were entered into the databases using the Boolean operator 'AND' and asterisks:

- Dentolog* AND Ethic*
- Dentolog* AND Ethic* AND Leader*
- Dentolog* AND Ethic* AND Leader* AND Polic*
- Dentolog* AND Ethic* AND Leader* AND Polic* AND Manage*

This allowed 139 sources that could potentially answer the research questions to be filtered out. Of these, 12 sources were excluded in the next step because they were identified by two or more search queries. The remaining 127 sources were then further narrowed. The material was further narrowed by excluding all sources published before 2002. This period was chosen because "Dentological Foundations of Police Management Actions" is a new scientific topic of this millennium. It is therefore not to be expected that literature published in the years before that could be significant for the present work.

Nevertheless, a rough review of materials from before 2002 was conducted. In the process, Gerwith's (1979) work was found and included in the literature review. All articles that aimed to report on individual ethical grievances were excluded. Furthermore, only German and English-language literature whose main content was relevant for answering the research questions was considered. Material that could not be accessed in full or was not available in full-text form was filtered out. After considering the criteria, 23 literature sources were finally identified as important for answering the research questions. These include 15 journal articles, three book sections, and five monographs. One of the monographs is a translation of an earlier monograph from 1785 that aligns with the topic and is considered relevant (Figure 3).

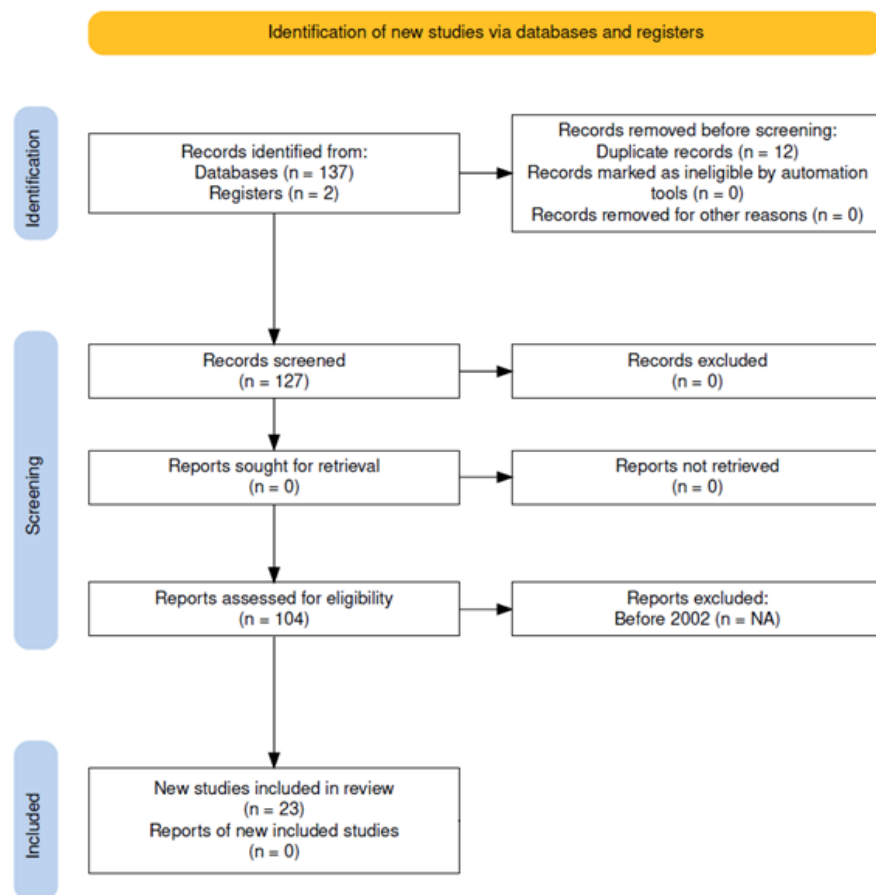


Figure 3. Flowchart of a process for filtering relevant literature.
Source: Own representation by PRISMA, 2026.

A review of the filtered sources, following the principles of Mayring's qualitative content analysis, begins without prior deliberation. The aim is to gain an overview of the sources and the structural features. The categorization of the material should, above all, emerge from the material itself. This approach is only deviated from in the case of very large data sets to handle the material at all. As the selected literature is limited to 23 sources, these sources are analyzed based on their synopses. This method was chosen because the number of available sources here does not provide sufficient data to justify a computer-assisted analysis with MAXQDA.

Results

The results correspond directly to the research objectives. First, they clarify the normative foundations of deontological ethics relevant to police management by showing that duty, human dignity, and the universality of moral norms constitute its central conceptual pillars. Second, they identify the principal fields in which these principles are operationally relevant, such as strategic leadership, organizational culture, error culture, integrity management, and the use of coercive means. Third, they demonstrate that these fields are not isolated ethical subdomains, but interdependent dimensions of police management that require coherent normative guidance. The findings, therefore, do not merely describe ethical challenges in policing; they show how a deontological perspective structures and evaluates them. This establishes a clear link between the analytical aims and their substantive results.

Deontological ethics forms one of the three main types of normative ethics, along with virtue ethics and consequentialism. At the center of deontological ethics is the moral evaluation of actions and types of action, not of character traits or merely the consequences of action. Thus, deontological ethics differs from both virtue ethics, which aims at virtues and character, and consequentialism, which evaluates moral rightness solely on the basis of consequences. A narrower understanding of deontological ethics, which dates back to Kant, holds that specific actions are morally right or wrong regardless of their consequences. Today, a broader definition is advocated, according to which the value of consequences can be taken into account, but is not the sole criterion for moral evaluation. Thus, a deontological theory is not necessarily blind to consequences; the decisive factor is only that the moral quality of an action does not depend entirely on its results. Historical roots of deontological considerations can be found in Christian moral teaching, for example, in the Decalogue, which prohibits acts such as killing or stealing regardless of purpose or consequence (Schmidt, 2023).

The most influential form of deontological ethics holds that moral action must be determined by principles that apply equally to all rational beings. The categorical imperative is formulated in different versions, according to the „maxim by which you can at the same time want it to become a general law" (Kant, 1785, translated by Gregor & Timmerman, 2012). A significant manifestation is the so-called end formula, according to which people may never be treated merely as a means, but always as an end in themselves (Kant, 1785, translated by Gregor & Timmerman, 2012). This principle explains, for example, why it is morally wrong to kill an innocent person, even if it could save several other lives (Schmidt, 2023).

It also points out that the philosophy of morality is not based on empirical purposes, but on the autonomous setting of moral laws by rational actors themselves. Ross (2022) developed a variant of deontology, the so-called ethics of duty. He argues that there are a large number of *prima facie* duties, i.e., duties that are morally binding in principle but must be weighed against one another in specific conflict situations. These duties include truthfulness, justice, charity, and keeping promises. Ross (2022) emphasizes that these moral obligations do not merely result from maximizing good results, but are moral reasons in their own right.

Gewirth (1979) argues that moral requirements are contained in the structure of action itself. Those who act necessarily presuppose freedom and well-being as goods and must therefore recognize that others are also entitled to these goods, which he calls the principle of generic consistency (PGC). His approach provides a rational derivation of moral obligations from the actor's perspective, thereby emphasizing the normative inevitability of moral claims.

While consequentialism in the utilitarian tradition judges actions exclusively by the amount of benefit produced, deontological ethics emphasizes that there are intrinsic moral commandments and prohibitions regardless of the results (Schmidt, 2023).

In contrast, deontology recognizes actions as right or wrong regardless of the consequences. Virtue ethics focuses on the moral perfection of character (Gethmann, 2023).

This is about the development of virtues such as courage or justice as stable characteristics of the acting person. Deontological ethics, on the other hand, evaluates concrete actions according to principles, not primarily the personality structure of the actor. Contract theories explain moral obligations arising from hypothetical agreements among rational actors in the original state. In contrast, deontological ethics asserts the objective validity of moral duties independent of contractual agreements or hypothetical consensus (O'Neill, 2013).

Deontological ethics holds that there are moral duties that apply regardless of consequences. In its classical form, it is based on the principle of autonomous moral legislation. Variants offer further differentiated approaches. Deontology represents an independent ethical perspective that differs from consequentialist, virtue ethics, and contract theory approaches.

Policing is associated with a variety of ethical challenges that affect both individual and structural dimensions. Police officers operate in a field of tension among legal requirements, social expectations, and practical professional necessities. Their actions must not only comply with the law but also be morally justified, a requirement that demands a high level of ethical reflection. Even professional socialization in the police carries the risk that initially imparted ethical ideals will be relativized in the course of practical activity. Young police officers often experience a "shock of reality" upon entering active duty, learning that pragmatic considerations, loyalty to colleagues, and the need to cope with complex everyday situations often take precedence over abstract ethical principles. A central ethical problem arises in dealing with violence. Police action must always be guided by the principle of proportionality, which means that the use of force is only legitimate if it is necessary, suitable, and appropriate. At the same time, fundamental human rights must be upheld at all times (Staller & Koerner, 2022).

The claim to realize nonviolence as far as possible often conflicts with the demands of a dangerous and unpredictable professional environment. In this context, the use of new resources such as the Taser also poses a particular ethical challenge. While the Taser was introduced as a way of de-escalation and is intended to close a tactical gap between baton, pepper spray, and firearms, its use is nevertheless associated with considerable ethical risks. Although the Taser is classified as a non-lethal weapon, it poses health risks, especially for vulnerable groups such as heart patients, people with weakened immune systems, children, and pregnant women. Despite its intended de-escalating effect, incidents show that its use can lead to serious health complications or even deaths in some instances, raising significant questions in terms of proportionality and risk minimization. In addition, there is the so-called "weapon effect". It describes the increased likelihood of the use of force due to the mere availability and visibility of a weapon, which has also been demonstrated with the Taser. The decision to use a Taser requires careful consideration between the protection of police officers, the physical integrity of the persons concerned, and respect for human rights. Especially in vulnerable groups such as the mentally ill or people under the influence of drugs, the risks increase considerably, which places additional demands on the ethical and tactical training of the emergency services.

Overall, the risk assessment makes it clear that the ethical handling of new resources requires ongoing risk analyses, precise deployment guidelines, and comprehensive ethical training to protect human dignity (Horres & Huschbeck, 2022).

In addition to the use of violence, the error culture within the police plays a vital role in ethical behavior. A positive error culture that does not stigmatize mistakes, but sees them as learning opportunities, makes a significant contribution to securing and further developing ethical standards. However, organizational power structures and traditional constructions of masculinity often make it difficult to reflect on misconduct (Seidensticker, 2019).

Another serious problem area is corruption. Even minor deviations from the norm, such as accepting small favors, can lead to the long-term erosion of professional integrity (Andreescu, 2012). Corruption is particularly encouraged in organizations with a weak ethical culture and high collegial loyalty (Domoro, 2012).

The lack of critical distance to one's own and others' actions can exacerbate systemic integrity problems (Behr, 2020c). Organizational culture and climate also influence ethical behavior. Studies show that a work environment that promotes well-being and ethical sensitivity can reduce the risk of misconduct (Werner-de-Sondberg, 2021). It is evident that higher hierarchical levels assess the ethical climate of their organization more positively than it is actually perceived (Trevino, Weaver & Brown, 2008). Therefore, leadership is a crucial lever for promoting ethics in the police. Value-oriented leadership that emphasizes authenticity, integrity, and accountability strengthens ethical behavior far more than a purely rule-oriented

approach (Schiwek, 2023). Unethical leadership undermines the ethical culture and increases the likelihood of norm violations (Lašáková & Remišová, 2015). Moral leadership goes beyond compliance. It requires leaders to actively exemplify ethical values and take responsibility for the organization's ethical climate (Thompson, 2004). Ethics must be integrated into training. For example, targeted ethics training can not only promote ethical judgment but also reduce prejudice and social dominance orientation (Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt & Ivkovic, 2023). In addition, social perception shapes the police's ethical framework. Citizen complaints indicate that violations of fairness, respect, and integrity significantly contribute to the erosion of trust in the police (Sabayova & Dinusova, 2024). New technological developments, such as facial recognition systems, raise additional ethical questions, particularly regarding data protection, discrimination, and transparency (Miah & McBride, 2025). Dealing with an increasingly culturally diverse society also poses growing ethical requirements. The police and society are in constant flux, and the police must learn to see cultural diversity as an opportunity rather than a threat (Srinivasan & Hearn, 2001). Studies on police integrity show that management levels sometimes assess misconduct more leniently than lower hierarchical levels, which illustrates the importance of transparent handling of misconduct at all levels (Vito et al., 2011). Despite new ethics guidelines, the "blue code" is the unwritten law of collegial silence and is deeply rooted in the police culture (Westmarland & Rowe, 2018). It poses a significant challenge to deontological ethics in upholding principles such as honesty, fairness, and respect (Figure 4).

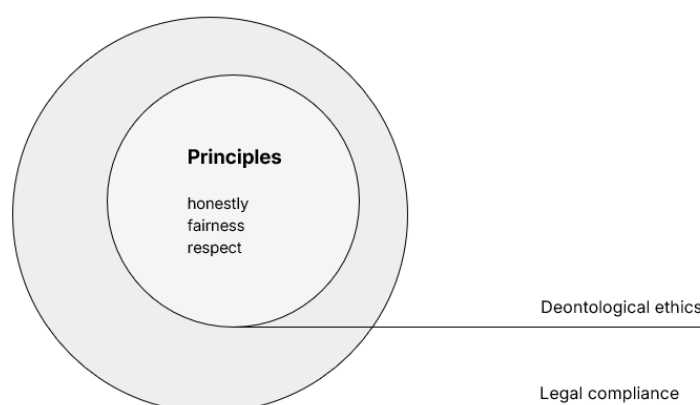


Figure 4. Deontological model.
Source: Own representation.

Discussion

Deontological ethics is based on the assumption that actions are to be judged according to fixed moral principles, regardless of their consequences. This understanding of morality provides a clear normative basis that goes beyond assessments of situational benefit. Police action is often caught between effectiveness and the rule of law. In acute situations, the temptation can be great to choose short-term useful solutions that violate fundamental principles in the long term. Deontological ethics reminds us that police action must always respect human dignity and be committed to justice, even when other options for action seem to promise more efficient results. A central example is the use of force. While practical security considerations often aim to establish order as quickly as possible, the deontological perspective demands a strict commitment to the principles of proportionality and necessity. The duty to use force only

as a last resort and to always respect the rights of those affected follows directly from the deontological maxim never to treat people merely as a means to an end. Similar considerations apply to the use of new technologies such as the Taser. Although it was introduced as a tool for de-escalation, it carries considerable risks, especially for vulnerable groups. Deontological ethics demands that such means be used only if they are compatible with unconditional respect for human dignity in each individual case, not merely because they may cause less harm than alternative coercive means. Deontological ethics also strengthens the individual responsibility of the acting police officers. According to the deontological view, no one can invoke orders or institutional constraints to justify moral misconduct. Rather, each person is obliged to align his actions with the standard of the moral law. This means officers must maintain ethical judgment and adhere to principles even under pressure. At the same time, deontological ethics in police practice also reaches its limits. The reality of police action is characterized by complex situations that often require quick action. Strict adherence to principles can lead to dilemmas here, for example, when various duties collide, such as the duty to save lives and the duty to uphold individual freedoms. At the organizational level, police management is responsible for creating institutional conditions that support transparency, accountability, and ethical reflection. At the individual level, officers must, in practice, translate these principles into concrete decision-making under legal requirements, situational pressure, and moral responsibility (Figure 5).

Organizational Level (Police Management)

establish a value-based organizational culture
integrate ethics into leadership and decision structures
promote:

transparency
accountability
ethical reflection

Individual Level (Officers in Practice)

apply clear ethical principles in decision-making
balance:
• legal requirements
• situational pressures
• moral responsibility

develop moral judgment and awareness

Ethical decision-making requires both structured leadership and individual responsibility.

Figure 5. Reality of police action.

Source: Own representation.

Ethical leadership is not exhausted by formal compliance systems, since institutional arrangements only become effective when they are internalized and enacted by individual officers. Conversely, individual moral responsibility remains limited if organizational structures do not provide clear ethical orientation, supervisory support, and room for principled dissent. Deontological ethics becomes operationally relevant only when leadership structures and professional conduct are aligned across levels.

Police organizations must recognize that ethical leadership, as derived from deontological ethics, is not merely a matter of individual integrity but a structural management responsibility. As highlighted in this article, ethics must be understood as a constitutive element of leadership rather than an auxiliary function. Consequently, several practical implications arise. Police

organizations should establish formalized ethical governance structures. Such mechanisms ensure that ethical reflection is embedded within decision-making processes rather than delegated to informal or ad hoc practices. Leadership must explicitly incorporate deontological principles such as duty, respect for human dignity, and universality of moral norms. Leaders should be trained not only to enforce compliance but to actively shape an ethical organizational climate. This includes modeling ethical behavior, fostering transparency, and ensuring accountability across all hierarchical levels. Such practices reduce the risk of systematic misconduct. With regard to emerging technologies (e.g., Tasers), police management must conduct systematic ethical impact assessments prior to deployment. These assessments should evaluate not only effectiveness but also implications for human dignity, proportionality, and potential discrimination. Continuous monitoring and transparent reporting are essential to maintain public trust. The persistence of informal norms such as the „blue code“ requires proactive intervention. Leadership must create safe environments for dissent, thereby weakening informal pressures that undermine ethical standards. Organizational communication strategies should reinforce that loyalty to ethical principles supersedes loyalty to peer groups (Frücht, 2023).

Ethical competence is not static but must be continuously developed throughout a police officer's career. Therefore, training systems must be designed as ongoing processes rather than one-time interventions. Ethics training should be mandatory at all career stages, including leadership levels. Regular refresher courses ensure that ethical principles remain salient and are adapted to evolving challenges. Given the high-pressure nature of police work, training programs should include modules on stress management and decision-making under uncertainty. This helps officers maintain ethical standards even in critical situations. Operational training, particularly regarding the use of force, must explicitly incorporate ethical considerations. This includes discussions on proportionality, necessity, and the protection of vulnerable groups. Structured reflection formats, such as supervision sessions or peer discussions, should be institutionalized. These formats provide safe spaces for discussing ethical dilemmas and learning from experience. Specialized programs for leaders should focus on ethical decision-making at the organizational level, including resource allocation, performance management, and handling misconduct.

The extension of the discussion underscores that deontological ethics, while normatively robust, only unfolds its full potential when translated into concrete institutional practices. The central insight is that ethical policing is not achieved through isolated measures but through the coherent interaction of leadership, training systems, and education. In this sense, ethics must be understood as an integrative governance principle that permeates all levels of police organizations and their surrounding ecosystems. Only through such a holistic approach can the tension between efficiency and moral obligation be sustainably addressed.

Conclusion

In response to the question raised in the introduction, it must be noted that deontological ethics provides an important framework for orienting police action. It protects fundamental moral principles such as human dignity and thus provides a normative basis that does justice to the police's special rights of intervention. At the same time, practical application shows that deontological principles in everyday police work place high demands on individual judgment, responsibility, and moral steadfastness. Deontological ethics binds the police force to universal moral standards, even in difficult real-world situations. In a modern, VUCA world or society, the respect for human dignity is relevant for deontological ethics, as a strong moral framework

or „moral compass" (Frücht, 2023), and as an institutionally embedded guideline for actively practiced in leadership and decision-making (Figure 6).

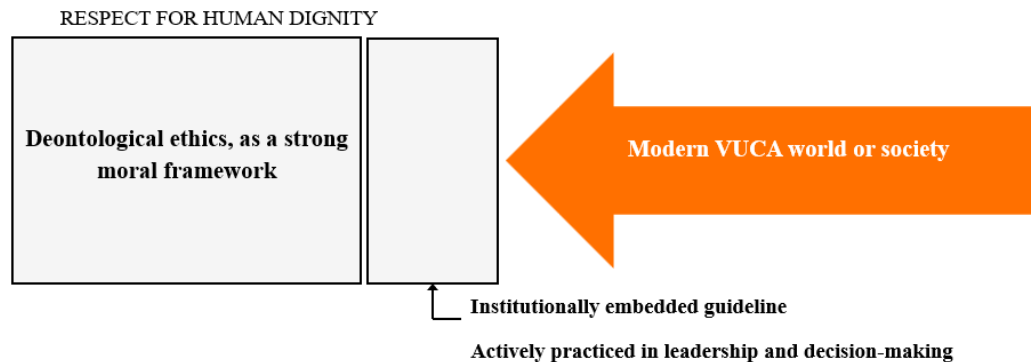


Figure 6. Moral framework.
Source: Own representation.

Limitation

It must be noted that the explicit normative orientation of this study entails certain limitations. By focusing primarily on deontological ethics, alternative ethical approaches, such as consequentialist or virtue ethics perspectives, are not considered to the same extent. This may lead to a selective emphasis on principle-based reasoning and limit the plurality of ethical viewpoints within the analysis.

Furthermore, the deontological perspective, with its strong emphasis on universal moral duties, tends to abstract from situational and organizational contingencies. In the context of complex and dynamic police practice, this may result in an underrepresentation of context-dependent decision-making processes and pragmatic considerations. Consequently, the findings may reflect a bias toward principle-oriented assessments, while the realities of operational practice are only partially captured.

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THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONS ON THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

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Abstract. *This paper analyzes the interdependencies between emotional states and immune function in healthy adults. It addresses the research question: To what extent do positive and negative emotions influence the immune system of healthy adults, with stress acting as a mediating mechanism. Grounded in biopsychosocial and psychoneuroimmunological literature, a literature review was conducted. The evaluated research demonstrates that negative emotions trigger persistent stress responses characterized by elevated cortisol release and the activation of systemic inflammatory pathways, thereby suppressing immune function. Conversely, positive emotions enhance immune parameters by accelerating physiological recovery and activating natural killer cells. Additionally, a reference to police practice is established. Structural and operational stressors, such as rotating shift work and critical incidents, severely disrupt emotional regulation and circadian rhythms. This systemic strain compromises not only the physiological health but also limits the cognitive capacity and flexible decision-making skills required during high-stress tactical interventions. Conclusively, this paper underscores the necessity of a holistic health framework that supports operational performance.*

Keywords: Psychoneuroimmunology, stressors, police officers

Introduction

Emotions accompany a person every day and influence not only mood but also the body and its associated biological processes, which are constantly active. Often, these effects are not consciously perceived, but there is a close connection between emotional states and immune system activity. These connections are examined in greater detail within the field of psychoneuroimmunology. Basically, all emotions affect the immune system. However, it is difficult to identify a clear connection, as other factors such as personality, lifestyle, and health status also play important roles. This complexity poses a significant scientific problem, as the influence of emotional states is often obscured, creating a research gap in the understanding of emotional-immune pathways. Accordingly, I will limit my research to healthy individuals and focus in particular on stress. However, emotions such as joy or fear are also evaluated for their effects on stress and, thus, on the immune system. The aim of this paper is to shed light on the connection between emotions and the immune system, highlighting the relevance of stress.

By narrowing the focus, this paper addresses the problem and investigates the effects of both negative and positive emotions on stress and, therefore, on immune function. As a result,

it will be investigated which effects both negative and positive emotions have on stress and, in turn, indirectly alter immune function.

In addition, this paper is intended to show which preventive measures can be taken to maintain immunological health. For this purpose, the paper adopts a theoretical approach that outlines the background, neurobiological mechanisms, and stress-related processes. It further includes a methodology section explaining how the relevant literature was identified and analyzed. The results section addresses the research question by examining the extent to which emotions influence the immune system. This is followed by a discussion that explores possible preventive measures. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the study's key findings.

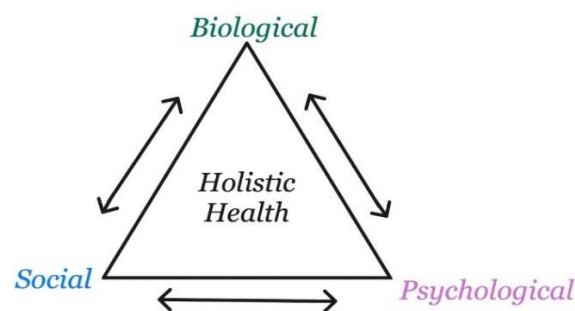


Figure 1. An illustration of holistic health, some of its components, and their mutual interaction.
Source: Own representation.

Theoretical approach

The central problem highlighted by traditional medicine is an incomplete biomedical understanding of disease. This limitation means that important influencing factors are ignored. For example, psychological, social, or societal aspects, such as a person's social class. According to Engel, this limited perspective leads to a misinterpretation of the holistic model of disease. The biopsychosocial model aims to address these problems by capturing the interplay between biological, psychological, and social factors. Humans are no longer viewed as machines but as part of a multifaceted system of interlocking levels. In clinical practice, this model means that not only physical factors but also social conditions must be taken into account in order to enable successful treatment. In summary, the aim of the model is to overcome the so-called "machine paradigm" and replace it with the biopsychosocial understanding, which is supported in particular by psychoneuroimmunologists (Berberich, 2021).

Stress activates neurobiological mechanisms that enable the body to adapt to stressful situations. The central nervous system, the autonomic nervous system (particularly the sympathetic nervous system), and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis are primarily involved in this system. When these systems are activated, stress hormones such as adrenaline, noradrenaline, and cortisol are released. Adrenaline and norepinephrine put the body into survival mode by increasing blood pressure and pulse rate. Cortisol supports energy supply by releasing glucose and also regulates existing inflammatory processes. In the long term, chronic stress negatively affects the immune system by weakening the body's defenses, amplifying inflammatory processes, and increasing susceptibility to disease.

Stressors are stimuli that can trigger adaptive reactions in the human body. They can also be classified in different ways and differ in their origin. Social stressors result from conflicts, isolation, or the loss of important caregivers. Physical stressors, on the other hand, include

environmental pollution, illness, or lack of sleep, and arise from internal demands, excessive stress, or conflicts. In addition, there are so-called everyday stressors, recurring, smaller stresses that intensify when combined with other factors and can have a long-term negative impact on health. When a stimulus is perceived as a stressor, the body activates neuronal and neuroendocrine mechanisms that trigger a stress response (Seibold, 2022). Neuronal mechanisms operate through the central nervous system. Neuroendocrine mechanisms, on the other hand, operate via the HPA axis. The sympathetic nervous system is activated very quickly, and adrenaline is released. Chronic stress arises from the persistent activation of the HPA axis and the resulting elevated cortisol levels. As a result, the body's resources are depleted. Cognitive and emotional processing is crucial for whether stressful events are managed effectively or lead to chronic stress and illness (Tafet, 2024).

Stressors also differ in duration and frequency. Acute stressors have a short-term effect, while chronic stressors can place strain on the body over a longer period, shorten recovery phases, and permanently activate the stress response (Seibold, 2022). Acute stress can strengthen the immune system in the short term. The sympathetic nervous system is activated, and immune cells are effectively distributed throughout the body. From an evolutionary point of view, this served to prepare the body for preceding injuries or infections. Chronic stress, on the other hand, overloads the HPA axis, resulting in elevated glucocorticoid levels that reduce immune defenses and make the body more susceptible to infections and diseases. The subjective perception of the person affected is decisive for the effect of a stressor. The same stimulus can cause different reactions in different people, depending on their previous experiences and their ability to cope with situations. Different ways of processing a stressor affect the release of stress hormones and determine how long they remain in the body.

Both the development and the course of physical illnesses are increasingly explained using psychosomatic approaches. Stress refers to the physical and psychological reactions to stressors that the organism perceives as challenging or threatening. This happens when the immune system reacts to neurochemical signals, which in turn can strongly influence the nervous system (Hoc, 2003). Such stressors can be both negative, such as conflicts, and positive events, such as an upcoming celebration. Regardless of whether these are negative or positive, stress hormones are released, and neuronal processes are activated, putting the body on high alert. There are two forms of stress. Eustress, which can increase performance, and distress, which causes excessive demands and can be harmful to health in the long term. Distress also refers to chronic stress, which causes somatic impairment and affects immune function. This can be explained by biological mechanisms. A central mechanism is the release of stress hormones and neurotransmitters, such as glucocorticoids (e.g., cortisol), which exert immune-inhibitory effects. Inflammation-regulating cytokines are reduced, immune cells such as T lymphocytes are weakened or even limited in their ability to form, and the activity of natural killer cells is dampened. This reduces the body's ability to fight infections. In addition, stress activates the sympathetic nervous system, which can trigger the release of adrenaline and noradrenaline, which also affect the immune function and thus contribute to increased immune response (Schobinger, 2025).

Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative analysis of academic literature. Its aim is to identify and evaluate the current state of research on the research question. To ensure a structured and replicable analytical process, the study adopts the principles of structured qualitative content analysis. This methodological framework guarantees that the literature is not merely

summarized descriptively but systematically processed through defined stages of analysis. The literature retrieval was conducted primarily using the systematic literature search engine Google Scholar, supplemented by the online catalog of SpringerLink and locally available digital library resources. To isolate high-quality academic sources, specific keyword combinations were applied (e.g., psychoneuroimmunology, stress mediation, circadian disruption). The selection and evaluation of literature was carried out in several phases:

Phase 1: Initial identification of potentially relevant sources based on thematic alignment.

Phase 2: Closer analysis of the core arguments to filter out publications lacking empirical or theoretical depth.

Phase 3: Final inclusion based on three strict criteria: direct relevance to the stress-immune research question, academic quality, and full-text availability.

Chronologically, the literature primarily comprises recent publications that reflect the current state of psychoneuroimmunological research. However, older works were included where they provide important theoretical foundations for the study.

The subsequent analytical methodology was driven by the deductive application of categories. The gathered data were coded and structured into three primary analytical dimensions derived from the research question. First, the physiological pathways of negative emotional stress. Second, the mechanisms of positive psychology. Lastly, the operational transfer to policing constraints. By synthesizing these text segments, the connection between emotional states and immune response was systematically evaluated.

The entire work is supported by several self-designed illustrations to help visualize and clarify the holistic health approach, including biological, psychological and social aspects.

Results

On the one hand, negative emotions influence the immune system. Emotions such as fear, pessimism, or self-doubt affect well-being and reduce the perception of positive influences. On average, 85% of perceived worries lead to neutral or positive outcomes. Although fear can drive people and protect them from potential threats, once it becomes excessive, it can inhibit and distract them from their intended personal goals (Tomoff, 2024). This statistic must be critically evaluated. While positive psychology views excessive worry as a hindrance, high-risk environments, such as daily police duty, specifically demand heightened vigilance to ensure accurate threat assessment for operational safety. These emotions negatively affect the immune system by increasing the release of stress hormones such as cortisol and suppressing the body's immune defenses. As a result, inflammatory processes in the body are supported, increasing the risk of chronic or autoimmune diseases. For example, these feelings can release inflammatory messengers through the nervous system, triggering acute illnesses or new complaints. The nerve cells in this nervous system release neuropeptides, which directly and positively influence immune cells and their activity. This represents an interaction between the immune system and the psyche. However, persistent negative emotions, including chronic stress, prevent this mechanism and ensure that chronic inflammation can develop (Tiedemann, 2021).

On the other hand, positive emotions influence the immune system. Fredrickson's "broaden-and-build" theory assumes that positive emotions expand a person's thinking and build long-term personal resources. A central mechanism of this theory is the so-called "undo effect", which explains that positive emotions reduce the physiological mechanisms arising from stress more quickly. Resilient people experience more positive emotions despite stress, which explains faster physical recovery. According to Fredrickson, this is because positive emotions enable flexible thinking and thus support better coping with stressors. Fredrickson

also calls this "upward spirals"(Fredrickson, 2004). Positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, and love have been shown to strengthen the immune system. They promote antibody production and activate natural killer cells, which play an important role in fighting infections. The release of endorphins and other feel-good hormones also helps to reduce stress hormones and inhibit inflammation in the body.

In addition, positive psychology analyzes the extent to which positive thinking and associated positive emotions strengthen the immune system. The construct of positive thinking is based on research by Seligman and assumes that greater positive thinking increases well-being and strengthens the immune system. Since stress is reduced and fewer stress hormones, such as cortisol, are released, the body's immune cells can work more efficiently, and infections can be fought off more quickly. So it helps manage stressors more effectively, thereby avoiding stress (Figure 2).

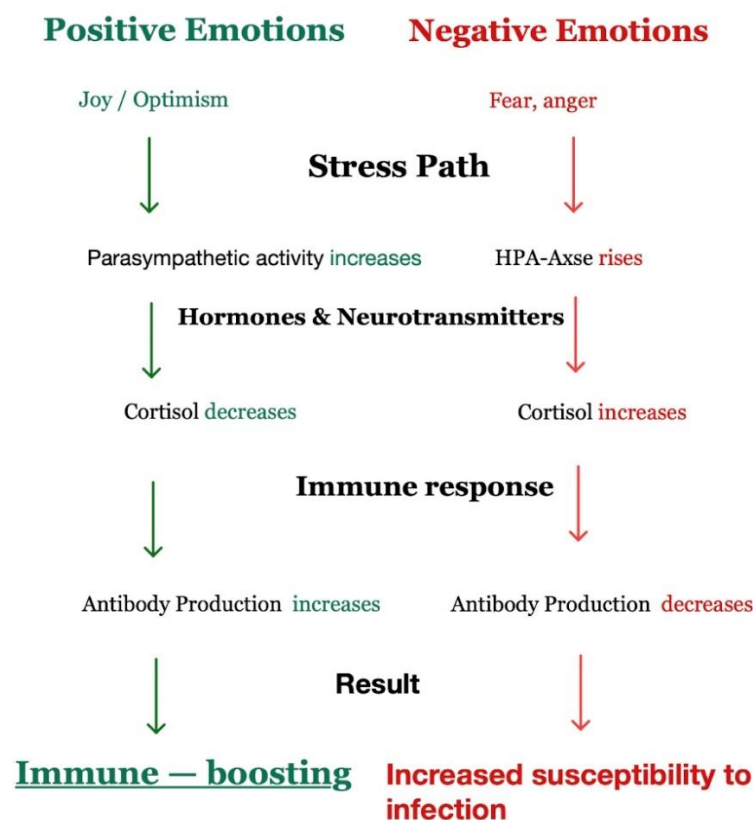


Figure 2. The influence of emotions on the immune system.

Source: Own representation.

From a critical perspective, the „broaden-and-build“ framework lacks operational feasibility during acute police interventions. While this approach effectively contributes to long-term maintenance, it offers limited immediate utility in tactical emergencies.

Social factors play a central role in the development and management of stress and thus also affect immune function. Factors such as stressful working conditions, lack of recognition, low socioeconomic status, and social isolation can cause chronic stress and thus weaken the immune system. In the long term, this can increase the risk of physical illness, as protective factors such as stable relationships or a good social network are eliminated, and one's own resources are increasingly depleted (Ernst, 2022).

If these findings are transferred to the policing profession, the following analysis can be made: There are several other stressors that occur, especially in everyday police life. These include dealing with emotionally stressful situations that deviate significantly from ordinary everyday events and often require long-term processing. These include operational situations involving violence, human tragedies, and accidents (Staller, 2023). Another significant stressor is shift work. This interferes with the natural biorhythm of humans and can impair both the regeneration of police officers and their social contacts. In addition, a strong sense of duty, which requires constant functioning and error-free action, can lead to an additional burden. As a result, the mental and physical health of police officers can deteriorate. Mental stress, in particular, is often neglected because those affected fear potential consequences at work (Löb, 2024). Furthermore, the fear of professional consequences highlights a deeper systemic issue. Individual stress-coping strategies can rarely function effectively if psychological vulnerability is not structurally recognized and remains institutionalized as a taboo.

To build on the previously outlined stress mechanisms, the following section examines their relevance for operational behavior and decision-making processes in policing.

Stress is a key factor for operational behavior and decision-making processes in everyday police life. Since police operations often evolve dynamically and involve potential threats, police officers must make urgent decisions, even when information is limited. Both perceptions of the operational situation and subsequent actions are influenced by stress. As a rule, stress directs police action towards averting a potential danger. Other equally relevant information could be disregarded, thereby distorting the assessment of the situation.

Stress can also limit behavioral flexibility, making it difficult to adapt to changing operating conditions. In addition, police officers' motor skills can be impaired by stress-induced physical tension. This is particularly disadvantageous for precision work. In summary, stress adversely affects operational behavior and decision-making. To remain operational and focused under stressful circumstances, prior mental preparation is central (Staller, 2023).

Furthermore, night work and rotating shift systems characterize shift work, which is a burden on police officers' health. The circadian rhythm, which refers to an immune system function. Due to the strain on the rhythm, the immune system recovers more slowly, and susceptibility to infections increases. Equally harmful to a functioning immune system is the lack of sleep caused by shift work, as important immunological regeneration processes take place during sleep. In addition, shift work is often accompanied by increased psychological and physical demands. These lead to a release of stress hormones and can therefore also adversely affect the immune system. A holistic approach makes sense to prevent these exposures. Fixed routines can allow for recovery periods despite changing working hours, thereby improving sleep quality. A balanced diet and regular physical activity support the immune system and help to reduce stress. Shift work can have a significant influence on the immune system. However, police officers can reduce adverse health effects by taking preventive measures (Löb, 2024). Ultimately, it must be noted that while individual preventive measures are crucial, they face a structural limit because environmental stressors, such as shift work, cannot be fully neutralized. This underscores that individual coping mechanisms must inevitably be supported by organizational adjustments to sustain long-term operational performance.

Discussion

Against the background of the previously outlined effects of stress on operational performance and decision-making, the following chapter introduces stress management strategies, focusing first on their definition and importance as preventive measures. Stress

management strategies describe concepts that aim to reduce current stress and prevent future stress. Since stress is unavoidable and is accompanied by a weakened immune system, which is thus harmful to health, it is essential to learn how to deal with it. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts a person makes to manage internal and external demands. Applying this coping concept to operational performance, it becomes evident that, because coping is a conscious and resource-intensive process, it actively connects the cognitive capacities required for critical decision-making. This process differs from the body's automated mechanisms, as it must be consciously controlled. Coping thus means both actively addressing the problems and also avoiding or denying them. Whether this strategy leads to the goal is irrelevant for the definition of the term "coping". Building on the general concept of stress management, cognitive and emotional coping strategies are key mechanisms for regulating stress responses and maintaining operational effectiveness. Coping is a form of stress management that involves reducing stress on emotional and cognitive levels. The focus is on the problem, and coping is dedicated to the stress itself as well as to optimizing the ability to deal with conflict. While problem-oriented coping seeks to change the stressful situation itself and find solutions, emotion-oriented coping aims to influence the unpleasant feelings that arise from it, such as fear or anger. Emotion regulation is stimulated much more. In addition, the direction of the coping response differs. The approach actively addresses the stressor, while avoidance means denying or accepting the existing situation. While the problem-solving strategy is often effective, the avoidant strategy can contribute to the deterioration in the long run (Hoyer & Knappe, 2022).

However, instrumental stress management addresses the root cause of stress. Through organization and restructuring in everyday life, future burdens are to be reduced. These include, on the one hand, improved self-management, which is intended to provide more structure, for example, to reduce stress at work or in everyday life. On the other hand, the ability to accept support when overwhelmed. In addition, a mindset shift can lead to better stress management. Mental stress management strategies can include taking a break from daily tasks or challenges. A change of perspective can make it possible to see difficulties less negatively and more as challenges that need to be addressed. After overcoming these challenges, one should also become more aware of one's successes to enable a positive attitude. Furthermore, there is talk of regenerative stress management, which focuses on the effects of stress and how to address it. The goal is to alleviate it, restore new energy, and reduce inner restlessness and physical tension to maintain resilience. These generally include relaxation techniques, regular physical exercise, a healthy, balanced diet, a regular balance of hobbies and leisure activities, and sufficient sleep. Overall, this form of stress management represents a healthy follow-up that focuses on protecting one's own resources and building up the inside. Also, emotion regulation refers to the ability to control emotions and calm oneself, and is associated with mental health and social integration. To distinguish between the control of emotions, there are two strategies that explain this control. The antecedent-focused strategy begins before the emergence of emotions and encompasses both situational evaluation and reaction-focused strategies, which address follow-up after emotions have occurred. In addition, a distinction is made between adaptive and maladaptive strategies. Adaptive strategies include reassessment and problem orientation, while maladaptive strategies include emotion suppression or avoidance. The latter makes it difficult to successfully cope with stress (Kaluza, 2018).

Evaluating operational performance through the models of Kaluza (2018) and Hoyer and Knappe (2022) reveals a critical intersection. Instrumental stress management serves a preventive purpose by avoiding stressors in advance, thereby leaving a functional gap during acute stress situations. For immediate decision-making in such high-stress moments, adaptive

mental strategies, such as cognitive reassessment, reflect the warning from Hoyer and Knappe (2022) about potential cumulative deterioration. This implies that defensive coping mechanisms diminish the cognitive capacity required to sustain performance under acute stress (Figure 3).

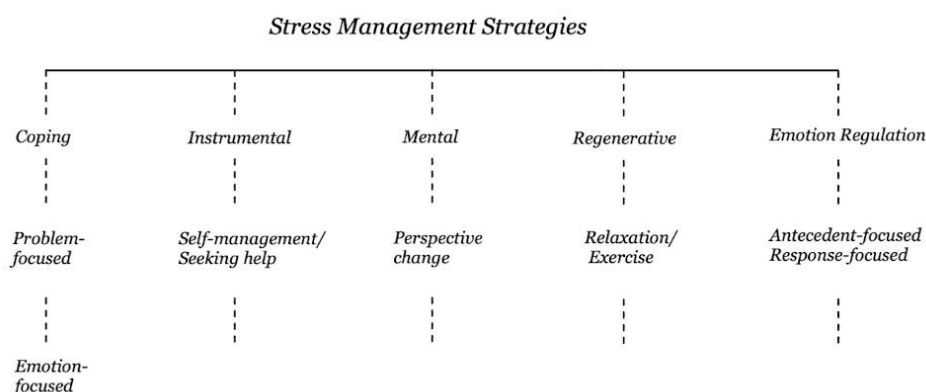


Figure 3. Stress management strategies.

Source: Own representation.

Conclusions and Limitation

The paper showed that emotions have a major influence on the immune system. This interaction happens especially due to stress processes. Emotions trigger physiological mechanisms that interact through the nervous, hormonal, and immune systems. Particularly negative emotions activate the HPA axis and increase cortisol release, leading to increased stress and weakened immunity. Positive emotions, on the other hand, promote recovery and reduce stress, thereby supporting immune-boosting processes, such as activating killer cells and immunological messengers. In addition, it became clear that stress management strategies are essential for promoting positive stress processes. Cognitive, emotional, instrumental, and regenerative coping reduce stress and thus its consequences. Especially emotion regulation, as it starts at the origin of stress processes and ensures successful prevention. In summary, the paper explains that emotions, stress, and the immune system are interrelated and continually influence one another. The research question addressed is: "To what extent do positive and negative emotions influence the immune system of healthy adults, with stress acting as a mediating mechanism?" This research question can be answered clearly in the context of this paper. As noted in the paper, negative emotions increase stress and weaken the immune system. Positive emotions, on the other hand, reduce stress processes and strengthen the immune system. Stress, therefore, acts as a mediator between emotions and the immune system.

The work has four limitations. First, because they were based exclusively on existing theories and research, the empirical investigations could not be included. Second, the paper focuses on healthy adults, which means that aspects such as chronic illnesses, mental disorders, or age-related deviations have not been taken into account. Third, emotions and stress are subjective and can vary from person to person, so the results are only a generalization. Fourth, social influences were considered only to a limited extent, although they play a major role, especially within the biopsychosocial model.

For future work, empirical studies that illustrate the interaction of emotions and the immune system in everyday life would be particularly useful. Long-section analyses would be suitable for this purpose, as they are a high-quality method for observing a process over a longer period of time and taking into account particularly subjective aspects of a person.

In addition, it is a good idea to increase preventive measures and stress management strategies in practice and to analyze the effects of psychosomatic health on stress processes. Overall, psychoneuroimmunology is a young field of research that offers great potential for further significant research.

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FINANCIAL SECURITY ATTITUDES AND INVESTMENT KNOWLEDGE IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY

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Abstract. Financial attitudes and investment knowledge are fundamental yet distinct determinants of individual financial decision-making amid macroeconomic instability and geopolitical uncertainty. This study investigates longitudinal changes in these constructs among International Business and Finance students at Vilnius University Business School amid sustained global volatility.

A two-wave longitudinal design was used (2024: $n = 147$; 2026: $n = 235$). Structural equation modeling (SEM) in AMOS was used to examine direct, indirect, and mediating relationships among Crisis Exposure (CE), Financial Attitude (FA), Investment Knowledge (IK), and Financial Behavior (FB).

Results indicate that financial attitude is the key psychological predictor of financial behaviour, both directly and indirectly via investment knowledge. Crisis exposure significantly influences financial attitudes, highlighting the role of macro-level instability in shaping micro-level behavioural outcomes. The model explains a substantial proportion (58%) of the variance in financial behaviour.

The study contributes to behavioural finance literature by integrating crisis exposure as an exogenous structural determinant of financial cognition and behaviour.

Keywords: Financial attitude; investment knowledge; behavioural finance; crisis exposure; financial behaviour; SEM; financial literacy; uncertainty.

Introduction

Global financial systems are increasingly marked by structural volatility, geopolitical fragmentation, and prolonged economic uncertainty. Contemporary financial environments are shaped by inflationary pressures, energy market disruptions, technological transformation, and geopolitical instability, all of which significantly affect individual financial decision-making. In such volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) conditions, financial behaviour

is no longer determined solely by rational economic calculations but is strongly influenced by psychological and behavioural factors (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

Recent geopolitical developments, including the Russian–Ukrainian war and escalating tensions in the Middle East, have intensified instability within international financial markets and increased perceptions of financial insecurity among households and investors. Simultaneously, rapid digitalisation has transformed access to financial information and investment opportunities. Young adults are continuously exposed to financial content through social media platforms, online trading applications, digital investment tools, and financial influencers. Although this environment may improve financial awareness and accessibility to financial markets, it also increases exposure to misinformation, speculative behaviour, emotional decision-making, and behavioural biases (OECD, 2020).

Financial literacy is traditionally conceptualised as the ability to understand and apply financial knowledge in personal financial management and investment decision-making (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014). Previous studies demonstrate that financially literate individuals are more likely to save, participate in investment markets, and engage in long-term financial planning (van Rooij, Lusardi, & Alessie, 2011). However, empirical evidence increasingly suggests that financial knowledge alone is insufficient to explain actual financial behaviour. Individuals with relatively high levels of financial knowledge often still demonstrate inconsistent saving behaviour, suboptimal investment decisions, and emotionally driven responses during periods of uncertainty, highlighting a persistent knowledge–behaviour gap.

Behavioural finance theory provides an important explanation for this phenomenon. Prospect Theory, developed by Kahneman and Tversky (1979), explains that individuals evaluate outcomes relative to perceived gains and losses rather than objective utility, leading to systematic biases such as loss aversion and asymmetric risk perception. Similarly, bounded rationality theory proposed by Simon (1955) suggests that individuals operate under cognitive limitations and incomplete information, relying on heuristics and simplified decision rules rather than fully rational optimisation processes. Behavioural economics perspectives further emphasise that financial decisions are strongly shaped by emotions, contextual influences, and psychological biases (Thaler, 2016). Empirical behavioural finance research additionally demonstrates that investors frequently rely on heuristics and emotionally driven judgments, resulting in systematic deviations from rational financial decision-making under uncertainty (Barberis & Thaler, 2003).

Within this theoretical framework, financial attitude emerges as a critical construct linking financial knowledge and financial behaviour. Financial attitude reflects an individual's psychological orientation toward money management, saving behaviour, investment risk, and long-term financial planning. According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour developed by Ajzen (1991), attitudes significantly influence behavioural intentions and subsequent actions, particularly in situations characterised by uncertainty and perceived risk. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development further conceptualises financial literacy as a multidimensional construct consisting of financial knowledge, financial behaviour, and financial attitudes, highlighting the central role of psychological factors in financial decision-making processes (OECD, 2020).

Despite the rapid expansion of financial literacy and behavioural finance research, several important gaps remain in the literature. First, existing studies predominantly emphasise cognitive aspects of financial literacy while insufficiently addressing behavioural and psychological mechanisms. Second, most research relies on cross-sectional designs, limiting the ability to capture dynamic changes in financial attitudes and behaviour over time. Third, there is limited evidence on how prolonged geopolitical and macroeconomic uncertainty

influences financial attitudes and investment knowledge among young adults, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, where financial systems and investor behaviour are strongly affected by structural transitions and external shocks.

Furthermore, university students represent a particularly relevant yet under-researched population in financial behaviour studies. They are entering financial markets in a period defined by high uncertainty, rapid digitalisation, and increasing accessibility of investment platforms. While this environment may increase financial participation, it may also amplify behavioural biases and emotional decision-making. However, longitudinal evidence on how financial attitudes and investment knowledge evolve under sustained uncertainty remains limited.

To address these gaps, the present study investigates the evolution of financial attitudes and investment knowledge among students of International Business and Finance using a two-wave longitudinal design conducted between 2024 and 2026. The study examines how ongoing geopolitical and economic uncertainty influences financial perceptions and behavioural tendencies over time. By integrating behavioural finance theory with financial literacy research, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying financial decision-making among young adults in contemporary VUCA environments.

Problem. Despite extensive research on financial literacy and behavioral finance, there remains insufficient understanding of how financial attitudes and investment knowledge interact amid sustained global uncertainty. Most existing studies rely on cross-sectional designs, which do not capture dynamic changes in psychological and cognitive financial constructs over time. Furthermore, the role of crisis exposure as a structural macro-level factor influencing financial attitudes and subsequent financial behavior remains underexplored, particularly among young adults in transitional economies. Therefore, a clear research gap exists in explaining the longitudinal mechanisms linking crisis exposure, financial attitudes, investment knowledge, and financial behavior.

This study aims to examine how global geopolitical and economic uncertainty influences financial attitudes and investment knowledge, and how these constructs shape financial behaviour among university students using a longitudinal structural equation modelling approach.

The study addresses the following specific objectives:

1. To examine longitudinal changes in Financial Attitudes under conditions of global uncertainty.
2. To assess changes in Investment Knowledge across time and study programmes.
3. To analyse the effect of Crisis Exposure on Financial Attitudes.
4. To investigate the direct and indirect effects of Financial Attitudes on Financial Behaviour, including mediation through Investment Knowledge.
5. To evaluate the explanatory power of the proposed structural model in predicting Financial Behaviour.

Research Hypotheses

Based on behavioural finance theory, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and financial literacy frameworks, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Crisis Exposure (CE) has a positive effect on Financial Attitude (FA).
- H2: Financial Attitude (FA) has a positive effect on Investment Knowledge (IK).

- H3: Investment Knowledge (IK) has a positive effect on Financial Behaviour (FB).
H4: Financial Attitude (FA) has a positive direct effect on Financial Behaviour (FB).
H5: Investment Knowledge (IK) mediates the relationship between Financial Attitude (FA) and
H6: Crisis Exposure (CE) has an indirect effect on Financial Behaviour (FB) through Financial Attitude and Investment Knowledge.

Literature Review

Financial attitudes and investment behaviour have become a central topic in contemporary research across behavioural finance, economics, psychology, and education sciences. Traditional neoclassical economic theory assumes that individuals make fully rational financial decisions; however, extensive empirical evidence shows that real-world financial behaviour is systematically influenced by cognitive biases, emotions, social environments, and uncertainty, particularly during periods of global instability and crisis. This shift has led to a broad consensus that financial decision-making should be analysed through behavioural and psychological frameworks rather than purely rational models.

A foundational theoretical contribution is provided by Prospect Theory, developed by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1979). The theory demonstrates that individuals evaluate gains and losses asymmetrically, with losses producing a significantly stronger psychological impact than equivalent gains. This leads to systematic deviations from rational decision-making, such as loss aversion, risk sensitivity, and inconsistent investment behaviour, especially under conditions of uncertainty and financial stress. These behavioural asymmetries intensify in high-volatility and crisis environments, reinforcing non-linear decision patterns.

Building on this behavioural perspective, Richard Thaler advanced key concepts such as bounded rationality, mental accounting, and behavioural nudges. His work explains that individuals often deviate from rational economic models due to cognitive limitations and simplified mental budgeting systems, particularly when making financial decisions under pressure or uncertainty. These mechanisms are especially relevant in explaining short-term financial behaviour that contradicts long-term financial goals. Together, these mechanisms provide a behavioural micro-foundation for systematic deviations in financial decision-making.

Financial attitude research originates from psychological and sociological approaches to money behaviour. Adrian Furnham developed the Money Beliefs and Behaviour Scale, demonstrating that money attitudes are shaped by personality traits, upbringing, and emotional security. His work established that money is not only an economic resource but also a psychological and symbolic construct associated with control, anxiety, and social status.

Similarly, Yamauchi and Templer developed the Money Attitude Scale, identifying key dimensions such as power-prestige, retention-time orientation, distrust, and financial anxiety. Their findings indicate that individuals with stronger long-term orientation and lower financial anxiety tend to demonstrate more disciplined saving behaviour and more stable financial decision-making patterns. These dimensions remain widely used in contemporary behavioural finance research due to their robustness and predictive validity.

Further development of money-related behavioural frameworks is provided by Tang Thomas Li-Ping through the Money Ethic Scale. His research highlights that money attitudes are not only related to financial behaviour but are also linked to broader value systems, including work motivation, ethical beliefs, and perceptions of success. This reinforces the multidimensional and socio-psychological nature of financial attitudes.

The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is strongly supported by the Theory of Planned Behaviour developed by Icek Ajzen. According to this model, behaviour is determined

by behavioural intentions, which are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. This framework has been widely applied in studies of saving behaviour, investment intention, and financial planning, particularly among young adults and university students. It provides a robust theoretical foundation for modelling financial behaviour as attitude-driven.

Financial literacy research has been significantly advanced by Annamaria Lusardi and Olivia S. Mitchell, who demonstrate that financial knowledge is a key determinant of long-term financial well-being, including retirement planning and investment participation. However, their findings also consistently show that financial knowledge alone is insufficient unless supported by appropriate financial attitudes and behavioural discipline. This supports the persistent and well-documented knowledge–behaviour gap in financial decision-making.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, particularly through the work of Atkinson and Messy, defines financial literacy as a multidimensional construct consisting of financial knowledge, financial behaviour, and financial attitudes. This framework emphasises that financial attitudes play a critical mediating role in translating financial knowledge into actual financial actions. This conceptualisation directly informs the structural logic of the present study.

Behavioural finance literature further highlights the importance of emotional and cognitive mechanisms in financial decision-making. Hersh Shefrin and Richard Thaler introduced the behavioural life-cycle hypothesis, explaining the persistent tension between short-term consumption preferences and long-term financial planning. This conflict is particularly evident among young adults with limited financial experience and higher sensitivity to immediate rewards. This strengthens the relevance of university students as a key behavioural research population.

Empirical studies further support the dominant role of psychological factors in financial behaviour. Research indicates that financial attitudes are often stronger predictors of financial behaviour than income level or formal financial knowledge. However, this relationship is context-dependent and becomes more pronounced under conditions of macroeconomic uncertainty.

Comparative studies show that students in economics and finance-related disciplines generally demonstrate higher levels of investment knowledge and financial decision-making competence compared to non-economics students. However, even within financially educated groups, behavioural biases and emotional influences continue to play a significant role in shaping investment decisions, indicating that financial knowledge does not eliminate behavioural distortions.

Recent research increasingly focuses on financial behaviour under crisis conditions. Global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing geopolitical conflicts have demonstrated that uncertainty significantly increases financial anxiety, short-term orientation, and risk sensitivity, particularly among young investors. The rapid expansion of digital financial platforms and social media further intensifies emotional decision-making and speculative behaviour by increasing exposure to real-time financial information and peer influence. These dynamics amplify systematic deviations from rational financial models.

In the context of the Baltic region, financial behaviour is strongly influenced by geopolitical proximity to instability, particularly due to the Russian–Ukrainian war. Students in Lithuania face continuous exposure to inflationary pressures, energy security concerns, and broader macroeconomic uncertainty. These conditions increase the importance of financial resilience, adaptive decision-making, and psychologically informed financial attitudes among

university students. However, this regional context remains underexplored in behavioural finance literature.

Against this theoretical background, the present study examines financial attitudes and investment knowledge among students of International Business and Finance at Vilnius University Business School, focusing on how these constructs evolved between 2024 and 2026 in response to global geopolitical and economic crises. The study integrates behavioural finance theory, financial literacy frameworks, and crisis psychology to provide a deeper understanding of how future business professionals adapt their financial decision-making under persistent global uncertainty.

The model is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), and bounded rationality theory (Simon, 1955), ensuring theoretical triangulation rather than post-hoc model fitting. Together, these frameworks capture cognitive, behavioural, and psychological dimensions of financial decision-making under uncertainty.

Recent empirical studies highlight that financial behaviour has been increasingly shaped by macroeconomic instability, digitalisation, and post-pandemic uncertainty. Research conducted after COVID-19 shows that individuals exhibit higher levels of risk sensitivity, short-term financial orientation, and emotional decision-making under conditions of prolonged uncertainty. Additionally, digital financial platforms and social media channels have significantly altered investment behaviour by increasing exposure to real-time information and behavioural biases such as herd behaviour and overconfidence. Recent OECD reports emphasise that financial literacy must now be understood as a multidimensional construct influenced not only by knowledge, but also by behavioural resilience and psychological adaptation in volatile environments (OECD, 2023; OECD, 2024). These developments further justify the need for longitudinal analysis of financial attitudes and investment knowledge under sustained global uncertainty.

Research Design and Methodology

This study employs a quantitative longitudinal research design grounded in behavioural finance theory, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), bounded rationality theory (Simon, 1955), and the OECD financial literacy framework. The study conceptualises financial decision-making as a psychologically driven process shaped by cognitive knowledge, behavioural attitudes, and external macroeconomic uncertainty.

A two-wave longitudinal design was implemented in 2024 and 2026 to examine changes in financial attitudes, investment knowledge, and financial behaviour under sustained geopolitical and economic instability. The structural framework guiding the study is illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the hypothesised relationships among Crisis Exposure (CE), Financial Attitude (FA), Investment Knowledge (IK), and Financial Behaviour (FB). In this model, Financial Attitude operates as both a direct predictor of behaviour and a mediating construct linking external uncertainty to cognitive financial outcomes.

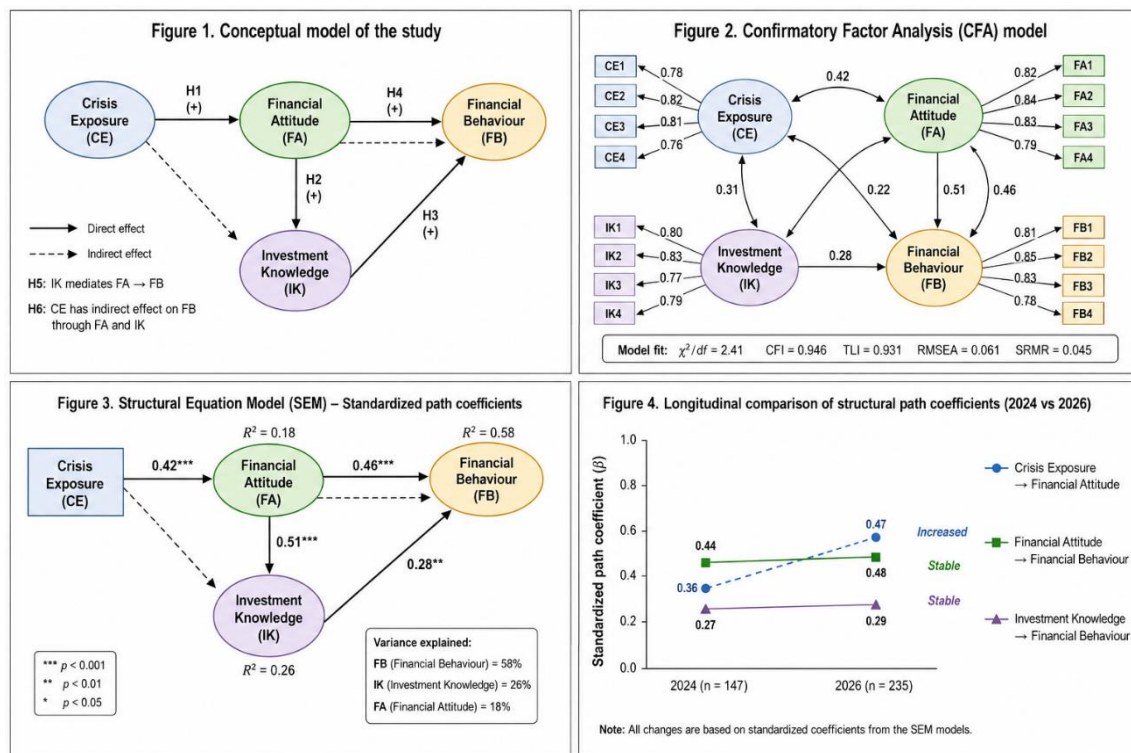


Figure 1-4. Integrated Structural Equation Modeling Framework of Financial Behaviour under Crisis Exposure: Conceptual, Measurement, and Longitudinal Evidence

The empirical sample consists of undergraduate students enrolled in International Business and Business Finance programmes at Vilnius University Business School. The sample includes 147 respondents in 2024 and 235 respondents in 2026, all aged 19–20. Participants represent both Lithuanian and international students across Lithuanian- and English-taught programmes. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire distributed through official university channels, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation.

All constructs were measured using validated multi-item scales on a five-point Likert scale. Financial Attitude reflects psychological orientation toward financial decision-making, risk perception, and long-term planning. Investment Knowledge captures perceived and applied financial literacy. Financial Behaviour represents actual and intended financial actions such as saving, budgeting, and investing. Crisis Exposure measures perceived exposure to macroeconomic instability, including geopolitical conflict, inflation, and financial market volatility.

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in AMOS. The analytical procedure followed a two-stage approach. First, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess measurement validity. The CFA model is presented in Figure 2, which illustrates standardized factor loadings and confirms the factorial structure of all constructs. Second, structural modelling was performed to test hypothesised relationships, mediation effects, and longitudinal stability. Measurement invariance testing (configural, metric, and scalar) ensured comparability across both waves.

Results

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) demonstrated satisfactory model fit, indicating that the measurement model adequately represents the observed data structure. The overall fit indices were as follows: $\chi^2/df = 2.41$, CFI = 0.946, TLI = 0.931, RMSEA = 0.061, and SRMR = 0.045. These values meet widely accepted SEM thresholds and confirm a good model fit.

Table 1. CFA model fit indices

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold	Interpretation
χ^2/df	2.41	< 3.0	Good fit
CFI	0.946	> 0.90	Excellent
TLI	0.931	> 0.90	Good
RMSEA	0.061	< 0.08	Acceptable
SRMR	0.045	< 0.08	Good

All standardized factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.60, confirming strong convergent validity across all constructs. Reliability analysis further demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency.

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Financial Attitude	>0.80	>0.80	>0.50
Investment Knowledge	>0.80	>0.80	>0.50
Financial Behaviour	>0.80	>0.80	>0.50
Crisis Exposure	>0.80	>0.80	>0.50

Discriminant validity was also confirmed, indicating that all latent constructs are empirically distinct and measure different theoretical dimensions. The structural equation model demonstrates strong explanatory power, with $R^2 = 0.58$ for Financial Behaviour, indicating that 58% of the variance in financial behaviour is explained by the model. The structural relationships are summarized below.

Table 3. Structural model results

Relationship	Standardized β	p-value	Result
Crisis Exposure $\rightarrow$ Financial Attitude	0.42	<0.001	Supported
Financial Attitude $\rightarrow$ Investment Knowledge	0.51	<0.001	Supported
Investment Knowledge $\rightarrow$ Financial Behaviour	0.28	<0.01	Supported
Financial Attitude $\rightarrow$ Financial Behaviour	0.46	<0.001	Supported

The results indicate that Financial Attitude is the strongest direct predictor of Financial Behaviour, confirming its central role in the structural model. The final SEM structure is illustrated in Figure 3, which presents standardized path coefficients and explained variance for

all endogenous variables. Mediation analysis confirms statistically significant indirect effects within the model.

Table 4. Mediation effects

Path	Effect Type	β	Significance
FA $\rightarrow$ IK $\rightarrow$ FB	Partial mediation	0.14	$p < 0.01$
CE $\rightarrow$ FA $\rightarrow$ FB	Indirect effect	0.19	$p < 0.01$
CE $\rightarrow$ FA $\rightarrow$ IK $\rightarrow$ FB	Sequential mediation	0.06	$p < 0.05$

These results confirm that Investment Knowledge partially mediates the relationship between Financial Attitude and Financial Behaviour. Additionally, Crisis Exposure operates through a sequential psychological–cognitive mechanism rather than directly influencing behaviour. Longitudinal analysis confirms both measurement and structural invariance across the two waves (2024 and 2026), indicating that comparisons over time are statistically valid.

Table 5. Longitudinal comparison of structural paths

Relationship	2024 β	2026 β	Change
Crisis Exposure $\rightarrow$ Financial Attitude	0.36	0.47	Increased
Financial Attitude $\rightarrow$ Financial Behaviour	0.44	0.48	Stable
Investment Knowledge $\rightarrow$ Financial Behaviour	0.27	0.29	Stable

The most notable change is observed in the effect of Crisis Exposure on Financial Attitude, which increases over time. This pattern, visualised in Figure 4, suggests that prolonged exposure to geopolitical and economic uncertainty strengthens its psychological impact on financial attitudes.

In total, the empirical findings consistently demonstrate that Financial Attitude is the strongest determinant of Financial Behaviour under conditions of uncertainty. Investment Knowledge plays a statistically significant but secondary role, acting primarily as a cognitive reinforcement mechanism. Crisis Exposure does not directly influence behaviour but operates indirectly through psychological adaptation processes.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide robust empirical support for the central role of psychological mechanisms in shaping financial behaviour under conditions of sustained global uncertainty. Across both structural and longitudinal analyses, Financial Attitude (FA) consistently emerges as the dominant explanatory construct, outperforming Investment Knowledge (IK) in predicting Financial Behaviour (FB). This pattern reinforces a growing consensus in behavioural finance that cognitive knowledge alone is insufficient to explain real-world financial decision-making.

A key theoretical contribution of the study is the empirical validation of Financial Attitude as a mediating psychological mechanism between macro-level uncertainty and micro-level financial behaviour. Crisis Exposure (CE) does not exert a direct behavioural effect; instead, it operates through attitudinal restructuring. This finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which positions attitudes as the primary antecedent of behavioural

intention. However, the present study extends this framework by demonstrating that attitudes are not only antecedents of behaviour but also adaptive psychological responses to macroeconomic instability. In this sense, financial attitudes function as a cognitive–emotional interface between external systemic shocks and individual behavioural adaptation.

The strong effect of FA on both IK and FB suggests a reversed causal ordering compared to traditional financial literacy models. Classical frameworks, such as those advanced by Lusardi and Mitchell, assume that financial knowledge precedes behavioural outcomes. However, the present findings indicate that psychological readiness may actually determine whether individuals engage with financial knowledge in the first place. This challenges the linear assumptions embedded in standard financial education models and suggests a more dynamic interaction between cognition and psychology.

Investment Knowledge exhibits a statistically significant but comparatively weaker effect on Financial Behaviour. This supports the persistent knowledge–behaviour gap widely documented in behavioural finance literature. However, this study refines that gap by demonstrating that it is not simply a failure of knowledge application, but a structurally mediated phenomenon shaped by psychological orientation. In other words, knowledge does not fail in isolation—it fails when not supported by stable financial attitudes. This interpretation aligns with Thaler’s behavioural life-cycle hypothesis and Shefrin’s work on self-control problems, where individuals systematically deviate from rational financial planning due to psychological constraints rather than informational deficits.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings strongly support Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). The increasing effect of Crisis Exposure on Financial Attitude over time suggests that prolonged uncertainty amplifies loss aversion and risk sensitivity. Individuals become progressively more attuned to potential losses, which reshapes their financial orientation. However, contrary to what might be expected under pure Prospect Theory predictions, this heightened sensitivity does not automatically translate into more rational or conservative financial behaviour. Instead, it operates through attitudinal restructuring, which may either improve or distort financial decision-making depending on individual psychological stability.

Bounded rationality theory (Simon, 1955) further strengthens the interpretation of these results. Financial decisions in uncertain environments are not optimised outcomes but satisficing responses shaped by cognitive limitations and emotional heuristics. The strong explanatory power of FA suggests that individuals rely on stable psychological schemas rather than continuously recalculating optimal financial choices. This reinforces the idea that financial behaviour is rule-based rather than optimisation-based in real-world contexts.

A particularly important contribution of this study is its longitudinal dimension. The increasing effect of Crisis Exposure on Financial Attitude between 2024 and 2026 indicates a cumulative adaptation process. This finding is theoretically significant because it demonstrates that financial attitudes are not static traits but evolving constructs shaped by prolonged exposure to macroeconomic instability. In contrast, most existing behavioural finance studies remain cross-sectional and therefore fail to capture this dynamic adaptation mechanism.

However, this also raises an important limitation: while the model captures structural relationships effectively, it does not fully account for potential cohort effects or external confounding variables such as income changes, employment status, or macroeconomic policy shifts. These factors may partially contribute to observed longitudinal changes. Future research should therefore incorporate multi-level modelling or mixed-method approaches to isolate structural psychological effects from contextual economic variation.

Another critical implication concerns the role of digital financial environments. Although not directly modelled, the findings indirectly reflect the influence of digitalisation on financial cognition. Increased exposure to online financial content may intensify both financial awareness and behavioural volatility. This aligns with recent OECD discussions on digital financial literacy, which emphasise the dual role of digital platforms in both enhancing and distorting financial decision-making. However, this study does not explicitly disentangle informational effects from psychological adaptation, which remains an important limitation.

From a practical perspective, the results challenge conventional financial education strategies. Standard approaches focusing primarily on knowledge acquisition appear insufficient. Instead, the findings suggest that effective financial literacy interventions must incorporate behavioural and psychological training components, including emotional regulation, risk perception calibration, and long-term behavioural discipline. Without addressing these dimensions, increases in financial knowledge may have a limited real-world behavioural impact.

Finally, the study contributes to a broader theoretical shift in behavioural finance: from rational-informational models toward psychological–structural models of financial behaviour. In this framework, Financial Attitude is not a secondary variable but a central organising construct that determines how individuals interpret, process, and act upon financial information under uncertainty. This position's attitude is not merely as a predictor, but as a structural mediator of financial cognition and behaviour.

Conclusions

This study provides clear evidence that financial behaviour in conditions of global uncertainty is driven primarily by psychological mechanisms rather than cognitive knowledge alone. Across both structural and longitudinal analyses, Financial Attitude (FA) consistently emerges as the central construct explaining how individuals translate external uncertainty and financial knowledge into actual financial behaviour.

The results confirm that Financial Attitude functions as the key motivational and psychological mechanism linking Crisis Exposure (CE), Investment Knowledge (IK), and Financial Behaviour (FB). In this framework, crisis-related uncertainty does not directly produce behavioural change; instead, it reshapes psychological orientation toward money, risk, and financial security. This altered attitude subsequently determines the extent to which individuals engage in financial learning and apply financial knowledge in practice.

Investment Knowledge plays an important but secondary role, acting primarily as a cognitive reinforcement mechanism that supports behavioural execution. However, its effect is conditional on underlying psychological readiness, indicating that knowledge alone is insufficient to ensure consistent and rational financial decision-making under uncertainty.

Overall, the findings reinforce the well-documented knowledge–behaviour gap in financial decision-making and extend it by demonstrating that this gap becomes more pronounced under conditions of sustained geopolitical and economic instability. Individuals may possess adequate financial knowledge, but without strong financial attitudes—such as emotional stability, responsibility, and long-term orientation—this knowledge does not reliably translate into behaviour.

From a theoretical perspective, the study strengthens behavioural finance and the Theory of Planned Behaviour by empirically confirming that attitudes are the most influential determinant of financial behaviour in uncertain environments. From a practical perspective, the

findings highlight the necessity of integrating behavioural, emotional, and psychological dimensions into financial education curricula.

In particular, financial education should extend beyond technical knowledge transfer and incorporate:

- emotional regulation in financial decision-making,
- behavioural discipline and self-control,
- risk perception under uncertainty,
- and the development of a long-term financial mindset.

Importantly, the longitudinal evidence indicates that the influence of Crisis Exposure on Financial Attitude increases over time, suggesting that psychological adaptation to persistent uncertainty is a dynamic and cumulative process rather than a static condition.

In conclusion, financial behaviour under global uncertainty is best understood as the outcome of a psychological–cognitive interaction system, in which Financial Attitude functions as the core driving force determining whether financial knowledge is transformed into effective financial action.

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LEGAL REGULATION AND PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS OF THE ACQUISITION OF FULL CIVIL CAPACITY BY MINORS IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract. Lithuanian civil law provides two exceptional mechanisms through which a person may acquire full civil capacity before reaching the age of majority: emancipation and the acquisition of full civil capacity through marriage. Although both institutions grant a minor the legal status of a fully capable person in civil legal relations, their practical application raises a number of legal issues. The legal framework does not clearly define the criteria for determining a “sufficient basis” for emancipation or what constitutes “other important reasons” for reducing the marriageable age, leaving significant discretion to the courts. In addition, questions arise regarding the legal significance of opinions provided by the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service and the relationship between full civil capacity and other branches of law.

This article analyses the legal regulation governing the acquisition of full civil capacity by minors, Lithuanian judicial practice concerning emancipation and the reduction of the marriageable age, and the legal consequences of acquiring full civil capacity before reaching adulthood. Particular attention is paid to the criteria developed in judicial practice, the evidentiary significance of opinions submitted by child rights protection authorities, and the legal implications of full civil capacity outside the sphere of civil law.

The research demonstrates that the concepts of a “sufficient basis” and “other important reasons” are primarily developed through judicial practice and assessed on a case-by-case basis. The findings further indicate that, although opinions of the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service constitute an important source of information in proceedings concerning emancipation and the reduction of the marriageable age, they are not binding upon the courts. Finally, the study confirms that an emancipated minor, or a minor who acquires full civil capacity through marriage, is treated as an adult in civil legal relations; however, this status does not extend to criminal, administrative, or constitutional law, where the age criterion remains decisive.

Keywords: full civil capacity, emancipation, marriageable age, minors, civil law, Lithuania.

Introduction

In Lithuanian civil law, minors may acquire full civil capacity before reaching the age of majority through emancipation or marriage. Although these institutions are regulated by law, their practical application raises a number of legal uncertainties. When deciding on emancipation or the reduction of the marriageable age, courts assess factors such as the minor’s maturity, independence, financial situation, and other relevant circumstances. However, the legal framework does not clearly define which criteria should be considered decisive. Consequently, judicial practice plays an important role in interpreting and applying these legal provisions.

Another problematic aspect concerns the role of opinions provided by the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service. In proceedings regarding the reduction of the

marriageable age, the submission of such an opinion is mandatory. Nevertheless, the law does not specify its legal significance or the extent to which courts should rely on it. In emancipation proceedings, obtaining such an opinion is not required by law. Therefore, it is relevant to examine whether these opinions are provided in practice and how they are assessed by courts.

The acquisition of full civil capacity before the age of majority also raises questions regarding its significance beyond civil law. Although an emancipated minor or a minor who acquires full civil capacity through marriage is treated as an adult in civil legal relations, the legal implications of this status in criminal, administrative, and constitutional law remain open to discussion.

The object of this article is the legal regulation of the acquisition of full civil capacity before reaching the age of majority and the problematic aspects arising from its application.

The aim of the article is to analyse the legal regulation governing the acquisition of full civil capacity by minors, to examine the criteria developed in judicial practice, and to identify the main legal issues associated with the application of this institution.

The research is based on the methods of document analysis, case law analysis, historical analysis, linguistic analysis, logical analysis, and generalisation. Document analysis is used to examine national and international legal acts as well as academic literature related to the acquisition of full civil capacity by minors. Case law analysis is employed to evaluate Lithuanian judicial practice concerning emancipation, the reduction of the marriageable age, and the legal consequences of granting full civil capacity to minors. Historical and logical analysis are applied to examine the development, content, and interpretation of the relevant legal norms and concepts, as well as their relationship with other branches of law. Finally, the method of generalisation is used to summarise the research findings, identify the principal problematic aspects of the legal regulation, and formulate the conclusions of the study.

Legal regulation of the granting of full civil capacity to persons who have not reached the age of majority

Under Lithuanian civil law, full civil capacity is generally acquired upon reaching the age of majority, namely eighteen years of age. In exceptional cases, however, a person may acquire full civil capacity before reaching adulthood through emancipation or marriage.

Full civil capacity may be defined as a legal status enabling a natural person to independently acquire and exercise civil rights and assume civil obligations without additional restrictions. A fully capable person may independently conclude contracts and other legal transactions, exercise rights, assume obligations, and bear legal responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

Persons who have acquired full civil capacity benefit from the presumption of capacity. According to this principle, adult individuals are presumed capable of acting independently unless otherwise established by law or a court decision.

Civil legal capacity and civil capacity may be restricted only in cases expressly provided for by law (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania). Consequently, parties participating in civil legal relations may reasonably rely on the assumption that an adult acts independently and on their own behalf. The freely expressed will of such a person therefore produces legal consequences for all parties involved.

Marriage as a ground for acquiring full civil capacity

The concept of marriage is multifaceted and may be examined from legal, moral, religious, and social perspectives. For the purposes of this article, marriage is analysed from a legal perspective, as it constitutes one of the grounds upon which a minor may acquire full civil capacity before reaching the age of majority. The conditions, limits, and legal consequences of this institution are established by law and further developed through judicial practice.

At the European level, the right to marry is guaranteed by Article 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which provides that men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry. However, the exercise of this right is governed by national law (Protocol No. 1 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms). Consequently, States retain discretion to determine the conditions for entering into marriage, provided that the essence of the right to marry is preserved.

The European Court of Human Rights has emphasised that the interpretation of the right to marry must take account of the historical and social context in which the Convention was adopted. States may therefore establish formal and substantive requirements for marriage, including requirements relating to registration, monogamy, or restrictions based on family relationships. Any limitations imposed must pursue a legitimate aim, remain proportionate, and not impair the very essence of the right to marry (Guide on Article 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights: Right to Marry).

In Lithuania, family relations are primarily regulated by Book Three of the Civil Code, entitled *Family Law*. The Civil Code establishes the principles governing family relations, the conditions for entering into and dissolving marriage, as well as the rights and obligations of spouses. Family relations are also governed by the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, international treaties, and other legislation. The Government and other public authorities may adopt legal acts relating to family law only where expressly authorised by the Civil Code (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania defines marriage as a free agreement between a man and a woman registered by the State and recognises the principle of equality between spouses. Similarly, the Civil Code defines marriage as a voluntary agreement between a man and a woman to create legal family relations in accordance with the procedure established by law. Article 3.26 of the Civil Code further provides that spouses enjoy equal rights and assume equal civil responsibilities towards one another and towards their children (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

Lithuanian law establishes several conditions for the validity of marriage. Marriage may be concluded only between persons of the opposite sex and must be based on the free and genuine consent of both parties. Any defect in consent, including coercion, threat, fraud, or other unlawful influence, may constitute grounds for declaring a marriage invalid. The law also requires compliance with the principles of monogamy and prohibits marriage between close relatives (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

One of the most significant legal requirements concerns the marriageable age. As a general rule, persons wishing to marry must have reached the age of majority, namely eighteen years of age. This requirement serves to ensure that individuals entering into marriage possess a sufficient level of maturity and are capable of independently assuming the legal consequences arising from family status.

Article 3.14 of the Civil Code establishes the general rule that marriage may be concluded only by persons who have reached the age of eighteen. Through this provision, the Lithuanian legislature complies with international obligations requiring States to establish a minimum age for marriage. In particular, the 1962 United Nations Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages requires States Parties to establish and maintain a minimum legal age for marriage (Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages).

Although the age of eighteen constitutes the general threshold for marriage, Lithuanian law provides for exceptions. Through simplified judicial proceedings, a court may reduce the marriageable age by up to two years, thereby permitting marriage from the age of sixteen. In cases of pregnancy, the court may authorise marriage even where the applicant has not reached the age of sixteen (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

The current regulation developed gradually. Prior to 1 July 2001, family relations were governed by the Marriage and Family Code of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. That Code established a general marriageable age of eighteen years but allowed executive committees of district and city councils to authorise marriage from the age of seventeen (Kudinavičiūtė-Michailovienė, 2004, p. 5). Following the entry into force of the Civil Code on 1 July 2001, the marriageable age could be reduced by up to three years, allowing marriage from the age of fifteen. In cases of pregnancy, the age threshold could be reduced even further (Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania). Since 2010, the current version of Article 3.14 has limited the ordinary reduction to two years while preserving the possibility of further reduction in cases of pregnancy (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

The principal legal consequence of a minor's marriage is established in Article 2.5(2) of the Civil Code. Where a person under eighteen years of age is lawfully permitted to marry, that person acquires full civil capacity from the moment the marriage is concluded. If the marriage is subsequently dissolved or declared invalid for reasons unrelated to the age of the spouses, the full civil capacity already acquired is retained. Consequently, the person remains fully capable under civil law despite the termination or invalidity of the marriage (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

A minor seeking to marry before reaching the age of majority must apply to a court for authorisation. The purpose of this procedure is to ensure the protection of the best interests of the child. Article 3.14(4) of the Civil Code requires the court to hear the views of the minor's parents, guardians, or custodians and to assess the minor's mental and psychological condition, level of maturity, financial circumstances, and other relevant factors underlying the request to marry.

The participation of the State Child Rights Protection Authority is mandatory in such proceedings. The Authority must submit an opinion indicating whether the reduction of the marriageable age is appropriate and whether it serves the best interests of the minor (Rules on the Registration of Civil Status Acts and Approval of Forms of Civil Status Records and Other Documents). This mechanism seeks to ensure that permission to marry is granted only where it is consistent with the welfare and lawful interests of the child.

In conclusion, marriage constitutes a statutory exception to the general rule that full civil capacity is acquired upon reaching the age of majority. Where a court authorises a minor to marry, full civil capacity arises from the moment of marriage and is retained even if the marriage subsequently ends. The application of this institution requires an individual

assessment of the minor's maturity, circumstances, and best interests, with particular regard to the views of parents and the opinion of the Child Rights Protection Authority.

Emancipation as a basis for acquiring full civil capacity

Within Lithuanian civil law, civil capacity is defined as the ability of a natural person, through their own actions, to acquire civil rights and assume civil obligations. As a general rule, full civil capacity is acquired upon reaching the age of majority, namely eighteen years of age. Emancipation constitutes an exception to this principle. Article 2.9 of the Civil Code provides that a minor who has attained the age of sixteen may, under certain conditions, be recognised by a court as fully capable, that is, emancipated (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

The institution of emancipation is based on the principle that, although the individual remains a minor in terms of age, they are treated as fully capable in civil legal relations. An emancipated minor acquires the same civil rights and obligations as an adult and may independently participate in civil legal relations, conclude legal transactions, manage property, and bear responsibility for their actions, except where legislation expressly establishes age-related restrictions (Kudinavičiūtė, 2002, p. 120).

Emancipation is a relatively recent institution in Lithuanian law. It was introduced by the Civil Code that entered into force on 1 July 2001. Prior to that date, Lithuanian legislation did not provide for the possibility of recognising a minor as fully capable through a court decision. Full civil capacity could only be acquired upon reaching the age of majority or through marriage. Neither the Civil Code of 1964 nor any other legal mechanism established an equivalent institution.

Pursuant to Article 2.9 of the Civil Code, a minor who has reached the age of sixteen may be recognised as fully capable upon the application of the minor, their parents, guardian, curator, or a guardianship authority. Such recognition may be granted only where there are sufficient grounds to conclude that the minor is capable of independently exercising civil rights and fulfilling civil obligations. In all cases, the minor's own consent constitutes a mandatory condition for emancipation (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

This provision establishes several essential criteria for emancipation. First, only persons who have attained the age of sixteen may apply for emancipation. Second, the application may be submitted not only by the minor but also by their parents, guardian, curator, or the competent guardianship authority. Third, the court must determine whether the minor possesses a sufficient degree of maturity and independence to participate autonomously in civil legal relations. Finally, emancipation may be granted only where the minor personally expresses a wish to acquire full civil capacity.

Applications for emancipation are examined in accordance with civil procedure rules. In assessing whether emancipation is justified, the court evaluates not only the formal statutory requirements but also the factual circumstances of the case. Relevant considerations may include whether the minor has stable employment, possesses financial management skills, lives independently from their parents, complies with legal obligations, and demonstrates sufficient social and personal maturity.

The Civil Code also provides for the possibility of revoking emancipation. Upon the application of the parents, curator, or guardianship authority, a court may revoke the recognition of full civil capacity if it becomes evident that the emancipated minor, while acting independently, causes harm to their own rights and interests or to those of other persons.

The acquisition of full civil capacity through emancipation produces significant legal consequences. Once a minor is recognised as fully capable, parental authority in relation to the representation of the child and the exercise of the child's rights comes to an end. The emancipated person thereafter exercises rights and fulfils obligations independently. Emancipation also constitutes a legal ground for the termination of guardianship or curatorship. Consequently, the powers of the guardian or curator and the supervisory functions of the competent authorities cease (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

Significant consequences also arise in the sphere of property relations. Since parents manage the property of their minor child under the legal institution of usufruct, emancipation terminates this right. Upon acquiring full civil capacity, the minor becomes entitled to the return of their property together with any fruits and income derived from it (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania). Furthermore, an emancipated minor may independently manage, use, and dispose of property and conclude legal transactions without the consent of parents or guardians.

Emancipation also affects maintenance obligations. As a general rule, an emancipated minor is no longer entitled to parental maintenance. The enforcement of previously awarded maintenance ceases from the moment full civil capacity is acquired, and the individual becomes responsible for their own financial affairs, except where legislation expressly provides otherwise.

In conclusion, emancipation constitutes a statutory exception to the general rule that full civil capacity is acquired upon reaching the age of majority. Through a court decision, a minor who has attained the age of sixteen may acquire the legal status of a fully capable person, provided that sufficient maturity and independence are demonstrated. The institution produces significant legal consequences in the areas of parental authority, guardianship, property relations, and maintenance obligations. At the same time, questions arise concerning the scope of emancipation and the legal significance of this status outside civil law, which requires further analysis.

The scope of emancipation and its relationship with other branches of law

Although emancipation grants a minor full civil capacity, the legal effects of this status are primarily confined to the sphere of civil law. Article 1.1 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania defines the scope of civil-law regulation and distinguishes private-law relations from public-law relations. The Civil Code regulates property relations, personal non-property relations connected with such property relations, and family relations. Relations arising from the exercise of public authority, including taxation, administrative and criminal sanctions, public finance, and other public-law matters, are generally governed by special legislation. Labour relations are likewise regulated by special legal acts, while the Civil Code applies only subsidiarily (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

Consequently, the concepts of legal capacity and civil capacity determine a person's status only within civil law. The acquisition of full civil capacity does not automatically alter a person's status in constitutional, criminal, administrative, or other branches of public law. Therefore, although an emancipated minor may independently conclude legal transactions, manage property, and assume civil liability, age-based restrictions established in other areas of law continue to apply.

An exception may be observed in labour law. Legal doctrine generally recognises that an emancipated minor who has acquired full civil capacity may act not only as an employee but also as an employer. This conclusion follows from a systematic interpretation of Article 21 of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania and Article 2.9 of the Civil Code. Article 21 of the Labour Code provides that an employer may be a natural person whose legal capacity and civil capacity are determined under civil law (Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania). Since Article 2.9 of the Civil Code allows a minor who has attained the age of sixteen to be recognised as fully capable, an emancipated minor who is not subject to any specific labour-law restrictions satisfies the requirements applicable to an employer who is a natural person. Consequently, such a person may participate in labour relations both as an employee and as an employer.

A similar conclusion may be drawn in the field of succession law. Article 5.15 of the Civil Code provides that a will may be made only by a legally capable person who understands the significance and consequences of their actions. Since emancipation grants full civil capacity, an emancipated minor may execute a will under the same conditions as an adult testator. The Supreme Court of Lithuania has expressly confirmed this position, stating that the subject of a will, as a unilateral legal transaction, may also be an emancipated minor or a minor who has acquired full civil capacity through marriage (Supreme Court of Lithuania, Case Law Review on Inheritance Matters No. 47). These examples demonstrate that emancipation extends beyond ordinary civil transactions and enables a minor to participate independently in legal relations that require full civil capacity.

The situation differs significantly in constitutional law. Although an emancipated minor is treated as an adult in civil legal relations, political rights remain subject to constitutional age requirements. Article 34(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania provides that citizens who have reached the age of eighteen on election day possess the right to vote. The same provision identifies persons declared legally incapable by a court as an exception to this rule (Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania). Consequently, emancipation does not confer electoral rights, as the right to vote arises only upon reaching eighteen years of age (Kudinavičiūtė, 2002, p. 120).

The distinction becomes even clearer with regard to passive electoral rights. Article 56 of the Constitution provides that a member of the Seimas may be elected only if the individual has reached the age of twenty-one and satisfies the other constitutional requirements (Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania). Accordingly, eligibility to stand for election is determined by constitutional criteria relating to age, citizenship, and residence rather than by the scope of a person's civil capacity (Puodžiūtė, 2023, p. 564).

A similar approach applies in criminal law. Article 13 of the Criminal Code provides that criminal liability generally arises for persons who had reached the age of sixteen before committing a criminal offence and, in certain exceptional cases, for persons who had reached the age of fourteen (Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania). The Criminal Code contains no special provisions concerning emancipated minors or minors who have acquired full civil capacity through marriage. Consequently, emancipated minors remain subject to the same rules of criminal liability as all other minors.

This approach is reinforced by Article 80 of the Criminal Code, which establishes that the special rules governing juvenile criminal liability are intended to ensure that liability corresponds to the offender's age and social maturity, to limit the use of imprisonment, and to prioritise educational and rehabilitative measures. The decisive criterion is therefore the person's age and level of development rather than the existence of full civil capacity.

The same principle is reflected in criminal procedure. Article 271 of the Code of Criminal Procedure defines a minor as a person who has not reached the age of eighteen at the time a

procedural act is performed (Code of Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Lithuania). The provision does not distinguish between ordinary minors and emancipated minors. Consequently, all procedural safeguards established for minors, including special interviewing procedures and additional protective measures, apply equally to emancipated persons until they reach the age of eighteen.

Administrative law follows the same logic. Article 6(1) of the Code of Administrative Offences provides that administrative liability may be imposed only on a person who had reached the age of sixteen before committing an administrative offence. Article 6(3) further provides that the specific features of juvenile administrative liability are regulated in Chapter VII of the Code, which employs the concept of a minor without reference to civil capacity or emancipation status.

Article 42 of the Code defines the purpose of juvenile administrative liability as ensuring that responsibility corresponds to the offender's age and social maturity while combining sanctions with educational and preventive measures (Code of Administrative Offences of the Republic of Lithuania). Thus, as in criminal law, age and social maturity remain the decisive factors.

The primacy of age-based regulation is also evident in other areas of public law. The Law on Road Traffic Safety establishes minimum age requirements for obtaining driving licences of different categories. For example, a Category B driving licence may generally be obtained only upon reaching the age of eighteen (Law on Road Traffic Safety of the Republic of Lithuania). Likewise, compulsory military service is governed by statutory age requirements rather than by civil capacity. The Law on Military Conscription provides that compulsory military service applies to citizens within a specified age range, while younger individuals may participate only under the conditions established by law (Law on Military Conscription of the Republic of Lithuania).

In conclusion, emancipation constitutes an exceptional legal mechanism through which a person who has not yet reached the age of majority may acquire full civil capacity. However, the legal effects of emancipation are primarily confined to civil law. While an emancipated minor may independently conclude legal transactions, manage property, make a will, act as an employer, and assume civil obligations, the acquisition of full civil capacity does not automatically extend to constitutional, criminal, administrative, or other public-law relationships. In these fields, age continues to constitute the primary criterion determining legal status, rights, obligations, and the scope of legal protection.

Judicial practice concerning the granting of full civil capacity to minors

Criteria for granting full civil capacity to minors

Under Lithuanian civil law, a minor may acquire full civil capacity on two principal grounds: through emancipation or by entering into marriage before reaching the age of majority. Although both institutions constitute exceptions to the general rule and produce the same legal consequence - the acquisition of full civil capacity by a minor - they serve different purposes and are governed by different legal regulations. Accordingly, the criteria applied by courts in each case must be analysed separately.

In the context of emancipation, Article 2.9 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania establishes the legal framework governing the acquisition of full civil capacity by a minor. A person seeking emancipation must be a minor who has attained the age of sixteen. An

application may be submitted by the minor, their parents, guardian, curator, or a child protection authority; however, the minor's own consent is mandatory in all cases.

The law further provides that emancipation may be granted where there is a "sufficient basis" for allowing the minor to independently exercise civil rights and fulfil civil obligations (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania). However, the provision does not define the content of this concept. This legislative ambiguity may be regarded as problematic, as it grants courts broad discretion and leaves the practical interpretation of the requirement largely to judicial practice.

An analysis of Lithuanian case law from 2020-2025 demonstrates that courts consistently apply three principal criteria when interpreting Article 2.9 of the Civil Code. First, the applicant must have attained the age of sixteen. Second, the minor must personally express a wish to acquire full civil capacity, as emancipation cannot be granted without the applicant's consent. Third, there must be a sufficient basis to conclude that the minor is capable of independently exercising civil rights and fulfilling civil obligations.

Judicial practice indicates that the requirement of a sufficient basis is assessed primarily through the minor's degree of independence, financial responsibility, and ability to assume responsibility for their actions. Courts place particular emphasis on the applicant's social and economic independence. Accordingly, they evaluate whether the minor is employed, engaged in education or vocational training, involved in economic activity, and capable of responsibly managing income and property. Even where a minor is not currently employed or studying, courts may consider previous engagement in such activities and realistic future plans relating to employment or education (Ruling of the Marijampolė District Court of 26 January 2021 in Civil Case No. e2YT-265-670/2021; Ruling of the Marijampolė District Court of 18 August 2022 in Civil Case No. 2YT-4604-670/2022).

Where available, courts also consider references issued by educational institutions. Such references commonly contain information regarding the minor's responsibility, discipline, social maturity, independence, and ability to function within an educational environment. Judicial practice demonstrates that these assessments are regarded as relevant indicators of the applicant's overall maturity and readiness to assume the rights and obligations associated with full civil capacity (Decision of the Vilnius Regional District Court of 9 July 2025 in Civil Case No. e2YT-8831-604/2025).

Another important consideration concerns the minor's ability to manage financial affairs. Courts examine the applicant's assets, sources of income, and the manner in which financial resources are used and administered. They also assess whether the minor can rely on moral and material support from family members when necessary. Findings regarding financial responsibility are frequently based on parental statements and on assessments provided by the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service (Ruling of the Marijampolė District Court of 18 August 2022 in Civil Case No. 2YT-4604-670/2022).

In addition, courts take into account the views of the parents and the conclusions of the Child Rights Protection Division. These sources provide information regarding the minor's family environment, relationships with parents, actual place of residence, ability to manage financial matters, and overall level of independence. Such information assists the court in determining whether the applicant possesses a sufficient degree of maturity to independently exercise and protect their lawful interests (Marijampolė District Court, Decision of 16 July 2024 in Civil Case No. 2YT-6102-329/2024; Marijampolė District Court, Decision of 6 March 2025 in Civil Case No. e2YT-581-831/2025).

Judicial practice further demonstrates that the existence of administrative offences or other legal violations does not automatically preclude emancipation. Courts assess such

circumstances within the broader context of the applicant's behaviour and overall maturity. For example, in Civil Case No. e2YT-581-831/2025, the court established that the applicant had committed several legal violations, including the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Similarly, in Civil Case No. e2YT-8831-604/2025, the applicant had been held administratively liable for driving a vehicle without the required driving licence. Nevertheless, after evaluating the applicants' overall maturity, independence, family circumstances, and ability to manage personal affairs, the courts concluded that these violations did not outweigh the evidence supporting emancipation and granted both applications (Marijampolė District Court, Decision of 6 March 2025 in Civil Case No. e2YT-581-831/2025; Vilnius Regional District Court, Decision of 9 July 2025 in Civil Case No. e2YT-8831-604/2025).

Courts also consider circumstances specific to the individual case. In Civil Case No. e2YT-8831-604/2025, the court attached particular significance to the fact that the applicant was raising a young child, actively participated in the child's upbringing and care, purchased essential items for the child, and paid child support to the child's father. The court further noted that the applicant had independently applied to the State Guaranteed Legal Aid Service for secondary legal aid. These circumstances were regarded as evidence of responsibility, maturity, and an ability to independently participate in legal relations, thereby supporting the conclusion that the applicant was capable of exercising full civil rights and obligations (Vilnius Regional District Court, Decision of 9 July 2025 in Civil Case No. e2YT-8831-604/2025).

The analysed case law indicates that Lithuanian courts have developed a comprehensive and multifactorial assessment model when deciding whether to grant emancipation. Although certain factors are considered more frequently than others, each application is assessed individually, and the final decision is based on the totality of the evidence and circumstances presented in the case.

A similar issue arises in proceedings concerning the reduction of the marriageable age. Article 3.14 of the Civil Code establishes a separate set of requirements that must be assessed by the court before a minor may acquire full civil capacity through marriage. The court must hear the views of the minor, the minor's parents, guardians, or custodians, assess the minor's mental and psychological condition and financial circumstances, and evaluate any other important reasons that may justify the reduction of the marriageable age. The provision expressly identifies pregnancy as one such reason. In addition, the State Child Rights Protection Authority must submit an opinion regarding whether the reduction of the marriageable age is appropriate and consistent with the best interests of the minor (Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania).

Although pregnancy is expressly recognised by law, Article 3.14 does not define what other circumstances may constitute "important reasons." As a result, the practical content of this concept has largely been developed through judicial practice.

The analysis of Lithuanian case law from 2020-2025 demonstrates that pregnancy constitutes the primary factor considered by courts when deciding whether to reduce the marriageable age. Courts consistently regard pregnancy as an important reason justifying such a reduction, particularly where marriage is considered capable of providing a stable family environment for the future child and safeguarding the interests of both the applicant and the unborn child (Panevėžys District Court, Ruling of 3 November 2020 in Civil Case No. 2SP-9898-783/2020).

Judicial practice further indicates that the existence of an already born child may likewise constitute an important reason for reducing the marriageable age. In Civil Case No. e2SP-3767-724/2025, the court relied on documentary evidence confirming that the child had already been born and that the father had acknowledged paternity and was registered on the birth certificate.

The court concluded that these circumstances demonstrated the existence of an actual family relationship and that granting permission to marry would contribute to safeguarding the child's interests and ensuring a stable family environment (Utena District Court, Ruling of 21 May 2025 in Civil Case No. e2SP-3767-724/2025).

Another significant factor concerns the stability of the relationship between the prospective spouses and their preparedness to establish a family. Courts assess whether the parties intend to raise the child together, whether they are already cohabiting or plan to establish a common household, and whether they demonstrate sufficient maturity to create and maintain a family unit (Šiauliai District Court, Ruling of 6 May 2022 in Civil Case No. 2SP-5839-457/2022).

The opinions of parents, guardians, or custodians also play an important role. Courts examine whether these persons support or oppose the application and consider their views regarding the minor's maturity, independence, and ability to cope with family responsibilities. The availability of practical and financial support from family members is likewise taken into account (Plungė District Court, Ruling of 31 March 2020 in Civil Case No. e2SP-1343-514/2020).

Financial circumstances constitute another relevant criterion. Courts evaluate not only the financial situation of the applicant but also that of the future spouse or the future father of the child. Judicial practice demonstrates that courts consider the ability and willingness of both parties to contribute to family life and to provide for the needs of the child. For example, in Civil Case No. e2SP-663-913/2021, the court noted that although the future father of the child was temporarily unemployed, he received social benefits and engaged in the resale of vehicles. The evidence demonstrated that he used his income to support the applicant, purchase items for the expected child, contribute to rent and utility payments, and meet household expenses. These circumstances supported the conclusion that the future family would possess sufficient material resources (Utena District Court, Ruling of 8 February 2021 in Civil Case No. e2SP-663-913/2021).

The opinions submitted by the State Child Rights Protection Authority are also of considerable importance. These opinions typically address the applicant's level of independence, approach to pregnancy, ability to manage financial resources, family environment, and overall readiness to establish a family. The authority further assesses whether reducing the marriageable age would be consistent with the minor's best interests (Panevėžys District Court, Ruling of 15 January 2020 in Civil Case No. e2SP-800-1005/2020; Šiauliai District Court, Ruling of 18 December 2023 in Civil Case No. e2SP-16927-1031/2023; Šiauliai District Court, Ruling of 20 December 2024 in Civil Case No. e2SP-19914-1051/2024).

In addition, courts take into account information concerning the applicant's family environment and social circumstances. In Civil Case No. e2SP-16927-1031/2023, the State Child Rights Protection Authority noted that case management measures had previously been applied within the family; however, these measures were unrelated to the applicant herself. The family was nevertheless described as orderly and stable. The authority concluded that the family unit the applicant intended to establish would be sufficiently mature and capable of raising a child. The court relied on this assessment and observed that there was no evidence suggesting that the applicant's psychological or mental condition impaired her ability to understand the consequences of marriage (Šiauliai District Court, Ruling of 18 December 2023 in Civil Case No. e2SP-16927-1031/2023).

Finally, courts evaluate the applicant's mental and psychological condition. This assessment is based on the entirety of the evidence presented and focuses on whether the applicant understands the legal and practical consequences of marriage and parenthood and is

capable of assuming the associated responsibilities (Telšiai District Court, Ruling of 22 November 2022 in Civil Case No. 2SP-6368-1079/2022).

The analysed case law demonstrates that judicial practice has not established a fixed list of “other important reasons” within the meaning of Article 3.14 of the Civil Code. Instead, courts assess each application individually and determine whether the totality of circumstances justifies reducing the marriageable age.

In conclusion, both exceptions through which minors may acquire full civil capacity are based not merely on age requirements but also on a range of substantive criteria. In emancipation proceedings, courts primarily assess the applicant’s independence, financial responsibility, social maturity, educational and employment situation, and ability to manage personal affairs. In proceedings concerning the reduction of the marriageable age, particular importance is attached to pregnancy or the existence of a child, the stability of the relationship, preparedness for family life, financial circumstances, and the best interests of the minor.

A common feature of both institutions is that courts do not rely solely on formal statutory requirements. Judicial practice demonstrates that the granting of full civil capacity depends on a comprehensive assessment of the minor’s maturity, independence, financial circumstances, family environment, and ability to assume responsibility for legal consequences. Consequently, both the concept of a “sufficient basis” under Article 2.9 of the Civil Code and the concept of “other important reasons” under Article 3.14 have been developed primarily through judicial interpretation rather than through detailed legislative regulation.

The significance of child rights protection authority opinions

The case law analysed in the previous section demonstrates that opinions issued by the Child Rights Protection Authority are submitted both in proceedings concerning the emancipation of minors and in cases involving applications for the reduction of the marriageable age. However, an explicit statutory requirement to obtain such an opinion exists only under Article 3.14 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania, which governs proceedings for the reduction of the marriageable age. Nevertheless, the analysed case law indicates that opinions of the State Child Rights Protection Authority are also regularly obtained and taken into account in emancipation proceedings. This suggests that such opinions are regarded as significant in practice when determining whether full civil capacity should be granted to a minor.

Under Article 3.14 of the Civil Code, the Authority is required to provide its opinion on the appropriateness of reducing the marriageable age and to indicate whether such a decision would serve the lawful interests of the minor. However, the law does not regulate the legal force of the Authority’s opinion or expressly specify the extent to which it is binding upon the court. This gives rise to a legal question concerning the evidentiary significance of such opinions and the extent to which courts are required to rely on them when making decisions. As a result, the practical role of these opinions can be understood only through an analysis of judicial practice.

An analysis of civil cases reveals circumstances in which courts rely on the conclusions of the Child Rights Protection Authority as well as situations in which they depart from them. In Civil Case No. 2SP-7964-1005/2018, the court examined an application for the reduction of the marriageable age. The Child Rights Protection Authority submitted an opinion stating that granting the application would not be appropriate and would not serve the lawful interests of the minor applicant. The Authority based its opinion on the applicant’s repeated absconding from a foster care institution, persistent behavioural problems, involvement in incidents that resulted in pre-trial investigations, and the ineffectiveness of previously applied supervision

measures. The Authority also noted that placement in a socialisation centre had failed to produce positive changes in the applicant's behaviour.

After assessing both the Authority's opinion and the other circumstances of the case, the court dismissed the application. In its reasoning, the court emphasised that the mere fact of pregnancy could not, by itself, constitute a sufficient basis for reducing the marriageable age. The court concluded that, in light of the applicant's overall behaviour and circumstances, granting the application would not be consistent with the applicant's lawful interests (Panevėžys District Court, Ruling of 16 July 2018 in Civil Case No. 2SP-7964-1005/2018).

A different approach can be observed in Civil Case No. 2A-37-775/2024, which concerned an application for emancipation. In that case, the regional division of the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service submitted an opinion opposing emancipation. The Authority argued that emancipation would not be appropriate and would not serve the applicant's best interests. Its assessment was based on a history of legal violations within the family, the application of case management measures, and the applicant's behavioural record, which included smoking, alcohol consumption, and administrative sanctions. The Authority also noted that the applicant had concealed her pregnancy for a prolonged period, had failed to attend medical examinations, and lacked sufficient parenting skills. Although the first-instance court took the Authority's opinion into account, after assessing all of the evidence in the case it concluded that the applicant was committed to completing her education, demonstrated motivation to prepare for motherhood, and intended to care for and raise her child. The court found that the applicant possessed a sufficient degree of independence and maturity and therefore granted the application for emancipation (Kaunas Regional Court, Ruling of 4 January 2024 in Civil Case No. 2A-37-775/2024).

The Child Rights Protection Authority appealed the decision and requested that the application be dismissed. However, the appellate court upheld the decision of the first-instance court and rejected the appeal. In doing so, it referred to established Supreme Court case law, according to which the evidentiary value of information submitted in judicial proceedings must be assessed by the court according to its own inner conviction, formed through a comprehensive and objective evaluation of all relevant circumstances of the case (Kaunas Regional Court, Ruling of 4 January 2024 in Civil Case No. 2A-37-775/2024).

The analysed cases demonstrate that the opinions of the Child Rights Protection Authority may have a significant influence on judicial decision-making. In some cases, courts rely heavily on such opinions and reach conclusions consistent with the Authority's assessment. In other cases, courts depart from the Authority's position where the totality of the evidence supports a different conclusion. Consequently, the Authority's opinion cannot be regarded as determinative of the outcome of proceedings.

Accordingly, although the opinions of the Child Rights Protection Authority carry considerable weight in proceedings concerning emancipation and the reduction of the marriageable age, they do not possess predetermined evidentiary force. Courts base their decisions on the totality of the evidence and on their own assessment of the circumstances of the case. The analysed case law demonstrates that the Authority's opinion performs a significant informational and advisory function. However, the final decision remains within the exclusive competence of the court, which must independently determine whether granting full civil capacity would serve the lawful interests of the minor.

Relationship between full civil capacity granted to minors and criminal law

When analysing the institution of full civil capacity granted to minors, the question arises as to how such a person should be treated in criminal law and criminal procedure. This issue is relevant because legislation does not clearly define the significance of full civil capacity outside civil law. As a result, uncertainty may arise as to whether a minor who has acquired full civil capacity should still be treated as a child or minor in criminal-law relations.

This issue was examined in detail by the Supreme Court of Lithuania in Criminal Case No. 2K-64-654/2024. The case concerned the status, for the purposes of criminal law and criminal procedure, of a minor victim who had acquired full civil capacity on the basis of marriage.

The cassation court first explained the concept of civil capacity and the exceptions that allow minors to acquire full civil capacity before reaching the age of majority. Civil capacity was described as the ability of a natural person to independently acquire and exercise rights, assume obligations, and bear responsibility for failure to fulfil them. As a general rule, this ability arises in full when a person reaches the age of eighteen. The Court noted that Lithuanian civil law provides two exceptions to this rule. A minor may acquire full civil capacity either by entering into marriage before reaching the age of majority or through emancipation under Articles 2.5(2) and 2.9 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania (Supreme Court of Lithuania, Ruling of 22 February 2024 in Criminal Case No. 2K-64-654/2024).

However, the cassation court emphasised that minors who have acquired full civil capacity are not regarded as adults in criminal law. This conclusion was based on the legal concept of a child. Under the Law on the Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child, a child is a person under the age of eighteen, unless otherwise provided by law. Criminal law and criminal procedure do not provide an exception under which a person who has acquired full civil capacity may be treated as an adult for criminal-law purposes.

The Court also relied on international and European Union legal acts concerning trafficking in human beings, sexual exploitation of children, and sexual abuse. These instruments define a child as a person under the age of eighteen. The Court stressed that the state may not establish lower standards of child protection than those arising from its international obligations. It also referred to the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court, according to which Lithuanian law may not narrow international human rights protection standards, although it may provide broader protection.

The cassation court further observed that, in cases concerning criminal offences involving the sexual exploitation of children, the concept of a child has consistently been linked to the age threshold of eighteen years. Therefore, there is no basis for creating an exception for emancipated minors or minors who have acquired full civil capacity through marriage. The Court also noted that even in civil law, full civil capacity does not grant all rights and obligations linked by law to a specific age. Examples include the duty to perform mandatory military service, electoral rights, and the right to drive vehicles. Accordingly, full civil capacity cannot in itself alter a person's status in criminal law (Supreme Court of Lithuania, Ruling of 22 February 2024 in Criminal Case No. 2K-64-654/2024).

The ruling also addressed earlier cassation practice. The Court noted that an older ruling had suggested that a child victim of certain criminal offences is any person under eighteen years of age, "unless the institution of emancipation has been applied to them". However, the Court clarified that case law develops over time, taking into account later international instruments and more recent judicial practice. In the ruling under analysis, the Court clearly held that, despite the reduction of the marriageable age and the conclusion of marriage, a victim who was

under eighteen years of age had to be regarded as a child and a minor for the purposes of criminal law. Thus, the earlier connection between emancipation and the loss of child status in criminal law is no longer relevant (Supreme Court of Lithuania, Ruling of 22 February 2024 in Criminal Case No. 2K-64-654/2024).

This interpretation also has direct consequences in criminal procedure. In the case under analysis, the victim was seventeen years old during the pre-trial investigation. She was questioned without applying the special procedural rules for minor victims, including the participation of a psychologist and a representative of the child rights protection authority. The cassation court recognised this as a procedural violation. However, it considered the violation to be formal and not affecting the lawfulness of the judgment, because later questioning, carried out after the victim had reached adulthood, confirmed the same essential facts.

Nevertheless, the Court's reasoning confirms an important principle. A person under the age of eighteen who has acquired full civil capacity must still be treated as a minor in criminal proceedings. Therefore, such a person must be afforded the procedural safeguards applicable to minors, including additional protective measures during questioning and other procedural actions (Supreme Court of Lithuania, Ruling of 22 February 2024 in Criminal Case No. 2K-64-654/2024).

In conclusion, the cassation ruling clearly defines the limits of full civil capacity granted to minors in relation to criminal law and criminal procedure. A minor who has acquired full civil capacity through marriage or emancipation is treated as equivalent to an adult only in civil legal relations. In criminal law and criminal procedure, such a person remains a child and a minor until reaching the age of eighteen.

This means that, in criminal law, the decisive criterion is not the scope of civil capacity but the person's age. The status of a child is linked to the need for special protection and cannot be denied merely because the minor has acquired full civil capacity in civil law.

Conclusions

Under Lithuanian civil law, full civil capacity is generally acquired upon reaching the age of majority. However, the law provides for two exceptions: emancipation and the acquisition of full civil capacity through marriage. Although both institutions result in the acquisition of full civil capacity by a minor, they differ significantly in their legal nature, conditions of application, and objectives. Therefore, they cannot be regarded as equivalent legal mechanisms.

Judicial practice demonstrates that decisions concerning emancipation and the reduction of the marriageable age are based on a comprehensive assessment of individual circumstances. In emancipation cases, particular attention is paid to the minor's independence, ability to manage financial affairs, employment or educational status, and social maturity. In cases concerning the reduction of the marriageable age, courts focus on the minor's maturity, preparedness for family life, the existence of pregnancy or the birth of a child, and the circumstances of the prospective family. The statutory concepts of a "sufficient basis" and "other important reasons" are not precisely defined by law, and their content is therefore developed through judicial practice on a case-by-case basis.

Although the opinions of the State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Service play an important role in proceedings concerning emancipation and the reduction of the marriageable age, they do not possess predetermined evidentiary force. Judicial practice demonstrates that courts assess such opinions together with all other evidence in the case and may depart from them where the totality of circumstances supports a different conclusion. Consequently, the

Authority's opinion performs an important informational and advisory function but is not binding upon the court.

The granting of full civil capacity to a minor produces legal consequences primarily within the sphere of civil law and does not alter the individual's status in criminal, administrative, or constitutional law. The case law of the Supreme Court of Lithuania confirms that an emancipated minor, or a minor who has acquired full civil capacity through marriage, is treated as an adult in civil legal relations. However, for the purposes of other branches of law, such a person remains a minor until reaching the age of eighteen and continues to be subject to the special legal rules applicable to minors.

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MANIPULIAVIMO SPORTO VARŽYBOMIS LIETUVOJE TEISINIO REGLAMENTAVIMO ANALIZĖ

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Anotacija. Manipuliacija sporte ir manipulavimas sporto varžybomis visame pasaulyje, kaip ir Lietuvoje, yra aktuali problema, ir tai yra viena didžiausių grėsmių šiandieniniam sportui, bei grėsmė Europos Sąjungos vidaus saugumui. Didėjanti sporto komercializacija turi įtakos legalių ir nelegalių lažybų pasiūlai, susijusiai su sporto renginiais, sporto varžybų įvykiais ir (ar) jų rezultatais, o dažnu atveju sporto šakų federacijų (toliau – sporto organizacija¹) ir sportininkų finansinis nestabilumas – tai pagrindinės priežastys, lemiančios manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis paplitimą pasaulyje, įskaitant ir Lietuvą. Todėl Lietuvoje ypač svarbu turėti veiksmingą teisinį reguliavimą, atitinkantį manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis keliamas grėsmes ir tarptautinius įsipareigojimus, taip pat proaktyviai veikiančią institucinę sistemą su funkcinėmis priemonėmis, leidžiančiomis ne tik kovoti su manipuliacijomis sporto varžybomis ir vykdyti jo prevenciją, bet ir aiškiai įvertinti esamą situaciją.

Šio straipsnio tikslas – kompleksiskai išanalizuoti manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis teisinio reglamentavimo ir kovos su šiuo reiškiniu koordinavimo problemas, įvertinti aktualių teisės aktų taikymo praktiką bei atskleisti manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis sąvokos turinį, jos aiškinimą ir taikymą teisės doktrinoje bei praktikoje, taip pat išnagrinėti atsakomybės už manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis taikymo aspektus, identifikuojant su šiuo reiškiniu susijusius teisinio vertinimo ypatumus, probleminius klausimus ir praktinio įgyvendinimo sunkumus Lietuvos teisinėje sistemoje.

Siekiant šių tikslų buvo analizuojami empiriniai tyrimai ir teisės aktai, taip pat nagrinėjami 2017-2025 m. laikotarpiu pradėti ikiteisminiai tyrimai dėl manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis (iš viso 18 ikiteisminių tyrimų, policijos ir prokuratūros priimtų nutarimų). Papildomai analizuoti 2014 ir 2023 m. atlikti sportininkų, trenerių, teisėjų, sporto vadybininkų ir kitų su sportu susijusių asmenų sociologinių tyrimų rezultatai, atspindintys manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis suvokimą ir paplitimą Lietuvoje. Tyrimo metu surinkti duomenys buvo sisteminami, lyginami, analizuojami ir apibendrinami. Tyrimo tikslams pasiekti buvo remtasi ir straipsnio autoriaus (Europol Supports Lithuania's Fight Against Match-Fixing)² daugiau kaip 12 metų profesinė patirtimi teisėkūros, teisės aktų taikymo, praktinio įgyvendinimo ir valdymo srityse, koordinuojant bei įgyvendinant kovos su manipuliacijomis sporto varžybomis priemones. Ši patirtis sukaupta taikant Lietuvos pasirašytą ir ratifikuotą Europos Tarybos konvenciją dėl manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis (Makolino konvenciją), bendradarbiaujant su nacionalinėmis ir tarptautinėmis institucijomis bei dalyvaujant manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis prevencijos, tyrimo ir kontrolės procesuose.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: manipuliacijos sporte, organizuotas nusikalstamumas, sukčiavimas, aukšto meistriškumo sportas, Makolino Konvencija.

¹ Straipsnio autorius naudoja platesnę „sporto organizacijos“ sąvoką negu Lietuvos Respublikos sporto įstatyme nurodyta „sporto šakos federacija“ sąvoką, kadangi manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis vyksta ne tik aukšto meistriškumo sporto varžybose, bet ir ne aukšto meistriškumo sporto varžybose bei varžybose, turinčiuose ne visus sporto varžybų požymius, bet labai panašus į sporto varžybas

² 2015 m. rugsėjo 23 d. parengta pirma policijos analitinė-strateginė pažyma dėl manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis, po kurios Lietuvos policijos buvo prijungta prie Europol AWF SOC FP Sport Corruption tikslinės grupės (dabar ji angliškai vadinasi Corruption Analysis Project) („Europol Supports Lithuania's Fight Against Match-Fixing“).

Ivadas

Pasaulinės futbolo federacijos (angl. *Fédération Internationale de Football Association*, toliau - FIFA) 2011 metų duomenimis, iš anksto manipuliuojamų sporto varžybų lošimų industrijos mastai per metus siekė apie 90 mlrd. JAV dolerių (FIFA steps up fight against \$90b match-fixing industry 2011), tai yra kelis kartus daugiau nei „Amazon“, „Coca Cola“ ir „Mc.Donalds“ metinė apyvarta.

2014 metais pasaulinės privačios sporto varžybų lažybų stebėjimo agentūros „*Sportradar*“ (steigėja yra Europos futbolo asociacijos sąjungos arba UEFA) teigimu Lietuva pateko į sąrašą 10-ies valstybių, kuriose užfiksuota daugiausia manipuliuojamų laikomų futbolo rungtynių (Bistrickaitė 2015, 71).

Europos Sąjungos sunkaus ir organizuoto nusikalstamumo grėsmių vertinimo 2025 metų ataskaitoje (angl. *EU Serious and organised crime threat assessment*, toliau – SOCTA ataskaita) Europolas pažymi, kad viena iš Europos Sąjungos grėsmių vidaus saugumui yra organizuotas nusikalstamumas, kuris nuolat keičiasi, įgauna naujas veikimo formas ir didesnę tarptautiškumą, plečiasi jo veiklos geografija, organizuoto nusikalstamumo veikla plinta internete, naudoja dirbtinį intelektą, naujos technologijos organizuotą nusikalstamumą dar labiau skatina neteisėtai veikti bei dar daugiau didinti grėsmes ir destabilizuoti vidaus saugumo padėtį Europos Sąjungoje (The changing DNA of serious and organised crime 2025).

Manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis, pasižymintis dideliu tarptautiškumu ir neturintis veikimo sienų, įsitvirtino kaip viena iš sunkaus ir organizuoto nusikalstamumo (The involvement of organised crime groups in sporto corruption. Situation report 2019) neteisėtos veiklos sričių (European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2021), iš kurios gaunamos didelės neteisėtos pajamos (The changing DNA of serious and organised crime, *op.cit.*). Nors Europolo išvalgos nurodo, kad manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis yra organizuoto nusikalstamo neteisėtų veikų sritis, deja, bet Lietuvos Nacionalinėje saugumo strategijoje (Nacionalinė saugumo strategija 2012) manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis nėra įvardintas kaip grėsmė Lietuvos nacionaliniam saugumui.

2014 m. rugsėjo 18 d. Lietuvos Respublika kartu su kitomis Europos Sąjungos valstybėmis narėmis pasirašė Makolino konvenciją (Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions 2014), kuri po beveik dešimtmečio – 2024 m. birželio 6 d. – buvo ratifikuota ir Lietuvoje. Nuo ratifikavimo momento Konvencijos nuostatos tapo privalomos nacionalinėje teisės sistemoje.

Šio tarptautinio teisės akto įsigaliojimas reikšmingai sustiprino manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis prevencijos, kontrolės ir teisinio reguliavimo sistemą, suteikdamas naują institucinę ir normatyvinę pagrindą kovai su šiuo reiškiniu, kuris kelia esminę grėsmę sporto sąžiningumo, skaidrumo ir pasitikėjimo principais grindžiamai sporto sistemai.

Iki Makolino konvencijos pasirašymo 2014 metais, moksliniuose darbuose manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis buvo nagrinėjamas kaip neigiamas socialinis reiškinys, pateikiant jo teisinį vertinimą ir galimą kriminalizavimą (Zaksaitė 2011, Zaksaitė 2012, Zaksaitė 2013). Tai iš esmės paaiškinama tuo, kad šis reiškinys Lietuvoje ilgą laiką nebuvo sistemiškai matomas, vertinamas, stebimas ir matuojamas, o dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis latentiskumo apie tai buvo kalbama itin retai.

Nuo Makolino konvencijos pasirašymo iki jos ratifikavimo, manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis reiškinys buvo nagrinėjamas keliais aspektais: Lietuvos ir tarptautinių įsipareigojimų (Bistrickaitė 2015), sportininkų sukčiavimo sportinėje veikloje (Šmigelskaitė 2016), manipuliavimo sporto varžybų situacijos (Alūzas 2022), baudžiamosios atsakomybės ir jos taikymo (Marcinauskaitė 2023), kriminologinių sociologinių aspektų dėl manipuliavimų

Lietuvos futbole (Zaksaitė 2023, p-99-123). Vis dėlto šie veiksniai neturėjo esminės įtakos baudžiamosios atsakomybės už manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis reglamentavimo formavimuisi, taip pat šio reiškinių teisiniam kvalifikavimui, galimų nusikalstamų veikų tyrimo praktikai bei metodologijai ir veiksmingos manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis prevencijos sistemos plėtrai.

Manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis reiškinys

SOCTA ataskaitoje pažymima, kad sunkus ir organizuotas nusikalstamumas vis dažniau veikia skaitmeninėje ir internetinėje erdvėje, taip transformuodamas tradicines, fizine sąveika grindžiamas nusikalstamų veikų vykdymo formas. Pažymima, kad sunkus ir organizuotas nusikalstamumas naudoja įvairias hibridines taktikas, schemas ar elementus, kurie skirti juos apsaugoti ir didinti galimybes gauti neteisėtas pajamas. Todėl organizuotas nusikalstamumas vis daugiau ir aktyviau į savo neteisėtą veiklą įtraukia:

- ✓ pinigų plovimą ir investavimą į įvairias finansų sistemas;
- ✓ „išisiskverbimą“ į legalų verslą ir jo struktūras, sudarant sąlygas įgyti daugiau galios ir įtakos, kurios gali padėti organizuojant ir slepiant nusikalstamas veikas (pavyzdžiui, Prokurorai siekia A. Pukelį-Švinių pasiūsti už grotų 2016, Rumūnas Lietuvoje apsimetė futbolo klubo pirkėju: parodęs krūvą grynųjų, sukeitė vokus 2025, Nuošalyje 1 d 2022, Nuošalyje 2 d. 2022);
- ✓ korupciją, kuri palengvina nusikalstamų veikų padarymą arba palengvina kilusias pasekmes;
- ✓ smurto naudojimą nusikalstamumo rinkose, kai yra sprendžiami konfliktai ir vykstant tarpusavio konkurencijai rinkoje;
- ✓ internetinio ir šifruoto ryšio sprendimų naudojimą;
- ✓ jaunų asmenų įtraukimą į nusikalstamą veiklą ir jų išnaudojimą, siekiant didinti nusikalstamos veiklos pelningumą bei stiprinti organizuotų struktūrų atsparumą demaskavimo rizikai (The changing DNA of serious and organised crime 2025).

Visi šie minimi organizuoto nusikalstamumo įtraukties elementai naudojami ir manipuliuojant sporto varžybomis. Manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis atskleidimas ir tyrimas nėra tradicinis ar įprastas, yra be galo sudėtingas, kompleksiškas, kartais be aiškių išankstinių kryptių ar požymių, nes manipuliavime sporto varžybomis susiduria daugelis kitų atskirų nusikalstamų veikų, kurių tarpinis ar galutinis rezultatas yra manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis.

Organizuotas nusikalstamumas iš manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis gauna pakankamai dideles neteisėtas pajamas, o įvertinus šio reiškinių latentškumą ir jo pagrindinę kilmės geografiją (The involvement of organised crime groups in sporto corruption. Situation report 2019), pateikiami skaičiai turi būti laikomi tik orientaciniais. 2021 metų SOCTA ataskaitoje nurodoma, kad organizuoto nusikalstamumo pajamos iš manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis siekia 120 mln. Eurų (European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2021). 2021 metų „Sportradar“ kompanijos pateikti duomenys rodo, kad dėl įvairių sporto varžybų pasaulio lažybų rinkoje dėl manipuliuojamų sporto varžybų yra atliekama 165 milijonų eurų statymų per metus (Betting corruption and match-fixing in 2021. 2022). 2021 metų Jungtinių Tautų Narkotikų ir nusikaltimų prevencijos biuro pranešime (Illegal bets add up to 1.7 trillion dollars each year: new UN report. 2021) nurodoma, kad kasmet nelegaliose lažybų rinkose padaroma statymų už 1,7 trilijonų JAV dolerių, tuo tarpu, 2025 metais organizuoto nusikalstamumo pajamos Europos Sąjungoje dėl narkotinių ir psichotropinių medžiagų neteisėtos apyvartos siekė net 146 trilijonų eurų (Key Findings 2025). 2022-2023

metų Interpolo operacijos SOGA (angl. *Soccer Gambling*) dėl neteisėtų lažybų, kuriose dalyvavo net 19 šalių, metu Europoje ir Azijoje buvo nustatyta virš 1400 įtariamųjų asmenų, buvo konfiskuota 7,9 mln. JAV dolerių grynais bei nustatyti statymai 465 mln. JAV dolerių sumai (Illegal gambling: Operation SOGA VIII leads to 1,400 arrests 2021). Šie skirtingi skaičiai parodo, kad žinome tik tiek, kad dėl lažybų manipuliuojant sporto varžybomis piniginės sumos ir neteisėtos pajamos yra labai didelės (pavyzdžiui, 2011 metais viena Azijos lažybų bendrovė buvo vertinama keturis kartus brangiau negu „Adidas“ pasaulio lygio sportinių prekių gamintoja, nors lažybininkų pelno marža yra daug mažesnė (Declan 2018, 145)). Pažymėtina, kad dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis specifiškumo ir latentiškumo nežinome tikrojo pinigų apyvartos masto, nes daugiausia lažybų dėl manipuliuojamų sporto varžybų atliekama Azijos lažybų rinkoje, bei nėra vertinamos galimai neteisėtos pajamos dėl manipuliuojamų ir sutartų sporto varžybų, prisidengiant sporto verslo strategija, žaidimo taktika ir net tam tikrus įsipareigojimus prieš kitus be lažybų, pavyzdžiui, rėmėjus (Declan 2018, 259).

2014 m. „Transparency International“ (Nesąžiningi susitarimai sporte 2014) atlikto tyrimo duomenimis, 55 proc. futbolininkų ir 30,9 proc. krepšininkų teigė, jog nesąžiningi susitarimai dėl rungtynių Lietuvoje yra paplitę. Lietuvoje nesąžiningi susitarimai sporte egzistuoja, tačiau nustatyti tikrąjį nesąžiningų susitarimų paplitimą ir mastą yra sunku arba neįmanoma. „Transparency International“ tyrimo duomenys rodo, kad sportininkų įsitraukimą į susitarimus dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis dažniausiai lemia finansinės priežastys, pavyzdžiui, neišmokėti atlyginimai ar kiti finansiniai įsipareigojimai. Tačiau sportininkų dalyvavimo nesąžininguose susitarimuose sporte ir jų įsitraukimo į lažybų veiklą teisinė kvalifikacija išlieka problemiška, kadangi nėra aiškiai suformuotos ir nuoseklios teisinės bazės, reglamentuojančios tokių veikų vertinimą.

Įvertinus tai, kad „Transparency International“ tyrimas buvo daromas 2014 metais, 2023 metais Lietuvos antidopingo agentūra (toliau – Agentūra) užsakė aukšto meistriškumo sportininkų, sportininkų, trenerių, teisėjų sporto vadybininkų ir kitų asmenų sociologinį tyrimą dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis suvokimo ir paplitimo Lietuvoje, kurio rezultatai pirmą kartą trumpai pristatomi šiame straipsnyje.

Sociologinėje *online* apklausų platformoje iš viso buvo sugeneruota 718 atsakymų. Ši sociologinė apklausa parodė, kad visuomenė ir sporto bendruomenė manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis suvokia kaip sąlyginai retai pasitaikantį ir būdingą tarptautiniam sportui. Apklausos dalyvių nuomone, manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis kaip nusikalstama veika yra tokia pat pavojinga kaip kyšininkavimas, dokumento suklastojimas ir neteisėtas praturtėjimas. Daugiau nei trys ketvirtadaliai (78,5 proc.) tirtos tikslinės grupės atstovų išreiškė nuomonę, jog Lietuvos visuomenė apie šį neigiamą reiškinį yra informuojama nepakankamai, todėl devyni dešimtadaliai (87,8 proc.) apklaustų išreiškia pageidavimą, kad šalyje būtų pateikiama daugiau informacijos, vyktų daugiau viešų diskusijų apie manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis.

Kas penktas (20,6 proc.) apklausos dalyvis nežino tiksliai, kaip elgtis sužinojus apie planuojamą ar įvykdytą manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis, bet tikėtina kreiptųsi į policiją ar Agentūrą, 33 proc. apklausos dalyvių kitur ieškotų patarimo kaip elgtis, 5,4 proc. apklausos dalyvių nieko neinformuotų apie tai.

Priešingai nei „Transparency International“ pateiktuose rezultatuose, tirtoje tikslinėje grupėje 15,5 proc. respondentų nurodė suvokę ir aiškiai supratę, kad buvo vykdomas manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis, 4 proc. dalyvavo tuose manipuliavimuose, iš kurių 9,3 proc. sudaro aukšto meistriškumo sportininkai. Todėl galima daryti išvadą, kad daugiausia manipuliavimų sporto varžybose vyko ne aukšto meistriškumo varžybose. Kita vertus, jei Lietuvoje per metus vyksta apie 3 000 aukšto meistriškumo varžybų (Sporto statistika 2023), kuriose galėjo dalyvauti 9,3 proc. aukšto meistriškumo sportininkų, apie 279 aukšto

meistriškumo sporto varžybų per metus galėjo būti paveiktos manipuliavimo ar iš anksto suderintų susitarimų. Tai reiškia, kad yra didelė tikimybė ir didelė rizika, kad ir kitose, ne tokiose populiariose sporto šakose kaip krepšinis, futbolas, tiek aukšto ir ne aukšto meistriškumo varžybose vyksta manipuliavimas dėl eigos ar rezultatų, siekiant turtinio ar sportinio intereso ir asmeninės naudos.

Manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis koordinavimas Lietuvoje

Agentūra - vienintelė nacionalinės antidopingo organizacijos statusą, kaip jis yra suprantamas Pasauliniame antidopingo kodekse, Lietuvos Respublikoje atitinkanti įstaiga, atliekanti nacionalinės antidopingo organizacijos funkcijas bei įgyvendinanti Pasaulinį antidopingo kodeksą ir kovos su manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis koordinatorė, kaip jis suprantamas 2014 m. rugsėjo 18 d. Europos Tarybos konvencijoje dėl manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis. Nuo pat jos įkūrimo pradžios, tai yra nuo 2005 metų, ji yra pagrindinė šalies instancija, kovojanti prieš dopingo vartojimą Lietuvos sporte. Jos vienas iš tikslų - UNESCO Konvencijos prieš dopingo vartojimą sporte (Konvencija prieš dopingo vartojimą sporte 2005) įgyvendinimas.

2022 m. lapkričio 15 d. Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo, mokslo ir sporto ministro įsakymu Nr. V-1789 „Dėl Švietimo, mokslo ir sporto ministro 2020 m. balandžio 23 d. įsakymo Nr. V-606 „Dėl Viešosios įstaigos Lietuvos antidopingo agentūros įstatų patvirtinimo“ pakeitimo“ Agentūrai pavesta vykdyti kovos su manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis koordinatoriaus Lietuvoje funkcijas.

Agentūros veikla orientuota į viešojo intereso tenkinimą, užtikrinant sąžiningą ir saugią fizinio aktyvumo bei aukšto meistriškumo sporto plėtrą. Jos pagrindinis tikslas – apsaugoti sportininkų teisę dalyvauti varžybose be dopingo ir manipuliacijų, taip stiprinant sveikatingumą, teisingumą ir lygybę sporte. Agentūra kuria ir tobulina antidopingo taisyklių pažeidimų nagrinėjimo procedūras, vadovaudamasi Pasauliniu antidopingo kodeksu ir tarptautiniais reikalavimais, taip pat teikia metodinę, informacinę ir praktinę pagalbą sporto organizacijoms. Agentūros veikla apima dopingo kontrolę, pažeidimų tyrimą, prevencinių priemonių įgyvendinimą, švietimo programų rengimą, visuomenės informavimą, nacionalinės antidopingo programos įgyvendinimą ir tarptautinį bendradarbiavimą. Be to, Agentūra renka ir analizuoja su antidopingu susijusią informaciją, rengia statistines ataskaitas, viešina nustatytus dopingo atvejus, remia mokslinius tyrimus ir organizuoja antidopingo taisyklių pažeidimus nagrinėjančios specialios komisijos veiklą, taip prisidėdama prie nuoseklios ir veiksmingos kovos su dopingo vartojimu sporte.

Sklaudaus, operatyvaus manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis keitimosi informacija procesą tarp institucijų Lietuvoje užtikrina dar 2015 metais pasirašyta, o vėliau 2020 atnaujinta, bendradarbiavimo sutartis tarp Švietimo, mokslo ir sporto ministerijos, Vidaus reikalų ministerijos, Policijos departamento, Generalinės prokuratūros, Lošimų priežiūros tarnybos, Specialiųjų tyrimų tarnybos bei Finansinių nusikaltimų tyrimo tarnybos (Tarpinstitucinė bendradarbiavimo sutartis 2015). Agentūra siekia būti ne tik jungiančia tarpinstitucinio bendradarbiavimo grandimi, tačiau ir padėti, patarti, koordinuoti teisėsaugos institucijų ir sporto organizacijų veiklą (Manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis sporto organizacijoje rekomenduojamas prevencijos priemonių planas 2024), atlikti informacijos ir duomenų apie manipuliavimą sporte ir manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis Lietuvoje rinkimą, analizę, rizikų ir grėsmių vertinimą. Kiekvienais metais Agentūra organizuoja ne tik tarpinstitucinius platformos susitikimus, aptariant esamą situaciją ir iššūkius, tačiau pastaruoju metu tokios platformos susitikimuose pradėjo noriai dalyvauti ir sporto organizacijos, o tai stipriai efektyvina ne tik

veiklos koordinavimą ir manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis prevenciją, bet ir gerėja manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis reiškinio suvokimas bei tarpusavio parama vienas kitam.

Siekiant užtikrinti Agentūros ir sporto organizacijų veiklos aiškumą, taip pat apibrėžti iš sporto organizacijų tikėtinus veiksmus bei jų pareigas manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis prevencijos srityje, įgyvendinant Lietuvos Respubliko sporto įstatymo (toliau – Sporto įstatymas) 9 straipsnio 2 dalies 4 punktą, 23 straipsnio 1 dalies 7 punktą būtina patvirtinti specialias Kovos su manipuliavimu sporto varžybomis taisykles. Pažymėtina, kad tokių taisyklių iki šiol nėra (Kovos su manipuliavimo aukšto meistriskumo sporto varžybomis taisyklių ir Kovos su manipuliavimo aukšto meistriskumo sporto varžybomis taisyklių laikymosi vertinimo tvarkos aprašo projektai), nepaisant to, jog Makolino konvencija Lietuvoje ratifikuota 2024 m. birželio 6 d.

Agentūros, kaip koordinuojančios institucijos, veikla manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis yra aktyvi bei rodanti lyderystę. Nuo 2023 metų Agentūra yra Kopenhagos manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis platformos narė, todėl Agentūros darbuotojams pasiekiami pranešami su informacija apie galimus manipuliavimus sporto varžybomis visame pasaulyje. Agentūra per metus gauna apie 200 įvairių informacinių pranešimų apie galimus manipuliavimus sporto varžybomis, vykstančiomis visame pasaulyje, nuo Australijos regbio čempionato, Ganos futbolo lygos, e.sporto iki Europos krepšinio lygos varžybų ir Olimpinių sporto varžybų.

2026 metais Agentūros atstovė išrinkta Makolino konvencijos stebėsenos komiteto pirmininke (Makolino Konvencijos stebėsenos komiteto pirmininke išrinkta Kornelija Tiesnesytė 2026) ir tai yra labai stiprus tiek Lietuvos, tiek Agentūros pastangų ir autoriteto pripažinimas manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis koordinavimo srityje.

Agentūros ir jos darbuotojų veikla su palyginus nelabai dideliais resursais parodo, kad imamasi institucinių veiksmų ne tik gerinant koordinavimą dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis, tačiau ir skleidžiant informaciją apie manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis reiškinį, organizuoja ir įgyvendinant manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis prevenciją.

Atsakomybė už manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis

Sporto įstatyme vartojama ne manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis sąvoka, o *manipuliavimo aukšto meistriskumo sporto varžybomis* sąvoka, kuri atitinka Makolino konvencijos 3 straipsnio 1 ir 4 dalyje (Europos Tarybos konvencija dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis) nurodytam manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis apibrėžimui. Galima teigti, kad pagal Makolino konvenciją ir Sporto įstatymą manipuliavimas sporto varžybose gali būti tik aukšto meistriskumo sporto varžybose ar tokiaame sportiniame renginyje, kurį organizuoja pripažinta (List of Sport organizations 2021) tarptautinė organizacija ir kitos sporto organizacijos pagal sporto organizacijos nustatytas taisykles.

Už manipuliavimą aukšto meistriskumo sporto varžybomis yra numatytos dvi galimos teisinės atsakomybės formos: baudžiamoji atsakomybė pagal Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamojo kodekso (toliau – BK) 182¹ straipsnį „Manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis“ (Baudžiamasis kodeksas) ir Sporto įstatymo 22 straipsnio 1 dalies 6 punkto tvarką sporto šakos federacijos taikoma, nustatytos sporto šakos federacijos patvirtintame etikos kodekse ir veiklos dokumentuose (toliau – drausminė atsakomybė). Vienu metu dėl to paties manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis atvejo fiziniam ir juridiniam asmeniui gali būti taikoma drausminė atsakomybė ir baudžiamoji atsakomybė.

2016 m. birželio 30 d. BK buvo papildytas nauju 182¹straipsniu, kuris numatė baudžiamąją atsakomybę už neteisėtą poveikį *profesionalių sporto varžybų* eigai ir rezultatams. Tuo metu galiojusiam Lietuvos Respublikos kūno kultūros ir sporto įstatyme (toliau – Kūno

kultūros ir sporto įstatymas) (Kūno kultūros ir sporto įstatymas) 2 straipsnio 19 dalyje nurodyta, kad „Profesionalus sportininkas - sportininkas, už rengimąsi varžyboms ir dalyvavimą jose gaunantis atlygį iš sporto organizacijos, su kuria jis yra sudaręs sportinės veiklos sutartį“. BK 182¹ straipsnio papildymo įstatymo projekto autoriai pasiūlė baudžiamąją atsakomybę nustatyti atsižvelgiant į požymį, susijusį su sporto profesionalumo sąvoka, ir taip nustatant ribą, nuo kurios gali atsirasti baudžiamoji atsakomybė. Tokiu būdu baudžiamoji atsakomybė dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybose, kuriose dalyvauja neprofesionalus sportininkas, neatsiranda. Ir nors 182¹ straipsnis buvo priimtas su aiškia atskirtimi tarp baudžiamosios atsakomybės ir kitos atsakomybės rūšies, keičiant Kūno kultūros ir sporto įstatymą ir jį išdėstant nauja redakcija su pavadinimu „Lietuvos Respublikos sporto įstatymas“, teisės akto autoriai užmiršo pakeisti BK 182¹ straipsnio dispozicijoje vartojamą „profesionalus“ sąvoką. Dėl to kai kurie autoriai nurodė, kad baudžiamoji atsakomybė su „profesionalių sporto varžybomis“ sąvokomis negalima ir abejotina (Gruodytė et al. 2021, Zaksaitė 2025).

Kitas vertus, dėl 182¹ straipsnio papildymo įstatymo projekto buvo gauta nemažai pastabų (Baudžiamojo kodekso papildymo 182¹ straipsniu įstatymo projektas (XIIP-1138)), pavyzdžiui, ar numatoma baudžiamoji atsakomybė dera su (*ultima ratio*) principais (Fedosiuk 2012), išskiriant abejonę, ar baudžiamoji atsakomybė gali atsirasti, kai tai nesukelia turtinių pasekmių, o tik pakenkia sporto prestižui, nuvilia sirgalius ir kitus su sportu susijusius asmenis. Iš esmės, autoriaus požiūriu, tokia pastaba buvo pateikta nesigilinant į manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis reiškinį ir jo specifiką, o pateikiant formalią teisinę abejonę ir teorines nuostatas, kad „[...] vien tik specialių normų išskyrimas nesumažina nusikalstamų veikų latentiskumo ir savaime neužtikrina efektyvaus baudžiamojo persekiojimo“, todėl dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis baudžiamosios atsakomybės atsiradimo ir veikos sudėties reikia atlikti analizę (Baudžiamojo kodekso papildymo 182¹ straipsniu įstatymo projektas (XIIP-1138)), kuri šiai dienai taip ir nebuvo atlikta.

Kaip galima užtikrinti veiksmingą baudžiamąjį persekiojimą ar taikyti kitas teises priemones, siekiant kovoti su naujomis, transnacionaliniu mastu daromomis nusikalstamomis veikomis (įskaitant ir Lietuvą), jeigu nėra aiškiai nustatytų griežčiausių teisinės atsakomybės priemonių ir jų taikymo pagrindų? Tokiu atveju kyla klausimas dėl veiksmų teisėtumo ir atitikties teisėtumo bei teisinio tikrumo principams.

Siekiant atsakyti į įstatymo projekto pastabų ir pasiūlymų rengėjų iškeltus klausimus, taip pat įvertinti, ar pasirinkta formali dispozicija ir jos santykinis neapibrėžtumas yra tinkami bei suderinami su *ultima ratio* principu, būtina išsamiai ištirti manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis praktiką baudžiamajame procese. Tai apima sukčiavimo kvalifikavimo ir manipuliavimo aukšto meistriskumo sporto varžybomis vertinimo analizę nusikalstamos veikos sudėties elementų kontekste.

Iš autoriaus žinomų 8 ikiteisminių tyrimų bylų praktika parodė, kad baudžiamosios atsakomybės taikymas pagal BK 182 straipsnį dėl sukčiavimo nepasiteisino, o visi ikiteisminiai tyrimai buvo nutraukti nesurinkus duomenų, kad tarp asmens ar asmenų galimai *apgaulingų* veiksmų yra priežastinis ryšys, susijęs su manipuliavimu varžybų eiga ir rezultatais, tarp galimos apgaulės ir galimai atsiradusios turtinės žalos, kurią neaišku kaip nustatyti, pamatuoti, įvertinti ir pagrįsti pinigais, neįmanoma nustatyti, kam realiai padaryta turtinė žala ir kt. Kitaip tariant, ikiteisminių tyrimų metu nepavyko surinkti duomenų dėl iš esmės pagrindinio sukčiavimo nusikalstamos veikos sudėties požymio – apgaulės ir žalos, nors kiti nesusiję požymiai rodė, kad buvo įvykdytas manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis.

Nuo BK 182¹ straipsnio įsigaliojimo pranešimų skaičius nuosekliai didėjo, o galimo manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis atvejai pradėti fiksuoti net ir mažiau įprastose ar mažiau

populiariose sporto organizacijų varžybose, kuriose tokio pobūdžio pažeidimai anksčiau buvo laikomi mažai tikėtinais³.

Nuo 2017 metų iki 2025 metų buvo pradėta 18 ikiteisminių tyrimų pagal BK 182¹ straipsnį (Duomenų rinkinys pagal Baudžiamojo kodekso straipsnius). Šiai dienai turime tik vieną baudžiamąją bylą (Klaipėdos apygardos prokuratūros skyriaus prokuroro nutarimas 2021), kuri pasiekė teismą ir buvo priimtas procesinis sprendimas dėl baudžiamosios atsakomybės taikymo pagal BK 182¹ straipsnį. Visi kiti ikiteisminiai tyrimai, kurie buvo pradėti pagal BK 182¹ straipsnį, buvo nutraukti, nepavykus surinkti pakankamai objektyvių duomenų, pagrindžiančių asmenų, galimai dariusių įtaką varžybų rezultatui, kaltės. Tyrimų metu nepavyksta įrodyti siekio neteisėtai paveikti varžybų rezultatą siekiant naudos, taip pat nepavyksta surinkti neginčijamų duomenų, kad konkretūs žaidėjai savo žaidimu tyčia darė įtaką nesąžiningam rezultatui ir kad varžybų rezultatas buvo iš anksto sutartas, nes baudžiamoji atsakomybė negali būti grindžiama subjektyvia nuomone, spėjimais ar prielaidomis.

Straipsnio autoriaus vertinimu, tiek 2016 m., tiek 2026 m. vis dar nėra pakankamai aiškiai suvokiama, su kokiais reiškiniais, kokiomis aplinkybėmis ir kokiais būdais turėtų būti kovojama, taip pat kokiais pagrindais turėtų būti pradedamas ikiteisminis tyrimas ir taikoma baudžiamoji atsakomybė pagal LBK 182¹ straipsnį, reglamentuojantį manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis.

Manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis yra apysunkis nusikaltimas, todėl atskleidžiant ir tiriant galimą nusikaltimą, laikantis Lietuvos Respublikos kriminalinės žvalgybos įstatymo (toliau – Kriminalinės žvalgybos įstatymas) 3 straipsnio 2 dalyje nustatytų kriminalinės žvalgybos principų (teisėtumo, žmogaus teisių ir laisvių užtikrinimo, viešojo intereso apsaugos, konspiracijos, konfidencialumo, viešų ir slaptų veiksmų derinimo), gali būti vykdomas kriminalinės žvalgybos tyrimas. Kriminalinės žvalgybos tyrimo metu, paaiškėjus nusikalstamos veikos požymiams, tuojau pat pradedamas ikiteisminis tyrimas (Rekomendacijos dėl kriminalinės žvalgybos įstatymo, baudžiamojo proceso kodekso normų taikymo ir kriminalinės žvalgybos informacijos panaudojimo baudžiamajame procese), visais kitais atvejais kriminalinės žvalgybos informacija gali būti panaudota įstatymo nustatytais kitais atvejais (Kriminalinės žvalgybos įstatymo 19 straipsnis).

Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamojo proceso kodekso (toliau – BPK) 181 straipsnyje nustatyta proceso dalyvio teisė susipažinti su ikiteisminio tyrimo duomenimis. Proceso dalyviu gali būti visi asmenys, dalyvaujantys baudžiamajame procese arba turintys teisinį interesą dalyvauti šiame procese. Todėl sporto organizacijos, tapusios proceso dalyvėmis, turi teisę susipažinti su ikiteisminio tyrimo duomenimis, tačiau negali jų panaudoti be prokuroro ar teismo leidimo. Vadovaujantis Lietuvos Respublikos generalinio prokuroro 2017 m. rugpjūčio 17 d. įsakymu Nr. I-279 „Dėl Ikitteisminio tyrimo duomenų teikimo ir panaudojimo ne baudžiamojo persekiojimo tikslais ir ikiteisminio tyrimo duomenų apsaugos rekomendacijų patvirtinimo“ (Ikitteisminio tyrimo duomenų teikimo ir panaudojimo ne baudžiamojo persekiojimo tikslais ir ikiteisminio tyrimo duomenų apsaugos rekomendacijos) 3 punktu, sporto organizacija gali kreiptis į ikiteisminio tyrimo įstaigą ar prokuratūrą dėl ikiteisminio tyrimo duomenų pateikimo atliekamam drausmės tyrimui. Todėl teoriškai sporto šakos federacija gali susipažinti ir panaudoti ikiteisminio tyrimo duomenis drausminime tyrime (Lažybose dalyvavusiam krepšininkui savo tiesos teisme įrodyti nepavyko), kuriame anksčiau buvo kriminalinės žvalgybos informacija.

³ Remiamasi straipsnio autoriaus profesine patirtimi ir turimais duomenimis, kurie dėl galiojančių teisės aktų reikalavimų nustatytą laikotarpį negali būti viešai atskleisti.

Jeigu atliekant kriminalinės žvalgybos tyrimą nepaaiškės ar nebus nustatyta pakankamai duomenų, patvirtinančių manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis nusikalstamą veiką, kriminalinės žvalgybos informacija negali būti panaudota sprendžiant drausminės atsakomybės klausimus sporto organizacijoje. Nusikalstamos veikos požymių nebuvimas ar duomenų nepakankamumas kriminalinės žvalgybos tyrime ar ikiteisminiame tyrime nėra manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis požymių ar duomenų nepakankamumas sporto principų kontekste. Tai nėra kliūtis sporto organizacijai pradėti drausminį tyrimą ir taikyti drausminę atsakomybę. Drausminės atsakomybės taikymas ir pripažinimas dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis požymių buvimas nereikalauja aukštų įrodinėjimo standartų bei taikoma Tarptautinio sporto arbitražo teismo (angl. *Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS)*) sprendimuose nurodoma pakankamo įsitikinimo įrodinėjimo taisyklė (Arbitration CAS 2009/A/1920 FK Pobeda, Aleksandar Zabrcanec, Nikolce Zdraveski v. UEFA 2010, Arbitration CAS 2001/A/343 Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) 2002), kai iš esmės sportininkas turi įrodyti, kad tai neįvyko. Dėl aiškių teisinių argumentų ir motyvų yra aišku ir pagrįsta kriminalinės žvalgybos informaciją naudoti tik apibrėžtais atvejais, tokios informacijos panaudojimas ir perdavimas sporto organizacijoms galėtų teigiamai įtakoti manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis reiškinio užkardymą, bei leisti asmenis patraukti drausminei atsakomybei, išvengiant nebaudžiamumo.

Jei kitose - *ne aukšto meistriskumo* sporto varžybose (mėgėjų) (Kalvelis 2021, p. 172) ar komercinėse sporto varžybose įvyksta susitarimai dėl varžybų eigos ir rezultatų, tai pagal Sporto įstatymą nėra pripažįstama manipuliavimu, nėra pažeidžiami sporto principai, nes įstatymu saugomas tik aukšto meistriskumo sportas. Vadovaujantis Sporto įstatymu, sporto organizacijos neatitinka aukšto meistriskumo sporte ir sporto šakų federacijos sąvokos, pavyzdžiui, tokios organizacijos kaip „Bushido“ ir „UTMA“ turnyrai, „Mėgėjų futbolo lyga“, „Vaikų futbolo lyga“, „Koleđų krepšinio lyga“, „Formulė1“, dėl kurių varžybų eigos ir rezultatų vykdomos lažybos Azijoje (Hill, 2018, p. 115, 120, 179, 255) ar kitose šalyse.

Užsienio valstybių praktika šioje srityje taip pat yra ribota, o informacijos apie sėkmingus manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis atskleidimo ir tyrimo atvejus viešinimas bei dalijimasis gerąja praktika išlieka fragmentiškas ir nepakankamai išplėtotas. Manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis atskleidimų ir ikiteisminių tyrimų nėra daug. Informacijos dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis taikymo praktika yra įvairi. Tenka apgailestauti, kad teisėsaugos institucijos surinktus ir gaunamus duomenis apie manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis išsamiai neanalizuoja ir vertina visumoje, o Agentūros įvertintų duomenų analizė pagal kompetenciją apsiriboja tik faktinių informacijos konstatavimų ir bendrų rizikų identifikavimų. Ikteisminių tyrimų ir ikiteisminių tyrimų pradėjimų, atliekamų tyrimų ir procesinių sprendimų praktika dėl galimų manipuliavimų sporto varžybose nėra apibendrinama, vertinama ir vienodinama, nėra pasinaudojama tais sprendimais, kurie pasiteisino ir buvo efektyvūs, pavyzdžiui, Tauragės krepšinio byla (žemiau pateikiame šios bylos apžvalgą). Kiekvieną kartą pranešimas vertinamas, tikrinamas ir priimami skirtingi sprendimai, kurie dažnu atveju remiasi vien BK ir BPK, kai net neprašoma pradėti ikiteisminio tyrimo ir asmenis patraukti atsakomybei, o prašoma atlikti informacijos analizę, vertinimą ir pradėti rinkti informaciją ir duomenis, vertinti keliamas rizikas ir grėsmes. Deja, bet nėra teisėsaugos ir teisėtvarkos institucijų rekomendacijų (Rekomendacijos Lietuvos sporto (šakų) federacijoms ir sportininkams dėl pasirengimo kovoti su manipuliacijomis sporto varžybomis siekiant tinkamai įgyvendinti Europos Tarybos Konvencijos dėl manipuliacijų sporto varžybomis nuostatas 2015, Rekomendacinės veiksmų koordinavimo sporto organizacijose schema, gavus informaciją apie galimą manipuliavimą sporte 2023) dėl pranešimų apie galimą manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis tikrinimą, ikiteisminių tyrimų ir kitų tyrimų atlikimo taktikos ir tyrimų metodikos (Investigation of cases

of competition manipulation: a practical guide 2023), o tai galėtų turėti teigiamos įtakos, kai formali veikla gali tapti proaktyvi dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybų atskleidimo ir tyrimo.

Kaip ir minėta anksčiau, šiai dienai turime tik vieną baudžiamąją bylą, kuri pasiekė teismą ir buvo priimtas sprendimas dėl baudžiamosios atsakomybės taikymo pagal BK 182¹ straipsnį. Nuosekliai šiame straipsnyje pateikiame šios bylos chronologiją:

1. 2019 metų gruodžio mėn. pabaigoje iš skirtingų informacijos šaltinių buvo gauta informacija apie tai, kad keli Nacionalinės krepšinio lygos Tauragės krepšinio klubo žaidėjai galimai patys ir per kitus asmenis manipuliuoja sporto varžybomis.

2. 2020 metais vykdomas kriminalinės žvalgybos tyrimas ir atliekami veiksmai, kurie minimi 2021 m. gegužės 10 d. Klaipėdos apygardos prokuratūros skyriaus prokuroro nutarime.

3. 2020 metų pabaigoje buvo pradėtas ikiteisminis tyrimas pagal BK 182¹ straipsnį.

4. 2021 m. gegužės 10 d. Klaipėdos apygardos prokuratūros skyriaus prokuroras priima nutarimą nutraukti ikiteisminį tyrimą ir asmenis atleisti nuo baudžiamosios atsakomybės dėl BK 182¹ straipsnio pagal laidavimą.

5. 2021 m. gegužės 11 d. Tauragės apylinkės teismo Tauragės rūmų teisėjas patvirtino prokuroro nutarimą. Asmuo buvo įpareigotas sumokėti 30 MGL (1 500 Eur) įmoką į Nukentėjusiųjų nuo nusikaltimų asmenų fondą.

6. 2021 metais Lietuvos krepšinio federacija pradėjo drausminį tyrimą pagal Lietuvos krepšinio federacijos Etikos ir drausmės kodeksą. Asmeniui buvo pritaikytos sankcijos dėl drausmės pažeidimo ir: 1) skirta 1 428 eurų piniginė bauda; 2) įpareigojimas dalyvauti FIBA nustatytoje prevencinėse programose, nukreiptose kovai su manipuliavimu sporte; 3) 4 metų diskvalifikacija (nuo komisijos sprendimo priėmimo dienos).

7. 2023 m. birželio 1 d. Vilniaus apygardos teismas išnagrinėjo asmens skundą dėl Lietuvos krepšinio federacijos Etikos ir drausmės komisijos sprendimų, ir paliko juos galioti (Lažybose dalyvavusiam krepšininkui savo tiesos teisme įrodyti nepavyko).

Straipsnio autorius mano, kad Tauragės krepšinio klubo ikiteisminio tyrimo byla yra geros praktikos pavyzdys, nors baudžiamoji byla ir nebuvo nagrinėjama skirtingose teismų instancijose. Šis pavyzdys parodo, kaip nuosekliai turėtų būti atskleidžiami ir tiriami manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis atvejai, nepradedant ikiteisminių tyrimų tik gavus informaciją apie planuojamą ar jau įvykdytą manipuliavimą.

Tauragės krepšinio klubo baudžiamosios bylos atskleidimas ir tyrimas reikalauja atskiro nuodugnaus teisinio nagrinėjimo bei vertinimo, galimai kuriant atskirą manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis metodiką, bendradarbiavimo formas su sporto organizacijomis.

Išvados

1. Kova su manipuliavimu sporto varžybomis yra aktuali tiek Lietuvoje, tiek pasaulyje. Lietuvos visuomenė ir Lietuvos sporto bendruomenė nepilnai suvokia šio reiškinių svarbą, daromą žalą, keliamas grėsmes ir rizikas. Tik pavienės sporto organizacijos, tokios kaip Lietuvos futbolo federacija, asociacija „Lietuvos krepšinis“ ir dar kai kurios, suvokia keliamą grėsmę ir riziką sportui, sporto principams ir sportininkams, todėl turi būti skatinama bendrystė kovojant su sportą naikinančiu „vėžiu“, skatinamas tarpusavio pro aktyvius dialogus tarp visuomenės, sportininkų, sporto organizacijų, sporto, nevyriausybinų organizacijų, savivaldybės ir valstybės institucijų, rodoma lyderystė.

2. Lietuvoje sukurta institucinė manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis koordinavimo sistema, kai kovos su šiuo reiškiniu koordinatoriaus funkcijos pavestos Lietuvos antidopingo agentūrai, tačiau praktinis šios sistemos veikimas dar nėra pakankamai aiškiai reglamentuotas. Iki šiol nėra patvirtintų kovos su manipuliavimu sporto varžybomis taisyklių, kurios nustatytų

aiškias sporto organizacijų pareigas, informacijos teikimo mechanizmus ir prevencijos priemones.

3. Siekiant efektyvesnės kovos su manipuliavimu sporto varžybomis Lietuvoje, tikslinga sukurti manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis atvejų analizės ir stebėsenos sistemą, leidžiančią rinkti ir sisteminti duomenis apie galimus pažeidimus. Būtina parengti teisėsaugos institucijų rekomendacijas ir tyrimo metodiką, skirtą manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis atvejų tikrinimui ir tyrimui. Būtina stiprinti tarpinstitucinį bendradarbiavimą tarp teisėsaugos institucijų, sporto organizacijų ir lažybų rinkos priežiūros institucijų, plėtoti prevencines ir edukacines programas sportininkams, treneriams ir sporto administracijai, didinant jų informuotumą apie manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis grėsmes ir teisinius padarinius.

4. Baudžiamosios atsakomybės taikymas už manipuliavimą sporto varžybomis pagal BK 182¹ straipsnį praktikoje susiduria su reikšmingais įrodinėjimo sunkumais. Ikiteisminių tyrimų praktika rodo, kad dažnai nepavyksta surinkti pakankamai objektyvių duomenų, patvirtinančių tyčinį siekį paveikti varžybų eigą ar rezultatą siekiant neteisėtos naudos. Dėl to dauguma pradėtų ikiteisminių tyrimų nutraukiami, o baudžiamosios atsakomybės taikymo praktika išlieka itin ribota. Autorius mano, kad reiktų atlikti BK 182¹ straipsnio taikymo doktrininę analizę. Be to, būtina visapusiška ir įvairi mokslininkų ir praktikų diskusija, moksliniai tyrimai ir siūlymai, kad atsakomybė už manipuliavimą sporto varžybose būtų efektyviai taikoma, būtų neišvengiama tiek baudžiamojo persekiojimo kontekste, tiek drausminės atsakomybės neišvengiamumo kontekste.

5. Teisinis reguliavimas Lietuvoje iš esmės orientuotas tik į aukšto meistriškumo sportą, todėl manipuliavimo atvejai kitose sporto varžybose – mėgėjų, komerciniuose ar kitokiuose sporto renginiuose – lieka už teisinio reguliavimo ribų. Tokia situacija sudaro prielaidas atsirasti teisinėms spragoms ir galimoms manipuliacijų formoms, kurios nėra kvalifikuojamos kaip teisės pažeidimai, ypač jei tai yra susiję su Lietuvos Respublikos azartinių lošimų įstatymo reguliavimu.

6. Manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis tyrimo ir prevencijos srityje Lietuvoje trūksta sisteminio duomenų rinkimo, analizės ir tyrimų praktikos apibendrinimo. Ikiteisminių tyrimų duomenys, kriminalinės žvalgybos informacija ir sporto organizacijų drausminių tyrimų rezultatai nėra vertinami visumoje, todėl nesiformuoja vieninga praktika ir metodologija.

7. Vienodos praktikos, veiksmų sekos ir rekomendacijų nebuvimas dėl manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis, informacijos vertinimo ir tyrimų atlikimo vengimas institucinių atsakomybių nesiėmimas, formalus suvokimas dėl ne pavojaus ateityje gali turėti neigiamos įtakos nacionaliniam saugumui, kadangi manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis tapo organizuoto nusikalstamumo neteisėtų veikų dalimi, kaip ir neteisėta narkotinių medžiagų apyvarta, iš kurios gaunama nemažai neteisėtų pajamų arba vyksta pinigų plovimas. Todėl įvertinant, kad manipuliavimas sporto varžybomis turi tiesioginį ir stiprų ryšį su organizuotu nusikalstamumu ir tarptautinėmis lažybų rinkomis, tikslinga svarstyti galimybę šį reiškinį aiškiau įvardyti nacionalinio saugumo kontekste bei stiprinti tarptautinį bendradarbiavimą keičiantis informacija apie manipuliavimo sporto varžybomis atvejus.

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE LEGAL REGULATION OF MANIPULATION OF SPORTS COMPETITIONS IN LITHUANIA

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Summary. Manipulation in sport and the manipulation of sports competitions around the world, as well as in Lithuania, is a pressing issue, and it represents one of the greatest threats to sport today, as well as a threat to internal security within the European Union. The increasing commercialization of sports influences the supply of both legal and illegal betting related to sporting events, sports competitions and/or their results, and in many cases, the financial instability of sports federations (hereinafter referred to as “sports organizations⁴”) and athletes. These are the main factors driving the prevalence of manipulation of sports competitions worldwide, including in Lithuania.

Therefore, it is particularly important for Lithuania to establish effective legal regulations that address the threats posed by the manipulation of sports competitions and comply with international obligations, as well as a proactive institutional system with functional tools that not only enable the fight against and prevention of manipulation of sports competitions but also allow for a clear assessment of the current situation.

The purpose of this paper is to comprehensively analyse the problems associated with the legal regulation of manipulation of sports competitions and the coordination of efforts to combat this phenomenon, to evaluate the current practice of applying relevant legislation, and to clarify the meaning of the concept of manipulation of sports competitions, its interpretation and application in legal doctrine and practice, as well as to examine aspects of the application of liability for the manipulation of sports competitions, identifying the specific features of legal assessment related to this phenomenon, problematic issues, and difficulties in practical implementation within the Lithuanian legal system.

To achieve these objectives, empirical studies and legislation were analysed, and pre-trial investigations into manipulation of sports competitions initiated between 2017 and 2025 were examined (a total of 18 pre-trial investigations and decisions issued by the police and the public prosecutor’s office). In addition, the results of sociological surveys conducted in 2014 and 2023 among athletes, coaches, referees, sports managers, and other individuals involved in sports were reviewed to reflect perceptions of and the prevalence of manipulation in sports competitions in Lithuania. The data collected during the study was systematically organised, compared, analysed, and summarised. To achieve the objectives of the study, the author of the article (Europol Supports Lithuania’s Fight Against Match-Fixing) drew on more than 12 years of professional experience in the areas of legislation, enforcement, practical implementation, and management, as well as in coordinating and implementing measures to combat the manipulation of sports competitions.

This experience has been gained through the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions (hereinafter referred to as the “Macolin Convention”), signed and ratified by Lithuania, through cooperation with national and international institutions, and through participation in processes related to the prevention, investigation, and control of sports competition manipulation.

Keywords: manipulation in sports, organized crime, fraud, high-performance sport, Macolin Convention.



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MECHANISMS OF GREENWASHING AND THEIR IMPACT ON CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND PURCHASING DECISIONS

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Abstract: The article analyzes the phenomenon of greenwashing as a marketing strategy aimed at creating a false pro environmental image of companies. The paper discusses the evolution of the term—from its origins to contemporary, advanced forms of visual and communicative manipulation. Particular attention is devoted to the fast fashion industry, in which brands such as H&M, Zara, and Shein exploit gaps in consumer awareness and psychological mechanisms to stimulate sales. The analysis is based on a comparison of the “Seven Sins of Greenwashing” framework with market research findings that indicate a significant discrepancy between consumers’ pro environmental declarations and their actual purchasing choices, which are primarily driven by price. The main research problem is an attempt to answer the question: How do greenwashing practices employed by clothing brands influence the consumer decision making process? The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of greenwashing strategies employed by selected apparel brands within the framework of the “seven sins of greenwashing” model, as well as to investigate the extent to which a fabricated pro-environmental image shapes and alters consumers’ market behaviours.

The article applies research triangulation, combining a critical analysis of the literature, a case study of selected clothing brands, secondary analysis of statistical data based on market research results, and a comparative method juxtaposing companies’ pro environmental claims with actual data on recycling and emissions.

Keywords: environmental awareness, consumer preferences, greenwashing, sustainable development, fast fashion

Introduction

Challenges on the way to responsible consumption often include consumer habits, lack of availability of ecological products, or higher purchase costs resulting from ethical and/or local production. An important problem is also greenwashing, which is an unfair marketing practice that creates an image of a brand as more ecological than it actually is. The overuse of terms such as “bio” or “eco” makes it difficult for consumers to recognize truly responsible enterprises [Ronda, 2023].

The fast fashion industry is responsible for 10% of total global CO₂ emissions. This is as much as the European Union emits and more than the aviation and shipping industries combined [UNFCCC, 2018]. It is also a major source of water consumption and pollution, as well as textile waste. The fashion industry generates a total of about 20% of global wastewater. Moreover, as much as 85% of textiles end up in landfills or are incinerated, while most of these materials could be reused [UNFCCC, 2018; Kielbasiński, 2026].

The growth of globalization and the dominance of digital platforms as marketing channels have led to an escalation of overconsumption. A key psychological factor has become the FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) phenomenon, which, through mechanisms of social comparison and gamification, triggers anxiety in consumers about not participating in dynamically changing trends. In this way, a closed market cycle is created in which demand and supply are stimulated by social pressure and shopping addiction.

Greenwashing in the clothing industry in the light of market practice and EU legal regulations

The term greenwashing was first used by Jay Westervelt in the 1980s in the context of drawing attention to unfair practices used in the hotel industry. At that time, it was about incentives directed to hotel guests regarding the multiple use of towels, allegedly for environmental protection. However, the goal was actions aimed at reducing operating costs, rather than caring for the environment by reducing water and detergent consumption [Lane, 2019]. Since then, the term greenwashing has evolved and currently refers to all activities aimed at presenting an enterprise, product, or service as more ecological than they actually are [Delmas & Burbano, 2011]. Contemporary corporate greenwashing activities are so common that they are becoming increasingly difficult to detect. The use of false advertising slogans aimed at changing the perception of a given product, the use of colors associated with ecology and nature, such as shades of green, blue, or beige, the use of catchy phrases like "eco", "bio", "natural" on packaging or labels – these are selected ways of misleading consumers.

In 2007, the consulting firm Terrachoice (now UL Solutions) wrote down a list of the so-called “7 sins of greenwashing”. This list highlighted the ways in which manufacturers deceive and how they influence consumers. These are:

- hidden trade-offs – promoting one eco-feature while ignoring other problems
- lack of evidence for the sustainable nature of the product
- vague communication and the use of ambiguous terms
- the sin of irrelevance of statements
- promoting the “lesser evil”
- using false labels
- lying in declarations.

Scheme 1. 7 sins of greenwashing

Source: AI-generated graphic



Manufacturers also often abuse the meaning of certificates. An example is the OEKO-TEX STANDARD 100 marking [OEKOTEX® Association, 2025] as proof of ecological production and concern for the environment, while in reality, this certificate only covers the issue of the presence of harmful substances in the finished product. The indicated certificate,

however, does not refer to production conditions and environmental impact. Companies use certificates in marketing communication, giving them a new – misleading meaning and scope. The appropriate certificate in this case is OEKO-TEX RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS, which confirms the manufacturer's sustainable approach to environmental care [OEKO-TEX® Association, 2025].

Another phenomenon is distracting consumers' attention from the real problem by creating and advertising small ecological initiatives that, although they have a positive impact on the environment, it is minimal. The consequences of greenwashing are multidimensional. For consumers, it may mean difficulty in making conscious purchasing decisions, a drop in trust in brands, and growing skepticism towards ecological activities. For companies, on the other hand, it may involve risks of financial penalties or loss of reputation.

In the European Union, the fight against greenwashing is currently based on two pillars: the adopted and binding EmpCo (Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition) directive, and the proposed (though currently suspended) Green Claims directive. Directive (EU) 2024/825, known as the EmpCo directive, is a key European Union legal act aimed at unfair market practices. From September 2026, the following will be illegal, among others:

- generic claims – using terms like "eco", "green", "environmentally friendly" without demonstrating the ecological effects of the product
- claims about the future – declaring climate goals (e.g., "we will be neutral by 2040") without a specific, public plan and independent monitoring of progress
- apparent climate neutrality – claiming that a product has a lower environmental impact solely because the company purchased CO₂ emission certificates.

Value-laden slogans, such as "better choice" or "smarter purchase", are based on emotions and the mechanism of moral licensing. They suggest that purchasing a given product is a pro-social action, which removes the burden of responsibility for overconsumption from the consumer. However, this is a subjective claim, because without indicating "better than what/whom?", the message remains only a marketing promise that cannot be verified.

According to the Green Claims Directive, comparative formulations require the presentation of a reference point and evidence based on the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) methodology. If a brand claims that a product is "better", it must specifically indicate, for example, how much less water or energy was used compared to the standard production process. Otherwise, this slogan is considered misleading by using unjustified arguments.

In addition to EU directives, national authorities, such as the Polish Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (UOKiK), are already issuing decisions based on general consumer protection regulations. It may seem illogical that corporations worth billions of dollars risk an image scandal for an advertising campaign. However, there are several reasons for such decisions. The dilution of responsibility in global supply chains makes companies hope that the degree of production complexity (e.g., in Southeast Asia) will prevent activists from reaching the truth. Brands also assume that the average consumer does not have enough knowledge to distinguish "bamboo viscose" from natural fibers. Furthermore, in the corporate world, the "result" counts. Even if a company is accused of greenwashing, the profit generated thanks to a "green" campaign can more than cover any potential fines.

Sustainable development has stopped being a choice and has become a necessity. Fitting into pro-ecological trends strongly affects brand value. Companies therefore use greenwashing because investors increasingly make their financing dependent on high environmental indicators. Thus, the pressure to demonstrate "green successes" in annual reports leads to "coloring" reality. Products labeled as "eco" are usually sold with a higher margin, which for

many marketing departments may be more important than the fear of potential financial penalty restrictions.

Fast fashion clothing brands such as H&M or Zara have already been caught several times lying about promises regarding textile recycling. H&M was sued in the United States for advertising fast fashion clothing and accessories as sustainable. The company was accused of using "green" consumer trends in the promotion of the Conscious Choice collection, which is not environmentally friendly [Witkowska, 2022]. Zara's Join Life collection has been repeatedly criticized for using misleading labels (Greenpeace, 2023). The Shein brand, in turn, was fined 1 million euros in Italy for misleading consumers regarding the environmental friendliness of the offered products [Gayle, 2025].

In recent years, the use of sustainability reports (ESG) as a marketing tool can also be observed. Some companies publish these reports solely to improve their image, without introducing real changes in their operating strategy [KPMG, 2023]. The lack of uniform reporting standards in this area can favor manipulation and make it difficult to compare data between enterprises – this, in turn, affects the problematic nature of making ethical and conscious decisions by consumers [Hassan, 2024].

The impact of greenwashing on consumer purchasing decisions in the light of empirical data

To ensure the methodological rigor of the analysis, insights derived from case studies of selected apparel brands were integrated with findings from market reports and with data concerning the environmental initiatives publicly disclosed by the companies under examination.

Greenwashing practices significantly affect how consumers make decisions. In the fast fashion model, which is characterized by a high pace of production, frequent changes in trends, and low prices, greenwashing serves as a mitigating agent, helping consumers in subconsciously making purchasing decisions without the feeling of self-criticism associated with excessive consumerism.

One of the psychological mechanisms used in the context of greenwashing is so-called moral licensing, or moral relief. Consumers, after making a choice considered moral (e.g., buying an "eco" product), feel entitled to make less ethical decisions in the future [Williams, 2020]. An example can be the behavior of a group of people studied by V. Tiefenbeck's team in Switzerland – the studied group signed up for a program aimed at teaching them how to save water and thus pay lower bills. Ultimately, water consumption decreased, but interestingly – electricity consumption increased, which may indicate the occurrence of the moral relief phenomenon. By doing a good thing – saving water – the studied group felt justified and less guilty about electricity consumption. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the context of purchasing clothes or other textiles. At the time of purchasing a product marked with an "eco" label or "made from recycled materials", the consumer feels less guilty buying more than they actually need [Suvarna, Shanbhag & Santekellur, 2026]. They also have less resistance to spending a larger amount of money and do not feel the need to verify the compliance of these labels with the actual state – which clothing manufacturers exploit. These are incentives to purchase products, even if the company's promises are not true [Tiefenbeck, et al., 2013].

The moral relief mechanism is complemented by the halo effect. This is a cognitive bias consisting in the fact that, based on one positive feature of a product (e.g., the word "natural"), the consumer attributes a whole series of other positive properties to it, which it does not actually possess. The halo effect makes the consumer assume that a logo resembling a

certificate (e.g., a green leaf) builds trust in the brand's entire supply chain, even in a situation where certification applies to only a fraction of production.

Thus, consumers often perceive products marked with various certificates, photos, natural colors, or slogans as being of better quality, more durable, or more ethical. Brand themselves can also suffer from unfulfilled promises – a consumer who discovers untrue or false declarations regarding ecology may stop trusting the brand and stop making purchases [Timmons, et al., 2024]. Consumers may begin to perceive the promises made as a kind of advertising slogan, rather than a factual contribution to environmental care [Fella & Bausa, 2024].

The fast fashion industry is characterized by intensive production, frequent collection replacement, and a short life cycle. These are factors that have a negative impact on the natural environment, because they affect greater water consumption, CO₂ emissions, or the use of dangerous chemicals. Research conducted in selected European countries indicates that as many as 71% of respondents would like to purchase clothing in a more sustainable way, and as many as 74% prefer wearing clothes longer and thus reducing the frequency of purchases made. Nevertheless, the most frequently mentioned obstacles are price (41%), difficulty in recognizing a sustainable product (27%), and lack of knowledge about where to buy such a product (24%) [Globe Scan, 2025].

The 2023 Fashion Transparency Index report shows that consumers expect greater transparency from fast fashion clothing manufacturers. Buyers want transparency in matters concerning, among others: the supply chain, origin of fabrics, working conditions, CO₂ emissions, water, or electricity consumption. Transparency in these areas allows consumers not only to make more conscious purchasing decisions but also builds trust in the brand and enables comparison of companies' actual actions in the field of sustainable development. The lack of such data makes it difficult to unambiguously assess which products meet the criteria for responsible consumption and which use greenwashing activities [Fashion Revolution, 2023].

An increasing number of consumers are starting to notice the greenwashing strategies used by fashion brands. The Changing Markets Foundation Annual Report 2023 shows that the organization revealed 60 new examples of misleading green claims in the fashion industry through the Greenwash.com platform. This growing publicity of greenwashing practices contributes to an increase in skepticism among customers – consumers increasingly doubt the authenticity of brands' "eco" messages. The limited possibility of verifying the declarations made and the lack of comparability of data between individual enterprises make it difficult to make fully conscious purchasing decisions [Changing Markets Foundation, 2024].

“7 sins of greenwashing” in the practice of the clothing industry

The growing ecological awareness of consumers makes clothing brands increasingly declare concern for the environment. Unfortunately, behind many "green" messages lie only pretenses of action. Greenwashing has become one of the most serious problems of modern fashion – from the abuse of vague terms, through data manipulation, to hiding the real impact of production on the environment. An analysis of the seven most frequently committed sins allows us to understand how the industry creates an ecological image that often has no basis in facts, and why a critical approach to marketing promises is so important [de Freitas Netto et al., 2020; Suphasomboon & Vassanadumrongdee, 2026].

Sin of hidden trade-offs. This is the most common sin in the fashion industry. It consists in suggesting that a product is "eco" based on one feature (e.g., organic cotton content), while ignoring the huge carbon footprint, water consumption, or toxic dyes used in the production

process. An example is H&M and its "Conscious" collection. The brand promotes a line of clothing made from sustainable materials. However, as noted by the Changing Markets Foundation [2021]) the production of these clothes takes place in the same energy-intensive business model that relies on overproduction. The collection contains an even larger share of synthetics than the brand's main line, and the use of polyester from recycled PET bottles is described as a "false solution" that does not reduce the real environmental impact.

Sin of no proof. This concerns claims that cannot be verified using easily accessible information or reliable external certificates. An example is the Shein brand, which often uses vague statements about "sustainable production lines". However, the brand's transparency reports lack specific data regarding emissions throughout the entire supply chain. Claims about "ethical sourcing" remain empty slogans.

Sin of vagueness. The use of terms so broad that their meaning is practically elusive to the consumer (e.g., "planet-friendly", "ethical", "natural"). An example is the Zara brand and its "Join Life" tags. The term "Join Life" is an example of emotional marketing that does not define a specific environmental impact, but only suggests a pro-ecological attitude of the buyer. This matter is being handled by the Polish UOKiK [2026], claiming that the company's declarations were not accompanied by clear information about their scope, scale, and limitations.

Sin of irrelevance. Providing information that is true but irrelevant from the point of view of environmental protection in a given product category (Table 1).

Table 1. Example greenwashing in the clothing industry

Source: Own elaboration

Brand	Reservations regarding "ecologicality"
H&M	Accused of misleading marketing, in which products presented as "sustainable" often do not show real ecological advantage. Inconsistencies were also noted in reporting the composition of materials, including recycled polyester.
Zara	Indicated in reports regarding the use of cotton from areas related to illegal deforestation and land expropriation, despite having certificates of "sustainable" origin.
Shein	The EU has issued warnings regarding the use of "fake discounts" and misleading claims about sustainable development. Studies have also indicated the presence of toxic substances (lead, cadmium) in products in concentrations many times exceeding the norms.

Some fashion brands (Zara or H&M) promote their products as "free from harmful substances X", while the use of these substances has long been banned by EU regulations. Companies use certificates such as GOTS or Oeko-Tex. Instead of educating consumers about what these certificates mean, brands emphasize one slogan "GMO-free" to evoke positive associations, even if the trade of such materials is already strictly regulated in the EU. This is an attempt to take credit for complying with basic legal norms.

Sin of the lesser of two evils. An attempt to make the consumer feel better about purchasing a product that is harmful in its nature by comparing it to an even worse alternative. For example, biodegradable garment bags in fast fashion, while the content itself (a polyester garment) will decompose for hundreds of years. This is a classic diversion of attention from the heart of the problem, which is the durability of the product (Table 2).

Sin of fibbing (lying). Providing completely false information about certificates or product composition. Many brands unlawfully place information on their websites about having the OEKO-TEX STANDARD 100 certificate. This certificate only concerns the lack of harmful substances in the finished fabric, and not – as brands suggest – an ecological way of growing the raw material or ethical working conditions. In the case of Shein, the "sin of lying" most often concerns production ethics, as the brand creates an image of a modern one, with a controlled supply chain, while in reality, it relies on dispersed, uncontrolled sewing rooms that violate labor rights.

Sin of worshipping false labels. Creating one's own "green" logos that closely resemble certificates from independent institutions to give the consumer a false sense of security.

Table 2. Comparison of declarations and reality at fashion giants

Source: Own elaboration

Brand	Declared action	Actual problem
H&M	Textile recycling program in stores	The clothes collection program in chain stores often serves to generate vouchers for subsequent purchases, which drives the consumption loop. The real recycling rate of these clothes into new fibers remains marginal (about 1%).
Zara	100% sustainable cotton by 2025	Lack of transparency in defining what the brand understands by "sustainable" cotton.
Shein	Donations to environmental foundations	Business model based on sending millions of air packages a day, generating a gigantic carbon footprint.

It can take as little as 10 days from the creation of a new Shein brand project to garment production. Every day, about 10,000 products are added to the website, and there are as many as 600,000 products on sale, at an average price of 10 dollars [Kiełbasiński, 2026]. Shein's fast-to-market strategy is "alarming". The company has been ranked among the worst fast fashion retailers in terms of emission reduction and sustainability efforts. Low-quality, cheap clothing from China and mass production carry extensive consequences. The presence of substances such as PFAS, formaldehyde, phthalates, heavy metals, and microplastics in cheap clothing is a serious problem [SGS, 2025].

The fast fashion model is characterized by a specific approach to clothing production, which emphasizes fast response to changing fashion trends and intensive production. The life cycle of products in this model is significantly shorter – from the moment of designing a new model to introducing it to the market, only a few weeks pass. Such a dynamic process allows brands to respond quickly to consumer needs while putting pressure on all stages of production.

Typical production processes include, among others, material selection, cutting, sewing, and packaging. Fast fashion focuses on reducing costs and time at every stage, which often involves using cheap raw materials and large, consolidated production. According to N.

Arimany Serrat, M. Arribas-Ibar, and G. Erdoğlan [2025], brands such as Zara, H&M, or Shein use diverse strategies:

- Zara: part of the production and logistics processes are managed internally, and part is outsourced. This allows for a very short production cycle and quick reaction to changing fashion. Zara's flexibility allows it to frequently replenish its assortment and update collections, minimizing the waiting time for new products.
- H&M: uses a network of foreign suppliers, which allows for lowering production costs and provides access to various materials and manufacturing technologies. This extends delivery times, which limits the speed of reaction to changing trends. Thanks to this, H&M maintains a balance between costs, quality, and delivery time.
- Shein: operates in an ultra-fast fashion model, using a decentralized and flexible supply chain. This enables the company to instantly introduce new products tailored to current trends.

The analysis of the above mechanisms shows that greenwashing in the Polish and European market has evolved towards systemic disinformation. Clothing brands have stopped using simple lies, replacing them with "information noise" and imprecise messages that exploit consumer cognitive biases.

The breakthrough in the fight against these practices, brought by new EU directives and the activity of UOKiK, means the end of the era of "unfair" marketing. The introduction of the obligation to document every pro-ecological declaration with hard scientific data (LCA) and the ban on the use of general slogans without evidence poses a challenge of transparency for companies. For the consumer, these changes mean a chance to realistically support ethical brands and eliminate the "eco-illusion" that for years has hampered the real sustainable transformation of the fast fashion industry. The considerations prove that only a combination of legal sanctions with psychological education of consumers can effectively limit the scale of market manipulation.

Conclusions and summary

The conducted considerations regarding the phenomenon of greenwashing in the fashion industry allow for the formulation of several key conclusions.

Firstly, greenwashing in the fast fashion industry should be seen as a structural, not an incidental, element. Environmental disinformation mechanisms are an integral part of a business model based on overproduction and rapid turnover of goods. The use of strategies corresponding to the "seven sins of greenwashing" enables brands to create appearances of ecological responsibility while maintaining unchanged, high-emission mass production.

Secondly, the effectiveness of greenwashing is reinforced by psychological mechanisms that the literature describes as moral licensing or moral relief. Empirical studies, including the works of Tiefenbeck and colleagues, indicate that contact with a "pro-ecological" message can reduce consumer criticism and lead to compensatory consumption behaviors. Consequently, greenwashing serves as a tool regulating cognitive dissonance, which makes it an effective, though ethically problematic, marketing instrument.

Thirdly, the considerations confirm the existence of a clear gap between declarations and purchasing practice. Although consumers declare high ecological sensitivity, their actual choices are determined primarily by price, availability, and limited knowledge about environmental certification. Susceptibility to visual manipulation is also visible, which favors the consolidation of greenwashing as a dominant communication strategy.

Fourthly, against the background of the above phenomena, European Union regulations appear as a potential factor of market transformation. The Green Claims Directive, assuming the obligation of scientific justification of environmental claims and the introduction of ex-ante verification, can significantly limit the scale of abuse. Financial sanctions reaching 4% of turnover constitute a significant incentive to change communication practices and move from declarativeness to transparency based on data.

The findings of the conducted research clearly indicate that apparel brands cannot base their strategies solely on the claim of “being green.” The “seven sins of greenwashing” model has ceased to function merely as a theoretical construct and has instead evolved into a practical framework for evaluating the environmental integrity of corporate practices. A practical implication of the study is the potential development of internal marketing checklists grounded in this model, enabling companies to mitigate risks such as the “sin of hidden trade-offs” or the “sin of no proof” prior to launching campaigns.

It is advisable to implement educational initiatives that raise consumer awareness of the psychological mechanisms of manipulation employed by brands, thereby enabling individuals to assess products rationally on the basis of their composition rather than a green-themed label. Shifting from image-driven slogans toward providing consumers with measurable and verifiable carbon-footprint data directly on product labels would simultaneously reduce reputational and legal risks.

The article demonstrates a discrepancy between consumers’ pro-environmental declarations and their actual purchasing decisions, which remain predominantly price-driven. In practical terms, this suggests that marketing strategies built around generic ecological claims are losing their effectiveness. Considering the analysed EU directives (Green Claims), which penalize a lack of transparency, companies should redefine their brand communication. A key recommendation would be to require firms to conduct supply-chain audits and to base their marketing exclusively on EU-approved certifications.

Environmental responsibility requires radical transparency and a departure from the paradigm of unlimited growth. Real sustainability is only possible with the implementation of comprehensive assessment tools, such as life cycle assessment (LCA), and with consistent reduction of production volume. The future of ethical fashion therefore depends both on the effectiveness of regulations and on the growth of consumer competence in the critical assessment of environmental messages.

Concluding – it is necessary to introduce two-track actions regarding producers and consumers. For the first group, systemic changes are necessary, consisting in taking responsibility for the manufactured product. The next step is the technological transformation of production processes, allowing for the reduction of waste generation and CO₂ emissions, as well as stopping the pollution of groundwater. Consumers, on the other hand, require education in environmental responsibility, which will enable them to distinguish reliable ecological actions from greenwashing. A conscious consumer will not act impulsively, but in a thoughtful and conscious way.

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FROM REACTIVE SECURITY TO SOCIETAL RESILIENCE: A COMPARATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS OF EU COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK (2005-2026)

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Abstract. *The European Union's counter-terrorism policy architecture has undergone profound transformations over the past two decades, evolving through three distinct strategic frameworks that reflect fundamentally different conceptualizations of security threats and appropriate policy responses. This article presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of the 2005 EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the 2020 Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU, and the emerging 2024/2025 strategic framework comprising Council Conclusions and the ProtectEU Internal Security Strategy. Rather than representing incremental updates to existing approaches, these documents embody paradigmatically different security policy orientations that warrant systematic scholarly examination.*

The research employs a comparative policy analysis methodology, examining primary sources including official EU strategic documents, Council conclusions, European Commission communications, European Parliament reports, and Europol threat assessments. The analytical framework encompasses four dimensions: contextual factors including triggering events and threat environment characteristics; strategic orientation distinguishing reactive from proactive approaches and law enforcement from prevention-centered paradigms; structural elements including pillar systems and institutional mechanisms; and scope considerations including internal-external security linkages and technology integration.

The analysis reveals a fundamental paradigm shift from the reactive, law enforcement-centered approach characterizing the 2005 strategy, through the proactive, prevention-focused orientation of the 2020 Agenda, to the comprehensive, hybrid threat-integrating, whole-of-society security conception embodied in the 2024/2025 framework. The 2005 strategy emerged as a response to organized terrorist networks, emphasizing criminal justice cooperation and the pursue-protect logic derived from the UK CONTEST model. By 2020, the rise of lone actor terrorism, online radicalization, and ideologically diverse threats necessitated fundamental reconceptualization, introducing the anticipate pillar and emphasizing root cause approaches. The current framework further integrates external-internal security nexus considerations, addresses state-sponsored hybrid threats, and introduces whole-of-society resilience building.

The findings demonstrate that strategic evolution reflects both objective transformation of the threat environment and the EU's institutional learning capacity developed through systematic policy evaluation processes. The study contributes to European security studies literature by providing a systematic framework for understanding paradigmatic change in counter-terrorism policy and offers evidence-based recommendations for addressing emerging challenges including artificial intelligence-enabled threats, youth radicalization patterns, and the integration of counter-terrorism within broader hybrid threat responses in the forthcoming 2026 EU agenda.

Keywords: counter-terrorism policy, European Union, security strategy, paradigm shift, radicalization prevention, hybrid threats

Introduction

Research Background and Problem Statement

The European Union's approach to counter-terrorism has evolved dramatically since the first coordinated responses following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. What began as primarily informal cooperation among Member States against separatist and ideologically-motivated violence during the 1970s and 1980s has transformed into a comprehensive, multi-layered policy framework encompassing prevention, protection, pursuit, and response mechanisms. Understanding this evolution is essential not only for assessing the EU's institutional capacity to address evolving security challenges but also for informing the development of future policy frameworks in an increasingly complex threat environment.

The terrorist attacks that have struck European cities over the past two decades—from Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 through the devastating 2015-2016 attack wave to more recent incidents—have served as critical junctures prompting strategic reassessment and policy innovation. Each major attack or attack series has triggered not merely operational adjustments but fundamental reconsideration of the conceptual foundations underlying EU counter-terrorism efforts. This pattern of crisis-driven policy evolution raises important questions about the nature, direction, and coherence of strategic change in this policy domain.

The central problem addressed by this research concerns whether the transitions between the EU's major counter-terrorism strategic frameworks—specifically the 2005 EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the 2020 Counter-Terrorism Agenda, and the 2024/2025 strategic framework—represent mere policy adjustments or fundamental paradigm shifts in security thinking. This distinction matters significantly for both scholarly understanding and practical policy development: if changes are primarily incremental, then existing analytical frameworks and policy tools require only refinement; if changes are paradigmatic, then more fundamental reconceptualization of approaches may be necessary.

Research Objectives and Questions

This study pursues three interconnected research objectives. The first objective is to identify and systematically contextualize the specific historical circumstances, triggering events, and threat perceptions that led to the adoption of each major EU counter-terrorism strategic document. This requires examining not only the immediate catalysts for policy change but also the broader security environment, institutional developments, and political dynamics shaping decision-making processes.

The second objective is to analyze the strategic logic, priority areas, conceptual frameworks, and institutional mechanisms characterizing each strategic period. This involves detailed examination of the pillar structures employed, the balance between reactive and proactive approaches, the treatment of different threat categories, and the institutional arrangements established or modified to implement strategic priorities.

The third objective is to explain the nature and significance of transitions between strategic periods, assessing whether these constitute paradigmatic shifts or incremental adjustments, and to derive implications for future policy development. This requires comparative analysis across multiple dimensions and consideration of both continuities and discontinuities in EU counter-terrorism approaches.

These objectives translate into the following research questions: What contextual factors—including terrorist incidents, threat environment characteristics, and institutional

developments—shaped the adoption of each strategic framework? How do the strategic frameworks differ in their conceptual foundations, structural organization, and priority areas? To what extent do the transitions between frameworks represent paradigmatic change versus incremental policy evolution? What implications do these findings hold for the development of the forthcoming 2026 EU agenda on terrorism and violent extremism?

Methodology and Sources

This study employs a comparative policy analysis methodology, systematically examining official EU policy documents across the three strategic periods under investigation. The analytical framework encompasses four key dimensions that enable structured comparison: contextual factors, including triggering events and threat environment characteristics; strategic orientation, distinguishing reactive from proactive approaches and law enforcement-centered from prevention-centered paradigms; structural elements, including pillar systems, institutional mechanisms, and implementation tools; and scope considerations, including internal-external security linkages, technology treatment, and stakeholder involvement.

Primary sources constitute the empirical foundation of the analysis. These include: the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted by the Council on 30 November 2005 (Council of the European Union, 2005); the Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond published by the European Commission on 9 December 2020 (European Commission, 2020); Council Conclusions on future priorities for strengthening joint counter-terrorism efforts and on reinforcing external-internal connections adopted in December 2024 (Council of the EU, 2024b, 2024c); the ProtectEU Internal Security Strategy presented by the European Commission on 1 April 2025 (European Commission, 2025); and supplementary documents including European Parliament reports, particularly the 2018 TERR Committee findings (European Parliament, 2018), and European Parliament Research Service analyses (European Parliament Research Service, 2025).

Quantitative data on terrorist incidents, casualties, arrests, and prosecutions derive from the Global Terrorism Database maintained by the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (GTD, 2021) and Europol's annual European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports (TE-SAT) for 2023, 2024, and 2025 (Europol, 2023, 2024, 2025). These data sources enable empirical grounding of threat environment characterizations and assessment of policy effectiveness indicators.

Literature Review

Academic engagement with EU counter-terrorism policy has expanded substantially since 2001, generating a diverse literature addressing strategic frameworks, institutional developments, and specific threat dimensions. Early critical assessments by Monar (2007) examined the coherence and effectiveness of initial EU responses, identifying coordination challenges and implementation gaps that would shape subsequent policy development. Bures (2006) provided a skeptical evaluation characterizing early EU counter-terrorism efforts as insufficiently robust, questioning whether strategic pronouncements translated into meaningful operational capabilities.

The institutional dimension of EU counter-terrorism has received sustained scholarly attention. Bendiek (2006) analyzed the network-based approach characterizing early EU efforts, identifying both the potential and limitations of coordination mechanisms designed to respect Member State sovereignty while enabling effective cross-border cooperation. More

recent work by D'Amato and Terlizzi (2022) provides empirical analysis of strategic evolution, examining whether EU counter-terrorism has achieved genuine strategic coherence or remains primarily reactive and fragmented.

Research on specific threat dimensions has contributed significantly to understanding the challenges facing EU policy frameworks. Hoffman (2006) provided foundational analysis of Al-Qaeda's operational characteristics that informed the 2005 strategic response. The phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters received comprehensive treatment from Van Ginkel and Entenmann (2016), whose ICCT research documented the scale and characteristics of European foreign fighter mobilization to Syria and Iraq. Vidino, Marone, and Entenmann (2017) analyzed the shift toward lone actor terrorism, documenting the disconnection between many attackers and organized terrorist networks that necessitated the 2020 strategic reconceptualization.

The ideological diversification of terrorist threats has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Koehler (2018) examined trends in German right-wing violence, identifying contextual factors contributing to what he terms 'hive terrorism' characterized by decentralized, leaderless organization. Research on online radicalization pathways, including work by Melhuish and Heath-Kelly (2022) on local-level prevention efforts, has informed understanding of the digital dimension requiring attention in contemporary strategies. The external dimension of EU counter-terrorism, including partnerships with third countries and regional organizations, has been analyzed by Baker-Beall and Mott (2021), highlighting the increasing recognition of external-internal security linkages.

Most recently, Wojciechowski and Wejksznier (2025) have examined emerging threat patterns identified in current Europol assessments, including the juvenilization of terrorism and the rise of mixed ideological profiles that challenge traditional categorization frameworks. This evolving literature provides essential context for the present comparative analysis while also revealing gaps in systematic examination of paradigmatic change across EU counter-terrorism strategic frameworks.

The 2005 EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Historical Context and Triggering Events

The EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted on 30 November 2005 represented the culmination of a developmental process initiated by the September 11, 2001 attacks and accelerated by subsequent terrorist incidents on European soil. While EU counter-terrorism cooperation had earlier antecedents—with Member States engaging in informal coordination against separatist movements and left-wing terrorist organizations since the TREVI framework of the 1970s—the 2001 attacks fundamentally transformed the priority accorded to this policy domain and the resources devoted to its development (Monar, 2007).

The immediate institutional response to September 11 was remarkably swift. Within two weeks of the attacks, the European Council convened an extraordinary session on 21 September 2001 and adopted an initial counter-terrorism action plan establishing what became known as the Anti-terrorism Roadmap. This document identified priority areas for enhanced cooperation and initiated a series of legislative and operational developments that would continue throughout the subsequent years. The Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism adopted in June 2002 provided a common legal definition of terrorist offenses across Member States, addressing a fundamental prerequisite for effective cross-border cooperation.

At the same time, the broader historical evolution of terrorism in Europe demonstrates that the threat environment confronting the EU in the early 2000s was the result of several preceding historical waves rather than an entirely new phenomenon. Analysis of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) reveals that European terrorism evolved through distinct temporal phases characterized by changing ideological motivations, organizational structures, and operational methods. The 1970s and early 1980s were dominated by ethno-nationalist and left-wing terrorism, including organizations such as ETA, the IRA, and the Red Brigades. A second significant phase emerged during the 1990s in connection with post-Cold War instability and the Balkan conflicts, while the period after 2014 was marked by the rise of ISIS-inspired jihadist terrorism and digitally amplified lone actor attacks.

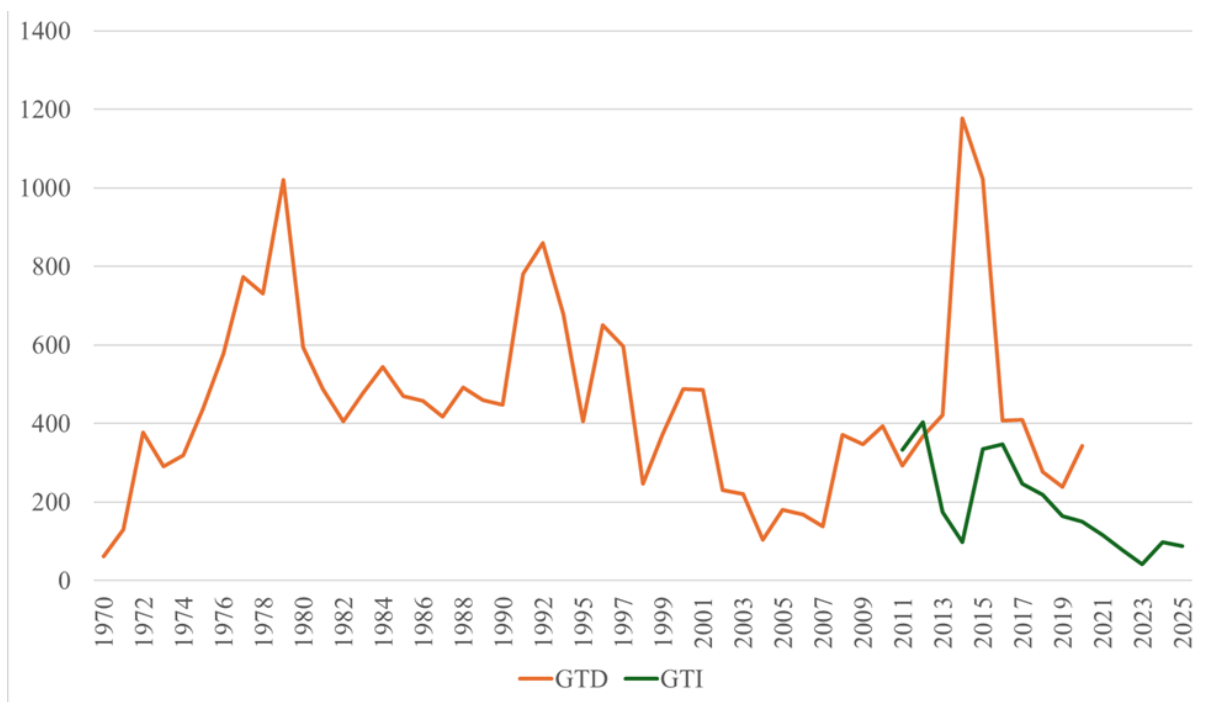


Figure 1. Number of Terrorist Attacks in Europe Based on the Global Terrorism Database (1970–2020) and the Global Terrorism Index (2011–2025)

Source: Authors' compilation based on GTD (2022) and GTI (2025).¹

The historical trend visible in Figure 1 suggests that terrorism in Europe should not be interpreted as a linear or static phenomenon. Instead, the data indicate cyclical but adaptive patterns shaped by geopolitical change, ideological transformation, and technological evolution. The relative decline in terrorist incidents during the early 2000s created an impression of partial stabilization compared to the high-intensity periods of previous decades.

¹ From a methodological perspective, it is important to note that the GTD data series is currently limited in temporal scope, as comprehensive data collection effectively concludes in 2020 (GTD, 2022). In order to extend the analytical horizon and maintain continuity in recent years, this study incorporates data from the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) for the period 2011–2025. While the GTI is based on a different methodological framework – relying on aggregated indicators, weighting mechanisms, and a combination of incident and impact-based measures – it nevertheless provides a sufficiently robust proxy for capturing broader temporal trends in terrorist activity.

This perception changed fundamentally following the Madrid train bombings of 11 March 2004.

The Madrid attacks constituted the critical turning point in EU counter-terrorism policy development. The coordinated bombings killed 193 people and injured more than 2,000, representing the first mass-casualty jihadist attack on European territory and demonstrating that Europe itself had become a primary operational theatre of transnational terrorism (Jordan et al., 2008). The political impact was immediate: within weeks, the European Council adopted the Declaration on Combating Terrorism, established the position of EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, and accelerated multiple legislative and institutional initiatives.

The London underground and bus bombings of 7 July 2005 provided further momentum for strategic consolidation. The attacks, which killed 52 people, reinforced the perception that the EU faced a persistent and coordinated transnational terrorist threat requiring a common strategic framework. Under the British Council Presidency, drawing heavily on the logic of the UK CONTEST model, the EU finalized and adopted the Counter-Terrorism Strategy in November 2005 (Kirkwood, 2006).

The threat environment during this period remained primarily associated with organized jihadist networks connected to Al-Qaeda. Recruitment, training, financing, and operational planning still relied heavily on physical infrastructures, personal networks, and centralized coordination. The internet already played a role in propaganda dissemination, but online radicalization had not yet become the dominant operational dynamic it would later evolve into. Consequently, the strategic response adopted in 2005 remained strongly law enforcement-centered, emphasizing intelligence sharing, border security, criminal justice cooperation, and the disruption of organized terrorist networks.

Threat Environment Characteristics

The 2005 strategy emerged within a threat environment that, while serious, appeared relatively well-defined compared to subsequent periods. Al-Qaeda and its affiliated organizations constituted the primary concern, representing a transnational terrorist network with hierarchical command structures, established recruitment and training pipelines, and demonstrated capability for mass-casualty attacks. The organizational model—characterized by central direction from leadership based in Afghanistan and Pakistan, operational cells deployed to target countries, and support networks providing financing, documentation, and logistics—formed the strategic response that would be adopted.

Terrorist recruitment and training during this period occurred primarily through physical spaces and personal relationships. Training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan provided operational skills to recruits who then returned to their home countries or deployed to target locations. Radical mosques and informal study circles served as recruitment venues, while prisons functioned as sites of radicalization where convicted extremists influenced other inmates. The technical requirements for attack execution—particularly the production of improvised explosive devices used in both Madrid and London—necessitated organized cells with specialized knowledge and coordination capabilities (Hoffman, 2006).

The internet's role in terrorist activities remained limited during this period, though not entirely absent. Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups maintained websites and participated in online forums for propaganda dissemination, but these represented supplementary rather than primary channels for recruitment and radicalization. The social media platforms that would later transform the threat landscape—Facebook (founded 2004), YouTube (2005), Twitter (2006)—either did not yet exist or had not achieved significant penetration. Consequently, counter-

terrorism approaches could focus primarily on physical interdiction, network disruption, and traditional intelligence methods without confronting the challenges of online content moderation and algorithmic radicalization that would later emerge (Gunaratna and Oreg, 2010).

The grievance narratives driving jihadist mobilization during this period centered primarily on Western military interventions in Muslim-majority countries and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The US-led invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), with varying degrees of European participation, provided potent recruitment themes. European countries' alliance relationships with the United States and their own colonial histories in the Middle East and North Africa contributed to perceptions of Western hostility toward Muslim populations that extremist ideologues exploited (Nesser, 2022). This external orientation of threat sources informed the strategy's emphasis on cooperation with partner countries in regions of concern.

Strategic Framework and Approach

The structural foundation of the 2005 strategy derived from the United Kingdom's CONTEST counter-terrorism framework, organizing EU efforts around four pillars: Prevent, Protect, Pursue, and Respond. This architecture reflected contemporary security thinking and provided a comprehensive framework addressing different phases of the counter-terrorism challenge—from preventing radicalization through protecting potential targets and pursuing terrorists to responding to attacks when prevention and protection failed (Pantucci, 2010).

The Prevent pillar addressed radicalization and recruitment, seeking to stop people from turning to terrorism. However, the 2005 conception of prevention remained relatively narrow, focusing primarily on disrupting recruitment networks and countering extremist propaganda rather than addressing underlying social, economic, or psychological factors. This approach reflected both the threat assessment emphasizing organized network-based terrorism and institutional constraints limiting EU competence in areas such as education, social policy, and integration that would later receive greater attention.

The Protect pillar encompassed measures to reduce vulnerability to attack, including border security, transport security, protection of critical infrastructure, and target hardening for potential attack sites. Aviation security received particular attention following the September 11 hijackings, with new screening requirements, air marshal programs, and cockpit security measures implemented across Member States. The Schengen framework's implications for both facilitating and potentially enabling threatening mobility across internal borders generated ongoing tension between security imperatives and free movement principles.

The Pursue pillar received the greatest operational emphasis, focusing on investigating and disrupting terrorist networks, impeding planning and financing, and bringing terrorists to justice. Key mechanisms included the European Arrest Warrant facilitating cross-border extradition, enhanced powers for Europol and Eurojust to coordinate investigations and prosecutions, expansion of the Schengen Information System to include terrorism-related alerts, and strengthened regulations targeting terrorist financing. This pillar's prominence reflected the law enforcement-centered orientation characterizing the overall strategy (Bendiek, 2006).

The Respond pillar addressed consequence management following terrorist attacks, encompassing emergency response coordination, victim assistance, and post-attack resilience. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism provided frameworks for mutual assistance among Member States facing crisis situations beyond their individual response capacities. While less developed than the pursuit-focused elements, the response pillar acknowledged the impossibility of preventing all attacks and the need for prepared, coordinated reactions.

The overarching strategic logic emphasized countering terrorist networks through counter-networks—building cooperative frameworks among law enforcement, intelligence, and judicial authorities across Member States that could match the transnational reach of adversaries. This network-against-network conception informed institutional design choices prioritizing information sharing mechanisms, mutual recognition arrangements, and coordination bodies over more centralized supranational capabilities. Respect for Member State sovereignty and existing competence boundaries remained fundamental constraints, limiting the strategy to coordination and facilitation rather than operational direction (Bures, 2006).

The 2020 Counter-Terrorism Agenda

Historical Context and Triggering Events

The Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU adopted on 9 December 2020 emerged from an extended period of strategic reassessment prompted by the deadliest terrorist attack wave in European history. The years 2015 and 2016 witnessed a devastating series of incidents that fundamentally challenged assumptions underlying the 2005 strategy and demonstrated the inadequacy of existing approaches for addressing evolved threat characteristics. This crisis period necessitated not merely operational adjustments but paradigmatic reconceptualization of EU counter-terrorism policy.

The attack sequence began with the assault on the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine offices on 7 January 2015, killing 12 people including prominent cartoonists whose work had attracted jihadist ire. Days later, related attackers killed four people at a kosher supermarket in Paris. These incidents, shocking as they were, proved merely preliminary to the catastrophic coordinated attacks of 13 November 2015. Teams of attackers struck the Bataclan concert hall, the Stade de France during a football match, and multiple restaurant and bar locations across Paris, killing 130 people and injuring hundreds more in the deadliest terrorist attack in French history and the worst in the EU since the 2004 Madrid bombings (Andreeva, 2023).

The violence continued into 2016 with the Brussels attacks of 22 March, when coordinated suicide bombings at Zaventem Airport and Maelbeek metro station killed 32 people—attacks linked to the same network responsible for the November 2015 Paris massacres. On 14 July 2016, Bastille Day celebrations in Nice were devastated when an attacker drove a cargo truck into crowds on the Promenade des Anglais, killing 86 people in an attack demonstrating the lethal potential of simple vehicle-ramming tactics. Just days before Christmas, a similar truck attack on a Berlin Christmas market killed 12 people, extending the attack wave into Germany.

The immediate period preceding the Agenda's adoption witnessed another cluster of attacks that intensified pressure for strategic response. On 16 October 2020, French history teacher Samuel Paty was beheaded near Paris by an attacker motivated by Paty's classroom use of Charlie Hebdo's Mohammed cartoons—an incident highlighting both the persistent targeting of individuals deemed to have insulted Islam and the role of social media in identifying and mobilizing against perceived offenders. On 29 October, an attacker killed three people at Notre-Dame Basilica in Nice. On 2 November, a shooting in Vienna's city center killed four people. EU interior ministers, meeting on the fifth anniversary of the Bataclan attacks, issued a joint declaration demanding urgent action, prompting the Commission to accelerate the Agenda's publication from its originally planned 2021 timeline.

Transformed Threat Environment

By 2020, the terrorist threat environment had undergone fundamental transformation compared to the relatively well-defined landscape of 2005. The most significant change concerned the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL/Daesh) and the unprecedented mobilization of European foreign fighters it inspired. Between 2012 and 2019, an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 EU citizens traveled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS or other jihadist organizations—a scale of foreign fighter mobilization far exceeding any previous conflict. The establishment of the ISIS caliphate across significant Syrian and Iraqi territory from 2014 to 2019 created both a destination for foreign recruits and a propaganda platform with reach extending across global social media networks (Van Ginkel and Entenmann, 2016).

The foreign fighter phenomenon created multiple, interconnected threat vectors that existing policy frameworks struggled to address. Approximately 30% of departed foreign fighters subsequently returned to their European home countries, carrying combat experience, tactical knowledge, network connections, and—in many cases—psychological trauma that complicated both security assessment and potential reintegration. Children taken to or born in conflict zones presented particularly complex challenges regarding citizenship, safeguarding, and radicalization risks. Meanwhile, security services faced daunting monitoring requirements tracking individuals across the risk spectrum from returned fighters through travel frustrates to those never successfully departing.

Perhaps the most consequential threat evolution concerned the rise of lone actor terrorism and small autonomous cells operating without direct organizational connection to established terrorist groups. Analysis by Vidino, Marone, and Entenmann (2017) found that 69.3% of jihadist attacks in Western countries between mid-2014 and late 2017 involved perpetrators lacking direct operational links to terrorist organizations. This phenomenon represented what some analysts termed the 'democratization' of terrorism—the internet and social media enabled individuals to self-radicalize, access operational guidance, and execute attacks without the network infrastructure that traditional counter-terrorism approaches targeted.

Attack methodologies evolved alongside perpetrator profiles. The sophisticated, coordinated operations requiring extensive preparation that characterized Madrid and London gave way to simpler attack modes exploiting readily available implements. Vehicle ramming attacks like those in Nice and Berlin required only access to a truck or car and a crowded public space. Knife attacks could be executed with items available in any kitchen. These low-sophistication, high-impact tactics proved extremely difficult to detect through traditional surveillance and intelligence methods, as they generated minimal advance indicators and required no communications or transactions that security services might intercept.

The threat environment's ideological diversification added further complexity absent from the 2005 framework. Right-wing extremist terrorism emerged as a significant concern, exemplified by attacks including the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings in New Zealand (whose perpetrator's manifesto circulated widely in European extremist networks), the Halle synagogue attack in Germany (2019), and the Hanau shootings (2020) killing nine people at shisha bars. These incidents demonstrated that counter-terrorism policy required ideology-neutral approaches capable of addressing threats from across the ideological spectrum (Koehler, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated matters by intensifying online radicalization, spawning new conspiracy theories blending health disinformation with extremist ideologies, and creating conditions of isolation that elevated vulnerability to recruitment messaging (Davies et al., 2021).

Strategic Reconceptualization

The 2020 Counter-Terrorism Agenda introduced fundamental structural and conceptual changes reflecting the transformed threat environment. Most significantly, the pillar framework was reorganized around four elements: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, and Respond—with the previous Pursue pillar eliminated as a standalone category and its functions distributed across other pillars. This restructuring represented more than terminological adjustment; it signaled a paradigmatic shift from reactive law enforcement approaches toward proactive, preventive, and predictive orientations (D'Amato and Terlizzi, 2022).

The introduction of the Anticipate pillar represented the Agenda's most significant innovation. This pillar explicitly acknowledged that reactive responses to identified threats could not provide adequate security in an environment characterized by decentralized actors, rapidly evolving tactics, and abbreviated attack preparation timelines. Instead, the Anticipate pillar emphasized strategic intelligence, threat assessment, and foresight methodologies enabling identification of emerging risks before they materialized in attack planning. The EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (EU INTCEN) received enhanced mandate and resources, while new mechanisms for integrating Member State intelligence contributions were established.

The Prevent pillar underwent substantial reconceptualization compared to its 2005 predecessor. Where the earlier strategy addressed prevention primarily through disrupting recruitment networks and countering propaganda, the 2020 Agenda emphasized addressing root causes of radicalization, building community resilience, and strengthening social inclusion as protective factors against extremist recruitment. The document explicitly states that 'an inclusive and rights-respecting society is the strongest protection against terrorism'—framing prevention as a societal challenge requiring engagement far beyond security sector actors (Melhuish and Heath-Kelly, 2022).

The online dimension achieved central prominence in the 2020 framework, reflecting recognition that digital spaces had become primary venues for radicalization, recruitment, operational communication, and attack incitement. The Regulation on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online (EU 2021/784), adopted shortly after the Agenda, established legally binding requirements for platforms to remove notified terrorist content within one hour. The Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) received expanded mandate and resources to support practitioners working on prevention across Member States. New initiatives addressed algorithmic amplification of extremist content and the challenge of cross-platform coordination among malicious actors.

The external dimension of EU counter-terrorism received enhanced attention, recognizing that internal security depended fundamentally on conditions in source and transit regions. Partnership frameworks with Western Balkan countries, North African states, Middle Eastern nations, and Sahel region governments were strengthened, encompassing capacity building, intelligence sharing, and coordinated approaches to shared threats. The return of foreign fighters and the complex situation of those detained in Syria added urgency to external engagement requirements (Baker-Beall and Mott, 2021).

The 2024/2025 Strategic Framework

Geopolitical Context and Policy Drivers

The strategic framework emerging in 2024 and 2025—comprising the December 2024 Council Conclusions on counter-terrorism priorities and external-internal connections, together with the ProtectEU Internal Security Strategy presented in April 2025—developed within a geopolitical context fundamentally transformed by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and its cascading consequences for European security. This context elevated concerns about hybrid threats, state-sponsored hostile activities, and the integration of internal and external security dimensions to unprecedented prominence in EU strategic thinking.

The European Commission's political guidelines for the 2024-2029 mandate established internal security as a priority area, envisioning a new EU agenda for preventing and combating terrorism and violent extremism to be presented in early 2026. The current framework documents accordingly represent transitional instruments establishing priorities and directions that the forthcoming comprehensive agenda will operationalize. This staged approach reflects both the complexity of the strategic environment and the extensive consultation and preparation required for a document intended to guide EU counter-terrorism efforts through the remainder of the decade.

Europol's 2025 Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) provides empirical context for the strategic framework's development. In 2024, EU Member States reported 58 completed, failed, or foiled terrorist attacks across 14 countries—a significant decrease from the 120 incidents reported in 2023. The ideological distribution revealed 24 jihadist-motivated acts (a notable increase from 14 in 2023), 21 attacks attributed to left-wing and anarchist perpetrators, and incidents across other categories. Jihadist attacks, though fewer in number than some other categories, proved the most lethal, claiming 5 lives and injuring 18 people, with perpetrators predominantly operating as lone actors (Europol, 2025).

Law enforcement activity remained intensive, with 449 arrests for terrorism-related offenses across 20 Member States in 2024, slightly exceeding the 426 arrests in 2023. The distribution of arrests across ideological categories—64% (289 individuals) for jihadist offenses, 47 for right-wing extremism (up from 26 in 2023), and 28 for left-wing and anarchist activity (up from 14)—indicated both the continued predominance of jihadist-related enforcement and the growing attention to other threat categories. Court proceedings resulted in 426 convictions and 59 acquittals across 16 Member States, demonstrating sustained prosecutorial engagement with terrorism cases.

Contemporary Threat Landscape

The contemporary threat environment presents unprecedented complexity, fragmentation, and dynamism that challenges categorization frameworks developed for earlier periods. Jihadist terrorism remains the most lethal threat category, but the landscape has diversified dramatically across multiple dimensions requiring nuanced assessment and response. The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), operating from Afghanistan following the Taliban's 2021 takeover, has emerged as the EU's most dynamic external jihadist threat. ISKP-linked cells and inspired individuals in Europe have increased, and the group's demonstrated capability for external operations—exemplified by the March 2024 Crocus City Hall attack in Moscow killing over 140 people—underscores its threat to European security (Wojciechowski and Wejkszner, 2025).

New threat categories have emerged that fit uneasily within traditional frameworks. Ecologically-motivated violent extremism, while thus far limited in Europe, shows signs of potential escalation as some environmental activists adopt increasingly confrontational tactics. The EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator's 2024 analysis noted that certain radical climate activist tactics could provide pathways toward more violent action, with concerns about infiltration of environmental movements by established violent extremist elements (Council of the European Union, 2024a). Anti-state and 'sovereign citizen' movements rejecting governmental legitimacy have gained adherents, exemplified by Germany's Reichsbürger movement whose 2022 coup plotting resulted in extensive prosecutions (Wallner and White, 2022).

Mixed or hybrid ideological profiles increasingly characterize individual radicalization trajectories, complicating threat assessment and categorical analysis. Some perpetrators combine elements from jihadist narratives with incel (involuntary celibate) misogynistic ideology, conspiracy theories, or ethno-nationalist themes—producing idiosyncratic threat profiles that do not align with established categories. These 'salad bar' ideologies, as some analysts term them, reflect the influence of online environments where individuals encounter and combine diverse extremist content streams. Security services face significant challenges identifying and assessing such threats using frameworks designed for more coherent ideological movements (Europol, 2023).

The juvenilization of terrorism represents a particularly alarming development receiving extensive attention in current threat assessments. Europol's 2024 and 2025 reports highlight increasing involvement of minors and young people across the terrorism activity spectrum—from propaganda production and online recruitment through attack planning to execution. TikTok and other short-video platforms have created new radicalization pathways, with algorithmic recommendation systems potentially exposing vulnerable young users to progressively more extreme content. Gaming platforms, encrypted messaging applications, and online communities provide venues for recruitment and coordination largely beyond traditional surveillance capabilities.

Hybrid threats integrating terrorism with state-sponsored hostile activities have achieved new prominence in EU strategic thinking. The ProtectEU strategy explicitly addresses the blurring of lines between internal security threats and external aggression, noting that hostile states—particularly Russia—combine physical attacks, cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and economic pressure in ways that challenge both traditional military and traditional law enforcement responses. The potential for weapons and trained fighters from the Ukraine conflict to create future security challenges in Europe, the exploitation of migration flows by hostile actors, and the use of proxy groups all contribute to an increasingly complex threat matrix.

Strategic Approach and Innovations

The December 2024 Council Conclusions established three priority intervention areas for the next five-year period: enhanced information sharing between Member States and EU agencies; improved prevention and detection of infiltration by persons posing terrorist threats; and strengthened approaches to online terrorism and violent extremism. These priorities reflect accumulated experience regarding persistent implementation challenges while acknowledging the evolving threat landscape requiring adaptive responses.

The explicit emphasis on external-internal security connections represents a significant conceptual advance. The December 16, 2024 Council Conclusions specifically address the

integration of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) frameworks, recognizing that these traditionally separate policy domains can no longer be addressed in isolation. This acknowledgment has both institutional implications—requiring new coordination mechanisms between previously distinct structures—and operational consequences for how threats traversing internal-external boundaries are assessed and addressed.

The ProtectEU Internal Security Strategy introduces the whole-of-society approach as its central conceptual innovation. This framework explicitly moves beyond the state-centric security paradigm that characterized earlier strategies, recognizing that effective security in contemporary conditions requires active engagement of citizens, businesses, researchers, civil society organizations, and local communities. The strategy articulates three implementation principles: integrated multi-stakeholder approaches to security challenges; mainstreaming security considerations across all EU legislative initiatives; and increased public expenditure on security capabilities.

Significant institutional developments accompany the strategic framework. The transformation of Europol into an operational agency, planned for implementation by 2026, will enhance its capacity to provide direct support to Member State investigations and operations. Eurojust and Frontex receive strengthened mandates reflecting expanded threat scope. The European Critical Communications System will provide secure, interoperable communications infrastructure for security services across Member States. Full integration of biometric databases—including Eurodac, the Visa Information System, and the European Criminal Records Information System for Third Country Nationals—is targeted for completion by 2027, enabling comprehensive identity verification capabilities.

The 2026 ProtectEU Agenda and the question of a fourth paradigm

The publication of the ProtectEU: Agenda to Prevent and Counter Terrorism (COM(2026) 101 final) on 26 February 2026 raised the question whether the European Union had entered a fourth counter-terrorism paradigm or whether the document merely operationalized the strategic direction already established in the 2024/2025 framework. A closer analysis suggests that the Agenda represents policy deepening rather than a paradigmatic rupture.

The document translates several strategic ambitions of the ProtectEU Internal Security Strategy and the 2024 Council Conclusions into concrete legislative proposals, institutional mechanisms, and implementation tools. In this sense, the 2026 Agenda functions less as a new conceptual framework and more as the operational consolidation phase of the third paradigm. The whole-of-society approach, the integration of hybrid threat considerations, and the fusion of internal and external security dimensions remain structurally unchanged.

Nevertheless, the Agenda introduces several important thematic innovations. First, it elevates the radicalization of minors into a distinct strategic concern, supported by empirical Europol findings indicating the growing involvement of juveniles in extremist activities. Second, the Agenda explicitly integrates artificial intelligence governance into counter-terrorism policy, linking the implementation of the AI Act and the Digital Services Act to prevention and detection efforts. Third, it lays the groundwork for a future EU-wide financial data retrieval architecture aimed at strengthening the tracing of terrorist financing and crypto-asset transactions.

At the same time, the Agenda also demonstrates the structural limits of EU counter-terrorism integration. Many of its most sensitive measures remain dependent on Member State

implementation, while several initiatives — including the expansion of passenger data systems and the full operationalization of EU financial monitoring mechanisms — remain under examination or delayed until later phases. The preservation of Member State sovereignty in internal security matters continues to constrain the emergence of a fully centralized European counter-terrorism model.

Consequently, the 2026 Agenda should be interpreted as the institutional and operational maturation of the third paradigm rather than the emergence of a distinct fourth paradigm. The EU's contemporary counter-terrorism approach increasingly resembles a continuously deepening governance framework built on resilience, technological adaptation, and multi-level coordination rather than periodic revolutionary strategic shifts.

Comparative Analysis

Systematic comparison across the three strategic frameworks reveals both continuities and fundamental discontinuities in EU counter-terrorism policy evolution. This section presents structured analysis along key dimensions, enabling assessment of whether transitions between frameworks constitute incremental adjustment or paradigmatic change. The tabular presentations that follow synthesize findings across strategic pillars and directional characteristics, providing visual representation of the evolution documented in preceding sections.

Evolution of Strategic Pillars

The pillar structures organizing each strategic framework reveal fundamental shifts in conceptualization and priority. The 2005 framework's Prevent-Protect-Pursue-Respond structure derived from UK CONTEST and reflected a law enforcement-centered paradigm emphasizing the Pursue elements addressing investigation, disruption, and prosecution. The 2020 restructuring replacing Pursue with Anticipate signaled reconceptualization from reactive toward proactive orientations. The 2024/2025 framework moves beyond the traditional pillar structure entirely, organizing priorities around integrated threat domains reflecting the contemporary landscape's complexity.

Table 1. Evolution of Strategic Pillars 2005-2025

Source: Authors' compilation based on primary documents

Pillar	2005 Strategy	2020 Agenda	2024/2025 Framework
First	PREVENT: Disrupting recruitment and counter-propaganda	ANTICIPATE: Strategic intelligence, threat forecasting, foresight	Integrated situational awareness and comprehensive threat assessment
Second	PROTECT: Physical target protection, border security, critical infrastructure	PREVENT: Root causes, community resilience, social inclusion	Strengthened operational and technical capabilities across agencies
Third	PURSUE: Investigation, network disruption, prosecution, financing	PROTECT: Physical security, digital protection, public spaces	Online and technological threat domain: AI, platforms, encryption
Fourth	RESPOND: Crisis management, consequence management, civil protection	RESPOND: Victim protection, emergency services, post-attack recovery	External-internal nexus: hybrid threats, state actors, regional stability

Comparison of Strategic Directions

Beyond structural organization, the frameworks differ fundamentally in strategic direction across multiple dimensions. The shift from reactive to proactive orientation, the expanding conception of relevant threat categories, the evolving treatment of external-internal linkages, and the changing assessment of technology's role all demonstrate paradigmatic rather than merely incremental change.

Table 2. Comparison of Strategic Directions Across Frameworks

Source: Authors' compilation based on primary documents

Dimension	2005 Strategy	2020 Agenda	2024/2025 Framework
Core Approach	Reactive, law enforcement-centered, network disruption focus	Proactive, prevention-centered, root cause intervention	Comprehensive, whole-of-society, resilience-building
Primary Threat	Al-Qaeda networks, organized cells, hierarchical structures	Lone actors, ISIS-inspired, online radicalization, FTFs	ISKP, hybrid threats, juvenilization, mixed ideologies
External Dimension	US partnership priority, War on Terror alignment	Regional partnerships, Western Balkans, MENA, Sahel	Integrated nexus, CFSP-JHA coordination, state threats
Technology Role	Marginal, websites and forums, limited social media	Central, online radicalization, platform regulation	Dual: AI as threat and tool, algorithmic challenges
Stakeholder Scope	State-centric, law enforcement and intelligence focus	Expanded, local actors, civil society, platforms	Whole-of-society, citizens, businesses, researchers

Paradigm Shift Assessment

The evidence presented supports characterization of the 2005-2025 evolution as encompassing two paradigm shifts rather than continuous incremental development. The first shift, from 2005 to 2020, involved transition from a reactive, law enforcement-centered paradigm emphasizing network disruption and criminal justice responses to a proactive, prevention-centered paradigm emphasizing anticipation, root cause approaches, and societal engagement. The second shift, from 2020 to 2024/2025, involves transition from counter-terrorism as a distinct policy domain toward integration within comprehensive internal security frameworks addressing hybrid threats and whole-of-society resilience.

These paradigm shifts reflect both objective transformation of the threat environment and institutional learning processes within the EU policy system. Major terrorist attacks served as critical junctures prompting reassessment, but the direction of change was shaped by accumulated experience, systematic evaluation processes including the European Parliament TERR Committee's work, and evolving understanding of effective counter-terrorism approaches. The EU's capacity for paradigmatic adaptation distinguishes its counter-terrorism policy evolution from mere crisis response.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The comparative analysis of EU counter-terrorism strategic frameworks yields significant implications for the development of the forthcoming 2026 EU agenda on terrorism and violent extremism. This section articulates evidence-based recommendations organized across four interconnected domains: institutional architecture, technological adaptation, societal resilience, and international cooperation. These recommendations derive from the paradigm shifts documented in preceding analysis and the contemporary threat characteristics requiring policy response.

Institutional Architecture Recommendations

The transformation of Europol into an operational agency represents a crucial institutional development requiring careful implementation. Enhanced operational capabilities must be accompanied by robust accountability mechanisms ensuring democratic oversight and fundamental rights protection. Clear jurisdictional boundaries between Europol's expanded role and Member State authorities will prevent duplication while enabling effective cooperation. The forthcoming agenda should establish review mechanisms assessing the operational transformation's effectiveness and addressing any implementation challenges identified during initial operation.

Information sharing across Member States and EU agencies has been identified as a priority in each successive strategic framework, yet implementation gaps persist. The 2026 agenda should prioritize full utilization of existing mechanisms before establishing new ones, addressing cultural and operational barriers that impede effective information exchange. The integration of biometric databases by 2027 requires standardized data protection protocols across all participating systems and Member States, with particular attention to accuracy requirements given the consequences of erroneous identification in security contexts.

The external-internal security nexus necessitates enhanced coordination between CFSP and JHA institutional frameworks. Establishing permanent joint working groups between the European External Action Service and relevant JHA agencies would operationalize this integration. Counter-terrorism considerations should be systematically incorporated into external partnership agreements, development assistance frameworks, and diplomatic engagement strategies, particularly regarding the Western Balkans, North African partners, and Sahel region states facing acute terrorist challenges.

Technological Adaptation Recommendations

Technology's dual character—as both threat enabler and counter-terrorism tool—requires sophisticated regulatory approaches balancing security imperatives with fundamental rights protection and innovation considerations. The proliferation of artificial intelligence capabilities poses unprecedented challenges including AI-generated disinformation, deepfake content enabling impersonation and manipulation, and the potential for AI-assisted attack planning. The EU should develop specific guidelines governing AI use in counter-terrorism operations while establishing safeguards against algorithmic bias and ensuring human oversight of consequential decisions.

Platform cooperation frameworks established under the 2021 Terrorist Content Online Regulation require extension to emerging platforms, particularly those popular among younger demographics including TikTok, Discord, and gaming-associated services. The forthcoming

agenda should address algorithmic recommendation systems that may amplify extremist content, requiring transparency regarding content moderation policies and recommendation algorithms. Investment in law enforcement technical capabilities must keep pace with technological evolution, including capabilities for analyzing encrypted communications and monitoring dark web activity consistent with legal frameworks.

Societal Resilience Recommendations

The whole-of-society approach introduced in the ProtectEU strategy requires systematic operationalization at national, regional, and local levels. Member States should develop comprehensive national resilience strategies integrating counter-terrorism with broader societal cohesion objectives, recognizing that extremism thrives in contexts of social fragmentation and alienation. Local authorities, educational institutions, and civil society organizations require resources and training to recognize early indicators of radicalization and implement appropriate interventions.

The documented juvenilization of terrorism demands specialized prevention programs targeting adolescents and young adults across both online and offline radicalization pathways. Digital literacy education equipping young people to critically assess online content should be integrated into educational curricula across Member States. Mental health support services should be incorporated into prevention frameworks, recognizing the psychological vulnerabilities that contribute to radicalization susceptibility. Programs supporting parents and educators in recognizing warning signs and responding appropriately require expansion and resourcing.

International Cooperation Recommendations

The evolving threat from ISKP and other external actors requires strengthened intelligence cooperation with partners across Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. The EU should pursue operational agreements with key regional partners while ensuring human rights compliance in all cooperative activities. Capacity-building programs in source and transit countries should address both immediate security requirements and underlying governance challenges that enable terrorist recruitment and operation.

The hybrid nature of contemporary threats requires coordinated responses across multiple policy domains. Counter-terrorism cooperation should be systematically linked with efforts to combat disinformation, protect critical infrastructure from cyber and physical attack, and address state-sponsored hostile activities. The EU should develop comprehensive frameworks for attribution and response to state-enabled terrorism, including graduated sanction mechanisms and diplomatic consequences for states providing support or sanctuary to terrorist actors.

Conclusions

This comparative analysis demonstrates that the evolution of EU counter-terrorism policy from 2005 to 2025 encompasses two fundamental paradigm shifts rather than merely incremental adjustment to existing approaches. The first paradigm shift, from 2005 to 2020, involved transition from a reactive, law enforcement-centered framework emphasizing pursuit and prosecution of organized terrorist networks to a proactive, prevention-centered approach emphasizing anticipation, root cause intervention, and online space regulation. The second paradigm shift, currently underway from 2020 to 2024/2025, involves transition from counter-terrorism as a distinct policy domain toward integration within comprehensive internal security frameworks addressing hybrid threats through whole-of-society resilience building.

The structural drivers of these paradigm shifts have been multiple and interconnected. Major terrorist attacks—Madrid 2004, London 2005, the 2015-2016 attack wave, and subsequent incidents—served as critical junctures triggering strategic reassessment. Technological transformation, particularly the rise of social media and subsequently artificial intelligence, fundamentally altered radicalization and recruitment patterns requiring new policy responses. Geopolitical developments, from the rise and fall of the ISIS caliphate through the Ukrainian conflict, reconfigured the external threat environment and elevated hybrid threat considerations. Institutional learning processes, including systematic evaluation through the European Parliament TERR Committee and regular Europol threat assessments, enabled more sophisticated policy responses building on accumulated experience.

The forthcoming 2026 EU agenda on terrorism and violent extremism will need to address several challenges identified through this analysis. The juvenilization of terrorism, with increasing involvement of minors across the threat activity spectrum, demands specialized prevention and intervention approaches. Artificial intelligence capabilities, both as threat enabler and potential counter-terrorism tool, require regulatory frameworks balancing security, rights, and innovation. The integration of counter-terrorism within broader hybrid threat responses necessitates institutional adaptations bridging previously separate policy domains. The whole-of-society approach, while conceptually compelling, requires practical operationalization mechanisms engaging citizens, businesses, and civil society in resilience building.

The future of EU counter-terrorism policy depends on sustaining the institutional capacity for paradigmatic adaptation that this analysis has documented. The threat environment will continue evolving in ways that cannot be precisely predicted, and policy frameworks must retain flexibility to respond to emerging challenges while maintaining core protective functions. The balance between security imperatives and fundamental rights protection requires continuous reassessment as both threats and response capabilities change. The EU's demonstrated capacity for strategic learning and paradigmatic evolution provides grounds for cautious optimism that future challenges can be effectively addressed, provided that this capacity is maintained and resources adequate to the task are committed.

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NUO IŠŠŪKIŲ PRIE REFLEKSIJOS: INTERAKTYVIŲ MOKYMOSI METODŲ INTEGRAVIMAS UGDANT ŽMOGIŠKŲJŲ IŠTEKLIŲ VALDYMO SPECIALISTUS

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Anotacija. Šiuolaikinėje verslo aplinkoje žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistų vaidmuo tampa vis sudėtingesnis. Iš jų tikimasi ne tik užtikrinti efektyvų žmogiškųjų išteklių procesų administravimą, bet ir aktyviai prisidėti prie organizacijos strateginių tikslų įgyvendinimo, organizacinių pokyčių valdymo, talentų ugdymo, darbuotojų patirties gerinimo bei organizacijos kultūros stiprinimo. Tokie reikalavimai suponuoja poreikį ieškoti mokymosi metodų, kurie leistų studentams ne tik įgyti teorinių žinių, bet ir ugdyti profesinėje veikloje reikalingas kompetencijas bei gebėjimą jas taikyti realiose organizacinėse situacijose. Todėl studijose vis daugiau dėmesio skiriama interaktyviems mokymosi metodams, kurie skatina studentų aktyvų išitraukimą, problemų sprendimą, bendradarbiavimą ir refleksiją. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama interaktyvių mokymosi metodų reikšmė ugdant būsimuosius žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistus, ypatingą dėmesį skiriant iššūkiams grįstam mokymuisi ir refleksijai. Straipsnio tikslas - pagrįsti šių metodų reikšmę ugdant būsimuosius žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistus ir, remiantis jų taikymo patirtimi, pateikti praktines išvagas apie šių metodų integravimą į studijų procesą. Teorinėje straipsnio dalyje aptariamos interaktyvių mokymosi metodų taikymo prielaidos, iššūkiams grįsto mokymosi ir refleksijos vaidmuo profesinių kompetencijų ugdyme bei jų sąsajos su šiuolaikiniams žmogiškųjų išteklių specialistams reikalingomis kompetencijomis. Empirinėje straipsnio dalyje analizuojama šių metodų integravimo į KTU Žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo magistrantūros studijų programos modulius „Projektų valdymas“ ir „Talentų valdymas“ patirtis. Projektų valdymo modulyje studentai sprendžia realius organizacijų iššūkius ir rengia siūlymus organizacijų vystymo bei pokyčių valdymo klausimais, o Talentų valdymo modulyje dalyvauja assessment centrų organizavimo, kompetencijų vertinimo, grįžamojo ryšio teikimo ir koučingo veiklose. Abiejuose moduluose svarbi mokymosi proceso dalis yra refleksija, leidžianti studentams analizuoti savo patirtį, priimtus sprendimus ir profesinį augimą. Studentų (N=82) atsiliepimų analizė atskleidė, kad didžiausią vertę jiems kuria praktinės veiklos, realios organizacinės situacijos, galimybė dirbti su išoriniais partneriais, gauti grįžtamąjį ryšį ir reflektuoti savo patirtį. Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad iššūkiams grįstas mokymasis ir refleksija prisideda prie teorinių žinių taikymo praktikoje, profesinių kompetencijų ugdymo, geresnio organizacinių procesų supratimo ir pasirengimo būsimai profesinei veiklai. Straipsnyje daroma išvada, kad šių metodų taikymas sudaro prielaidas veiksmingiau rengti specialistus, gebančius veikti sudėtingoje organizacijų aplinkoje, valdyti pokyčius ir kurti vertę organizacijoms bei jų darbuotojams.

Raktiniai žodžiai: žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymas, interaktyvūs mokymosi metodai, iššūkiams grįstas mokymasis, refleksija.

Įvadas

Šiuolaikinėje organizacijų aplinkoje žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo (ŽIV) specialistų vaidmuo tampa vis sudėtingesnis ir kompleksiškesnis. Organizacijoms veikiant nuolatinių technologinių, ekonominių, demografinių ir socialinių pokyčių sąlygomis, iš ŽIV profesionalų tikimasi ne tik užtikrinti efektyvų žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo procesų administravimą, bet ir

aktyviai prisidėti prie organizacijos strateginių tikslų įgyvendinimo, organizacinių pokyčių valdymo, talentų ugdymo bei organizacinės kultūros formavimo. Todėl ŽIV specialistams būtina ne tik gerai išmanyti žmogiškųjų išteklių (ŽI) valdymo procesus ir procedūras, bet ir suprasti organizacijos veiklos principus, verslo modelį, sektoriaus specifiką bei gebėti inicijuoti ir įgyvendinti organizacijos vystymo projektus.

Pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais vykdomi tarptautiniai ŽIV kompetencijų tyrimai rodo nuoseklią profesijos transformaciją iš administracinės funkcijos į organizacijos strateginį partnerį, o vėliau ir į organizacijos kultūros ir žmonių vystymo lyderį. Nuolat atnaujinamas ŽIV kompetencijų modelis pabrėžia, kad šiuolaikiniai šios srities specialistai turi gebėti kurti žmogiškojo kapitalo vertę, inicijuoti ir įgyvendinti organizacinius pokyčius, stiprinti organizacijos gebėjimus bei veiksmingai veikti sudėtingoje ir nuolat kintančioje verslo aplinkoje (Phillips ir kt., 2021). Nors modelis evoliucionavo atsižvelgiant į naujus organizacijų ir visuomenės poreikius, ankstesnėse jo versijose identifikuotos kompetencijos išlieka aktualios ir šiandien. Tarp svarbiausių jų minimos gebėjimas suprasti verslo aplinką ir organizacijos veiklos kontekstą, veikti kaip patikimam ir įtaką darančiam profesionalui (angl. *Credible Activist*), vystyti organizacinius gebėjimus ir talentus, inicijuoti bei valdyti pokyčius, taip pat sėkmingai naviguoti prieštaringose ir neapibrėžtose situacijose (angl., *Paradox Navigator*, *Talent designer*, *Human Capital Curator*) (Ulrich ir kt., 2010, Phillips ir kt., 2021). Naujausioje modelio versijoje išskiriamos penkios kompetencijos, akcentuojant gebėjimą supaprastinti organizacijose kylantį sudėtingumą (angl. *Simplifies Complexity*), mobilizuoti informaciją (*Mobilizes Information*), ugdyti darbuotojų ir organizacijos gebėjimus (angl. *Advances Human Capability*), skatinti bendradarbiavimą (angl. *Fosters Collaboration*) bei prisidėti prie organizacijos veiklos rezultatų gerinimo (angl. *Accelerates Business*). Taigi iš šiuolaikinių ŽIV profesionalų tikimasi ne tik ŽIV procesų išmanymo, bet ir gebėjimo kurti vertę organizacijai pasitelkiant duomenimis grįstus sprendimus, organizacinių gebėjimų stiprinimą ir strateginį žmonių potencialo panaudojimą (Phillips ir kt., 2021).

Tokie ŽIV specialistų kompetencijų reikalavimai suponuoja poreikį ieškoti efektyvių mokymo metodų, kurie neapsiribotų teorinių žinių perteikimu. Todėl vis daugiau dėmesio skiriama interaktyviems ir į studentą orientuotiems mokymosi metodams, kurie leidžia mokymosi procese integruoti realias verslo situacijas bei organizacinius iššūkius. Interaktyvūs mokymosi metodai apima įvairias aktyvaus mokymosi formas, tokias kaip atvejų analizė, projektinis mokymasis, probleminis mokymasis, iššūkiais grįstas mokymasis, diskusijos, simuliacijos, refleksijos ir kiti metodai, skatinantys studentų aktyvų įsitraukimą į mokymosi procesą. Tarp interaktyvių mokymosi metodų pastaraisiais metais ypatingo dėmesio sulaukia iššūkiais grįstas mokymasis (angl. *Challenge-Based Learning*, *CBL*), kuris leidžia studentams iš karto pritaikyti teorines žinias sprendžiant realias problemas (Gallagher ir Savage, 2020; Leijon ir kt., 2022; David ir kt., 2025), bei refleksiją, kuri sudaro prielaidas kritiškai įvertinti sukauptą patirtį (Machost ir Stains, 2023; Harvey ir kt., 2025).

Tyrimo problema. Nors interaktyvių mokymosi metodų taikymas aukštajame moksle plačiai nagrinėjamas, vis dar trūksta empirinių įžvalgų, kaip iššūkiais grįstas mokymasis ir refleksija prisideda prie būsimų žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistų kompetencijų ugdymo studijų procese.

Tyrimo objektas. Iššūkiais grįsto mokymosi ir refleksijos taikymas ugdant būsimų žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistų kompetencijas.

Straipsnio tikslas yra pagrįsti interaktyvių mokymosi metodų reikšmę ugdant būsimuosius žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistus ir, remiantis iššūkiais grįsto mokymosi bei refleksijos taikymo patirtimis, pateikti praktines šių metodų taikymo studijų procese įžvalgas. Pagrįsti interaktyvių mokymosi metodų reikšmę ugdant būsimuosius žmogiškųjų

išteklių valdymo specialistus ir, remiantis jų taikymo patirtimi, pateikti praktines įžvalgas apie šių metodų integravimą į studijų procesą.

Tyrimo metodai. Straipsnyje taikoma mokslinės literatūros analizė ir kokybinė studentų atsiliepimų analizė. Empirinė dalis grindžiama 2022–2025 m. KTU Žmonių išteklių valdymo magistrantūros studijų programos modulių „Projektų valdymas“ ir „Talentų valdymas“ studentų atsiliepimų analize (N=82). Duomenys analizuojami taikant kokybinės turinio analizės principus.

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamos teorinės interaktyvių mokymosi metodų taikymo prielaidos bei jų vaidmuo ugdant būsimų žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistų kompetencijas. Taip pat aptariamas šių metodų integravimas į Žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo magistrantūros studijų programos modulius „Projektų valdymas“ ir „Talentų valdymas“. Pirmasis modulis orientuotas į platesnio verslo ir organizacinio konteksto supratimo, organizacijų vystymo bei pokyčių valdymo kompetencijų ugdymą, o antrasis – į specializuotų žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo žinių ir profesinių gebėjimų gilinimą. Remiantis šių metodų taikymo patirtimis moduluose, analizuojami studentų vertinimai ir pateikiamos praktinės įžvalgos apie interaktyvių mokymosi metodų taikymą rengiant būsimus žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistus.

Nuo iššūkių prie refleksijos: teorinės prielaidos žmogiškųjų išteklių specialistų kompetencijų ugdymui

Interaktyvūs mokymosi metodai ugdant būsimų žmogiškųjų išteklių specialistų kompetencijas

Šiuolaikinėse studijose vis daugiau dėmesio skiriama ne tam, ką dėstytojas perduoda studentui, o tam, kaip studentas konstruoja savo žinias ir ugdo profesines kompetencijas. Toks požiūris skatina taikyti interaktyvius mokymosi metodus, kurie studentus įtraukia į aktyvų mokymosi procesą, sudaro galimybes spręsti realias problemas, bendradarbiauti ir reflektuoti įgytą patirtį. Žmogiškųjų išteklių specialistų rengimo kontekste interaktyvių metodų reikšmė ypač didelė. Šios profesijos atstovai turi gebėti veikti sudėtingoje organizacinėje aplinkoje, spręsti darbuotojų, komandų ir organizacijos vystymo klausimus, inicijuoti pokyčius bei bendradarbiauti su įvairiomis suinteresuotomis grupėmis. Todėl vien teorinių žinių nepakanka, būtina sudaryti sąlygas studentams mokymosi metu susidurti su realiomis organizacinėmis situacijomis, permąstyti įvairius sprendimo variantus ir galimas jų pasekmes.

Interaktyviems mokymosi metodams būdingas aktyvus studentų įsitraukimas į mokymosi procesą, mokymasis bendradarbiaujant, autentiškų problemų sprendimas, teorinių žinių taikymas praktinėse situacijose bei refleksija. Šie metodai orientuoti ne tik į žinių perteikimą, bet ir į profesinių kompetencijų, kritinio mąstymo, kūrybiškumo bei problemų sprendimo gebėjimų ugdymą (Freeman ir kt., 2014; Theobald ir kt. 2020). Tyrimai taip pat rodo, kad interaktyvūs mokymosi metodai sudaro sąlygas studentams geriau suprasti sudėtingus profesinius kontekstus ir efektyviau perkelti teorines žinias į praktiką (Gallagher ir Savage, 2023; Leijon ir kt., 2022; David ir kt., 2025).

Interaktyvių mokymosi metodų įvairovėje iššūkiais grįstas mokymasis ir refleksija išsiskiria tuo, kad apima tiek aktyvų veikimą, tiek patirties analizę ir įprasminimą. Nors šie metodai dažnai taikomi kartu, jų paskirtis skiriasi. Iššūkiais grįstas mokymasis sudaro galimybes studentams spręsti realias organizacijų problemas ir taikyti teorines žinias realiame kontekste, o refleksija padeda kritiškai įvertinti įgytą patirtį, suprasti priimtų sprendimų pasekmes bei paversti patirtį ilgalaikiu mokymusi (Leijon ir kt., 2022; David ir kt., 2025; Machost ir Stains, 2023; Harvey ir kt., 2025).

Iššūkiais grįstas mokymasis: organizacinių realiųjų pažinimas

Iššūkiais grįstas mokymasis yra aktyvaus mokymosi metodas, grindžiamas realiųjų problemų sprendimu bendradarbiaujant su socialiniais partneriais ar kitomis suinteresuotosiomis šalimis. Pagrindinis šio metodo tikslas yra sudaryti sąlygas studentams mokytis sprendžiant aktualius iššūkius ir kuriant praktinę vertę organizacijoms ar visuomenei (Büchler ir kt., 2021; Büchler ir kt., 2024; Leijon ir kt., 2022). Skirtingai nei tradiciniuose mokymo modeliuose, kuriuose daugiausia dėmesio skiriama žinių perteikimui, CBL orientuojasi į studento aktyvų dalyvavimą mokymosi procese. Studentai tampa ne pasyviais informacijos gavėjais, bet aktyviais problemų sprendėjais, kurie savarankiškai ieško informacijos, analizuoja situacijas, bendradarbiauja su kitais ir priima sprendimus realiaame kontekste. Tokiu būdu, iššūkiais grįstas mokymasis siejamas su realiomis situacijomis, o teorinės žinios įgyja aiškią praktinę vertę (Gallagher ir Savage, 2023).

Spręsdami realias problemas studentai ne tik gilina specialybines žinias, bet ir ugdo kitas profesinėje veikloje svarbias kompetencijas. Tyrimai rodo, kad CBL ypač prisideda prie kritinio mąstymo, problemų sprendimo, komandinio darbo gebėjimų ugdymo bei padeda mažinti atotrūkį tarp teorinių žinių ir jų taikymo praktikoje (Leijon ir kt., 2022), skatina kritišką globalių problemų analizę, tarpkultūrinį bendradarbiavimą ir visuomeninės atsakomybės suvokimą (David ir kt., 2025). Tai ypač svarbu socialinių mokslų studijose, kur būsimi specialistai turi gebėti veikti sudėtingoje, nuolat kintančioje ir įvairių interesų grupių veikiamoje aplinkoje.

Žmogiškųjų išteklių specialistų rengimo kontekste CBL yra ypač aktualus, nes sudaro galimybes susidurti su realiais organizacijų iššūkiais, susijusiais su talentų pritraukimu ir išlaikymu, darbuotojų įsitraukimu, organizacine kultūra, pokyčių valdymu ar organizacijų vystymu. Tokiu būdu studijų procese kuriama mokymosi aplinka tampa artima būsimai profesinei veiklai, o studentai turi galimybę praktiškai išbandyti ir reflektuoti sprendimus, kuriuos ateityje teks priimti profesinėje veikloje.

Refleksija kaip patirties transformavimo į profesines žinias mechanizmas

Nors iššūkiais grįstas mokymasis suteikia studentams realias profesines patirtis, vien dalyvavimo realiųjų iššūkių sprendime nepakanka visaverčio mokymosi užtikrinti. Patirties transformavimas į žinias vyksta refleksijos procese.

Šiuolaikinėje literatūroje refleksija apibrėžiama kaip sistemingas procesas, kurio metu besimokantysis analizuoja savo patirtį, vertina veiksmų rezultatus ir planuoja būsimus veiksmus (Machost ir Stains, 2023). Refleksija laikoma svarbia kompetencijų ugdymo prielaida, nes leidžia ne tik įvertinti įgytą patirtį, bet ir suprasti jos reikšmę būsimai profesinei veiklai. Wu ir Crocco (2019) pažymi, kad refleksija padeda individams įvertinti savo darytas prielaidas, peržiūrėti savo vertybes ir įsitikinimus, taip sudarydama sąlygas tobulėjimui. Tačiau refleksija neturėtų būti suvokiama kaip pavienė studijų užduotis ar formalus mokymosi proceso elementas. Harvey ir kt. (2025) siūlo nuolat naudoti refleksiją mokymosi procese, taip mokymosi metu sukaupią patirtį ir paverčiant ją ilgalaikėmis profesinėmis žiniomis bei kompetencijomis.

Žmogiškųjų išteklių specialistų rengimo kontekste refleksija ypač svarbi, nes šios profesijos atstovams tenka nuolat priimti sprendimus sudėtingose ir dažnai nevienareikšmėse situacijose. Todėl refleksija ir iššūkiais grįstas mokymasis gali būti vertinami kaip vienas kitą papildantys metodai: CBL suteikia autentišką profesinę patirtį, o refleksija leidžia ją interpretuoti, įprasminti ir taip ugdyti aktualias specialybines ir bendrąsias kompetencijas.

Tokiu būdu sudaromos prielaidos rengti specialistus, gebančius veikti kompleksiškoje organizacijų aplinkoje, valdyti pokyčius ir kurti vertę organizacijoms bei jų darbuotojams.

Tyrimo metodas

Straipsnyje taikoma kokybinė tyrimo strategija, siekiant įvertinti iššūkiais grįsto mokymosi ir refleksijos taikymo galimybes ugdant būsimuosius žmoniškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistus. Tyrimo objektas - iššūkiais grįsto mokymosi ir refleksijos metodų taikymas KTU Žmonių išteklių valdymo magistrantūros studijų programoje.

Empirinio tyrimo duomenys buvo renkami analizuojant studentų atsiliepimus apie modulius „Projektų valdymas“ ir „Talentų valdymas“. Analizei panaudoti 2022–2025 m. laikotarpiu surinkti studentų vertinimai. Tyrimo imtį sudarė 82 magistrantūros studijų programos studentų pateikti atsiliepimai. Atsiliepimai buvo renkami pasibaigus moduliams, naudojant universitete taikomą studijų modulių vertinimo sistemą, kuri sudaro galimybę studentams savarankiškai ir anonimiškai pateikti grįžtamąjį ryšį apie studijų turinį, taikytus mokymo metodus, įgytas kompetencijas bei mokymosi patirtis.

Duomenų analizė atlikta taikant kokybinės turinio analizės metodą. Analizės metu buvo identifikuotos pasikartojančios temos, susijusios su studentų patirtimis taikant iššūkiais grįstą mokymąsi ir refleksiją. Ypatingas dėmesys skirtas studentų vertinimams apie praktinių veiklų naudą, teorinių žinių pritaikymą praktikoje, bendradarbiavimą su organizacijomis, grįžtamojo ryšio gavimą bei refleksijos reikšmę mokymosi procese.

Toliau pateikiami du atvejai: „Projektų valdymo“ ir „Talentų valdymo“ moduliai, kuriuose taikomi iššūkiais grįsto mokymosi ir refleksijos principai. Šio konteksto analizė leidžia atskleisti, kaip interaktyvūs mokymosi metodai integruojami į studijų procesą ir kokias mokymosi patirtis jie kuria būsimiems žmoniškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistams.

Tyrimo kontekstas: interaktyvių mokymosi metodų integravimo atvejai KTU Žmonių išteklių valdymo magistrantūros studijose

Projektų valdymo modulio atvejis: nuo organizacinių iššūkių iki projektinių sprendimų

Projektų valdymo kompetencijos tampa vis svarbesnės ne tik projektų vadovams, bet ir žmoniškųjų išteklių specialistams, kurie vis dažniau dalyvauja organizacijų transformacijos, pokyčių valdymo, talentų vystymo ir organizacinių iniciatyvų įgyvendinimo procesuose. Projektinis darbas leidžia koordinuoti įvairių suinteresuotųjų šalių veiklą, valdyti išteklius, planuoti pokyčius ir užtikrinti organizacinių tikslų įgyvendinimą (PMI, 2023; IPMA, 2023).

Kauno technologijos universiteto Žmonių išteklių valdymo magistrantūros studijų programoje modulyje „Projektų valdymas“ taikomi iššūkiais grįsto mokymosi ir refleksijos principai, siekiant ugdyti studentų gebėjimą spręsti realius organizacijų iššūkius. Modulio metu magistrantai dirba su realiais verslo partnerių pateiktais iššūkiais ir, bendradarbiaudami su organizacijų atstovais, rengia praktinius sprendimus aktualioms organizacijų problemoms spręsti. Mokymosi procesas organizuojamas vadovaujantis pagrindiniais CBL etapais: problemos identifikavimu, situacijos tyrimu ir sprendimo kūrimu bei pristatymu verslo partneriams. Studentai analizuoja organizacijos veiklos kontekstą, renka duomenis, konsultuojasi su ekspertais, rengia projektinius pasiūlymus ir pristato juos organizacijos atstovams. Tokiu būdu sudaromos sąlygos ne tik taikyti teorines projektų valdymo žinias, bet ir ugdyti kritinio mąstymo, bendradarbiavimo, komunikacijos bei problemų sprendimo gebėjimus. Viso proceso metu studentai reflektuoja savo mokymosi patirtį, priimtus

sprendimus ir komandinio darbo rezultatus, taip susiedami įgytą patirtį su būsima profesine veikla. Be to, parengti sprendimai pristatomi organizacijų, pateikusių verslo iššūkius, atstovams, todėl studentai turi galimybę gauti tiesioginį grįžtamąjį ryšį iš praktikos ekspertų, išgirsti verslo atstovų vertinimą bei geriau suprasti siūlomų sprendimų pritaikomumą realioje organizacinėje aplinkoje.

Talentų valdymo modulio atvejis: Assessment Centrai kaip patirtinio mokymosi erdvė

Modulyje „Talentų valdymas“ iššūkiais grįsto mokymosi ir refleksijos principai integruojami per Assessment (Development) centrų organizavimą. Šios metodikos plačiai taikomos organizacijose darbuotojų atrankai, potencialo vertinimui ir ugdymui, todėl suteikia studentams galimybę susipažinti su viena dažniausiai praktikoje naudojamų talentų valdymo priemonių (Keele ir kt., 2010). Assessment centrų metu dalyviai vertinami atliekant įvairias darbinės užduotis ir simuliacijas, leidžiančias stebėti kompetencijų pasireiškimą realioms darbo situacijoms artimame kontekste (Dewberry, 2024). Naujausi tyrimai taip pat pabrėžia, kad Assessment Centrai gali būti vertinami ne tik kaip kompetencijų vertinimo, bet ir kaip mokymosi bei profesinio augimo priemonė, sudaranti galimybes reflektuoti savo veiklą ir gauti grįžtamąjį ryšį (Rutherford ir kt., 2025). Modulio metu studentai planuoja ir organizuoja Assessment Centrus pirmo kurso KTU GIFTed programos studentams. GIFTed programa skirta aukštą mokymosi potencialą demonstruojantiems ir aktyviai savo kompetencijas ugdantiems studentams, todėl dalyvavimas Assessment Centruose jiems suteikia galimybę kounčingo sesijos metu gauti grįžtamąjį ryšį apie savo stipriąsias puses bei tobulintinas kompetencijas.

Vykdydami šią veiklą Žmonių išteklių valdymo magistrantai praktiškai susipažįsta su visu talentų vertinimo procesu, nuo kompetencijų modelių analizės ir kompetencijų aprašų rengimo iki jų vertinimo kriterijų nustatymo. Studentai mokosi suprasti, kaip kompetencijos pasireiškia konkrečioje elgsenoje ir kaip jos gali būti vertinamos assessment centrų metu. Praktinių veiklų metu jie stebi dalyvių elgseną įvairiose situacijose, vertina kompetencijų pasireiškimą, rengia kompetencijų profilius, interpretuoja vertinimo rezultatus bei formuluoja rekomendacijas tolesniam kompetencijų vystymui, bei vėliau tai aptaria koučingo sesijose. Svarbi proceso dalis yra ir rezultatų komunikavimas dalyviams, teikiant individualų grįžtamąjį ryšį bei vedant koučingo sesijas. Tokiu būdu studentai ne tik gilina teorines talentų valdymo žinias, bet ir įgyja praktinės patirties, artimos realioms ŽIV specialistų veikloms organizacijose. Svarbi proceso dalis yra ir pačių magistrantų refleksijos, kuriose jie analizuoja savo, kaip vertintojų, patirtį, vertina priimtus sprendimus, aptaria kilusius iššūkius bei grįžtamojo ryšio teikimo ypatumus. Tokiu būdu refleksija tampa priemone, leidžiančia kritiškai įvertinti savo veiklą ir susieti teorines talentų valdymo žinias su realia profesine praktika.

Studentų patirtys taikant iššūkiais grįstą mokymąsi ir refleksiją

Siekiant įvertinti iššūkiais grįsto mokymosi ir refleksijos metodų taikymą Žmonių išteklių valdymo magistrantūros studijose, buvo analizuojami studentų atsiliepimai, gauti vedant modulius „Projektų valdymas“ ir „Talentų valdymas“ 2022-2025 m. laikotarpiu. Viso šiuos modulius duotu periodu klausė 82 žmogiškųjų išteklių studentai. Analizė parodė, kad studentai ypač vertino praktinį mokymosi pobūdį, galimybę dirbti su realiomis situacijomis ir tiesiogiai taikyti teorines žinias.

Vienas ryškiausių studentų akcentuotų aspektų buvo praktinių veiklų ir realioms darbo situacijoms artimų užduočių gausa. „Talentų valdymo modulyje“ studentai teigiamai vertino įvairių interaktyvių metodų taikymą, pažymėdami, kad „patiko įtraukiančios užduotys bei

darbo pokalbio vedimo metodas“, „praktinis darbas su assessment centrais, nauja patirtis ir visai kitokia mokymosi forma“, o „praktinės veiklos, studentų assessment centras ir jų asmeninis koučingas“ leido geriau suprasti talentų valdymo procesus organizacijose. Teigiamai buvo vertinamas ir kompetencijų vertinimui taikomas STAR metodas bei darbo pokalbių simuliacijos. Vienas studentas pažymėjo, kad „labai patiko tai, kad galėjome su studentais pasibandyti darbo pokalbių simuliacijas, tai leidžia pažinti procesą iš arčiau“.

Analizuojant atsiliepimus matyti, kad didžiausią vertę studentams kūrė galimybė dirbti su realiais žmonėmis ir realiomis situacijomis. Talentų valdymo modulyje studentai dalyvavo Assessment Centrų organizavimo ir vykdymo veiklose, dirbo su KTU GIFTed programos studentais, teikė jiems grįžtamąjį ryšį bei vykdė koučingo sesijas. Studentai šias veiklas vertino kaip vieną svarbiausių mokymosi patirčių. Nors, anot studentų tai „buvo tikrai labai challenging, .. nu kaip musę į barščius įmetėt...:“), bei „koučingo sesija su pirmakursiais bakalaursais suteikė daug naudos“, o „realus ir praktinis darbas su žmonėmis, kai supranti kad tavo klaida gali realiai paveikti žmogų, tai labai mobilizuoja“.

Projektų valdymo modulyje studentai taip pat akcentavo praktinį mokymosi pobūdį ir galimybę spręsti realias problemas. Teigiamai vertintas projektinis darbas, realių organizacijų situacijų analizė ir teorinių žinių taikymas praktikoje. Studentų teigimu, „buvo įdomu atlikti projektinį darbą“, o „teorija siejosi su praktiniais sprendimais“. Nors dalis studentų pradžioje jautė neapibrėžtumą ar nerimą („pradžioje buvo daug klaustukų, tu nedirbi toje organizacijoje, daug ko nežinai, ir nors buvo galima pateikti klausimus verslo atstovui, bet jie kilo eigoje, ir juk nerašinėsi kiekvieną dieną...“), susidūrę su didesnio neapibrėžtumo ir savarankiškumo reikalaujančiomis užduotimis, galutinė patirtis buvo vertinama teigiamai, ypač pasitikėjimas savimi atsirado priėmus savo sprendimus verslo atstovams ir gavus jų vertinimus: „motyvavo, kai [XXX] pasakė, kad gera idėja, ir jie nebuvo apie tai pagalvoję“.

Studentų atsiliepimuose taip pat atsiskleidė refleksijos svarba mokymosi procese. Vertę kūrė ne tik pačios praktinės veiklos, bet ir galimybė pasidalinti savo patirtimis, gauti grįžtamąjį ryšį bei pagalvoti ką galima pagerinti. Studentai teigiamai vertino ir savirefleksiją, teikdami, kad „rašydama refleksiją dar kartą permąsčiau ar viską dariau gerai ir dabar tikrai žinau kelis dalykus, kur darysiu jau kitaip“. Tai patvirtina prielaidą, kad refleksija leidžia įprasminginti patirtį ir transformuoti ją į žinias, įgalinančius ateityje keisti savo elgseną ar priimti kitus sprendimus.

Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad studentai labai gerai vertino tiek iššūkiais grįsto mokymosi, tiek refleksijos metodų taikymą. Didžiausią vertę jiems kūrė galimybė mokytis per realias praktines veiklas, dirbti su realiomis situacijomis, gauti grįžtamąjį ryšį ir reflektuoti savo patirtį. Šios veiklos leido ne tik gilinti teorines žinias, bet ir ugdyti kompetencijas, aktualias būsimai žmoniškųjų išteklių specialistų veiklai.

Išvados

Šiuolaikinių žmoniškųjų išteklių valdymo specialistų rengimas reikalauja mokymosi metodų, kurie sudarytų galimybes ne tik įgyti teorinių žinių, bet ir ugdyti gebėjimą jas taikyti praktikoje. Straipsnyje aptarti iššūkiais grįsto mokymosi ir refleksijos metodai leidžia studentams aktyviai įsitraukti į mokymosi procesą, spręsti realius organizacijų iššūkius ir reflektuoti sukauptą patirtį. Tai sudaro prielaidas ugdyti profesines kompetencijas, kurios yra svarbios būsimai veiklai žmoniškųjų išteklių valdymo srityje.

KTU Žmonių išteklių valdymo magistrantūros studijų programos modulių „Projektų valdymas“ ir „Talentų valdymas“ patirtis atskleidė, kad realių organizacijų iššūkių sprendimas, Assessment centrų organizavimas, koučingo veiklos ir refleksija leidžia studentams geriau suprasti būsimą profesinę veiklą bei kryptingai ugdyti profesines kompetencijas. Studentų

vertinimuose didžiausia vertė siejama su praktinėmis veiklomis, realiomis verslo situacijomis ir galimybe gauti grįžtamąjį ryšį bei permąstyti priimtus sprendimus.

Todėl ŽIV specialistų rengime tikslinga ir toliau plėtoti interaktyvių mokymosi metodų taikymą, didinant bendradarbiavimą su organizacijomis ir kuriant daugiau galimybių studentams spręsti realias verslo problemas. Taip pat svarbu refleksiją integruoti kaip nuoseklią mokymosi proceso dalį, sudarančią sąlygas studentams analizuoti savo patirtį, priimtus sprendimus ir profesinį augimą. Tokiu būdu galima veiksmingiau rengti specialistus, gebančius veikti sudėtingoje organizacijų aplinkoje, valdyti pokyčius ir kurti vertę organizacijoms bei jų darbuotojams.

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JAUNŲ SUAUGUSIŲJŲ SUVOKIAMO TĖVYSTĖS STILIAUS, PERFEKCIONIZMO IR SOCIALINIO NERIMO RYŠYS

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Anotacija. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjamos jaunų suaugusiųjų socialinio nerimo, perfekcionizmo ir suvokiamų tėvystės stilių sąsajos. Tyrimo aktualumą lemia didėjantis perfekcionizmo paplitimas šiuolaikinėje visuomenėje, socialinių medijų įtaka tapatumo formavimuisi bei augantis socialinio nerimo aktualumas tarp jaunų žmonių. Straipsnyje remiamasi teorinėmis socialinio nerimo, perfekcionizmo ir tėvystės stilių sampratomis, aptariami pagrindiniai šių reiškinių tarpusavio ryšiai. Tyrime dalyvavo 139 asmenys, kurių amžius svyravo nuo 18 iki 29 metų. Duomenys rinkti naudojant šiuos standartizuotus instrumentus: Tėvų autoritetingumo klausimynas (PAQ), Socialinės fobijos klausimynas (SPIN) bei Daugiamačio perfekcionizmo skalė (MPS). Tyrime buvo skaičiuojamas instrumentų patikimumas, atlikta aprašomoji statistika, taikomas Student *t*-testas nepriklausomoms imtims bei atlikta Pearson koreliacinė analizė. Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė, jog jauni suaugusieji patyrė vidutinio arba aukšto išreikštumo socialinį nerimą, tačiau moterys jautė aukštesnį socialinio nerimo lygį nei vyrai. Lyčių skirtumų perfekcionizmo dimensijų atžvilgiu rasta nebuvo. Tyrimas taip pat atskleidė, jog suvoktas autoritarinis auklėjimo stilius buvo teigiamai susijęs su socialiai priskirtu ir į save orientuotu perfekcionizmu bei socialiniu nerimu. Leidžiantis auklėjimo stilius nebuvo susijęs nei su socialiniu nerimu, nei su atskiromis perfekcionizmo dimensijomis, o autoritetingas auklėjimo stilius buvo neigiamai susijęs su socialiai priskirtu perfekcionizmu. Gauti rezultatai pabrėžia ankstyvųjų tėvystės patirčių ir perfekcionistinių nuostatų svarbą jaunų suaugusiųjų psichologinei gerovei bei socialinio nerimo formavimuisi.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: suvokiami tėvystės stiliai, perfekcionizmas, socialinis nerimas

Įvadas

Sąvoka „jaunatviškas maksimalizmas“ ilgą laiką buvo siejama su veržlumu, ambicingumu ir polinkiu rizikuoti. Tačiau šiandien „jaunatviškas maksimalizmas“ įgyja kitą prasmę, transformuojasi į perfekcionizmą, kuris, kaip teigia (Curran ir Hill, 2019), šiuolaikinėje visuomenėje sparčiai plinta.

Jauno suaugusiojo amžiaus tarpsnis dažnai siejamas su tapatumo paieškomis (Arnett, 2000), jauni žmonės bando suprasti, kas jie yra, kuo ir kokiais jie nori būti. Jauni suaugusieji stebi „tobulus“ gyvenimus ir „tobulus“ žmones savo išmaniųjų technologijų ekranuose, tyrimai rodo, kad Lietuvoje problematiškas socialinių medijų naudojimas tarp jaunų suaugusiųjų tampa vis aktualesne problema (Brailovskaia, Truskauskaitė-Kuneviciene, Kazlauskas & Margraf, 2021). Šiuolaikinėje visuomenėje, nuolatinis kitų žmonių stebėjimas socialinėse medijose gali dar labiau iškreipti savo tapatumo suvokimą, tapatumo paieškos gali virsti ne savęs pažinimu, o bandymu atitikti tai, kas laikoma socialiai priimtina ar „normaliu“ standartu. Kas, jei šie standartai neegzistuoja? Kaip jaučiasi žmogus, bandydamas pasiekti tai, kas neegzistuoja? Ar gali būti, jog socialinis nerimas tampa jaučiamo neapibrėžtumo išraiška?

Viešame diskurse neretai tėvai įvardijami, kaip esminis gyvenimo atramos šaltinis. Tėvai lydi vaikus raidos procesuose ir daro reikšmingą įtaką asmenybės formavimuisi. Vieniems tėvai yra saugumo ir emocinės paramos šaltinis, o kitiems, tai siejasi su nerimu, kontrole ar kritika. Skirtingai patiriamos ir interpretuojamos auklėjimo patirtys gali būti susijusios su tuo, kaip jauni žmonės funkcionuoja reikalavimų kupinoje aplinkoje ar jie jaučiasi saugūs, vertingi, ar priešingai yra linkę nuolat lyginantys save su kitais ir bijantys suklysti.

Atsižvelgiant į spartų perfekcionizmo paplitimą, reikšmingą tėvų vaidmenį atžalos raidoje ir neapibrėžtumą jauno suaugusiojo amžiaus tarpsnyje, tikslinga tirti šių veiksnių tarpusavio sąsajas bei jų ryšį su socialiniu nerimu. Suvokiamas tėvystės stilius bei perfekcionizmo ir socialinio nerimo ryšys Lietuvoje yra nepakankamai ištirtas, todėl svarbu papildyti tyrimų lauką naujais duomenimis. Šių ryšių atpažinimas, gali būti naudingas, kuriant psichoedukacines programas tėvams apie tai, kaip auklėjimo stilius gali būti susijęs su atžalos psichologine gerove, net ir jam suaugus.

Tyrimo tikslas – atskleisti suvokiamą tėvystės stilių, perfekcionizmo, socialinio nerimo ir amžiaus ryšius tarp jaunų suaugusiųjų bei nustatyti, kaip socialinio nerimo lygis skiriasi tarp vyrų ir moterų.

Tyrimu siekiama:

- Nustatyti ryšį tarp socialinio nerimo, perfekcionizmo dimensijų ir suvokiamų tėvystės stilių;
- Nustatyti, kaip amžius siejasi su socialiniu nerimu, skirtingomis perfekcionizmo dimensijomis ir skirtingais auklėjimo stiliais;
- Nustatyti, kokio dažnio skirtingi auklėjimo stiliai ir perfekcionizmo dimensijos bei išreikštumo socialinis nerimas vyrauja jaunų suaugusiųjų imtyje;
- Palyginti socialinio nerimo ir perfekcionizmo dimensijų įverčius tarp moterų ir vyrų.

Socialinio nerimo ir socialinio nerimo sutrikimo samprata

Socialinis nerimas, tai socialinių situacijų, kuriose gali būti gėda arba yra rizika būti neigiamai įvertintam kitų, baimė. Socialinis nerimas gali būti įvairus: nuo lengvo iki stipraus (Hur et al., 2019). Manoma, jog kai socialinis nerimas pasiekia sunkų lygį, sutrikdydamas žmogaus kasdieninį funkcionavimą, jį galima vadinti socialinio nerimo sutrikimu. Socialinio nerimo sutrikimas dažniausiai prasideda ankstyvoje paauglystėje (Lijster et al., 2017) ir yra linkęs išlikti. Asmenys, turintys šį sutrikimą, patiria reikšmingą gyvenimo kokybės sumažėjimą daugelyje gyvenimo sričių, įskaitant fizinę ir psichologinę sveikatą, tarpasmeninius santykius bei profesinę veiklą (Hakami et al., 2017), o pagalbos paprastai kreipiamasi, kai socialinis nerimas jau būna komplikotas gretutiniais sunkumais. Salari ir kitų (2024) tyrime buvo analizuojamas socialinio nerimo sutrikimo paplitimas pasauliniu mastu, kai maždaug vienas iš dvidešimties žmonių turi socialinio nerimo sutrikimą, o jaunimo tarpe nustatytas net 17 proc. paplitimas. Vis dėlto, vertinant socialinio nerimo sutrikimo paplitimą, tyrėjai atkreipia dėmesį, jog žmonės gali objektyviai neįvertinti savo socialinio nerimo, nors ir atitinka socialinio nerimo sutrikimo kriterijus (Jefferies & Ungar, 2020), tad realus sutrikimo paplitimo suvokimas gali būti šiek tiek iškreiptas.

Socialinis nerimas yra siejamas su įvairiais sociodemografiniais veiksniais. Pastebima, jog moterys, jaunesni, nesusituokę, žemesnį išsilavinimą turintys ir mažesnes pajamas uždirbantys asmenys turi padidintą riziką tapti socialiai nerimastingais (Stein et al., 2017).

Tyrėjai nurodo, jog egzistuoja lyčių skirtumas socialinio nerimo kontekste, pvz. moterys patiria daugiau socialinio nerimo simptomų (Asher & Aderka, 2018; Tsui, Lahat & Schmidt,

2017), tačiau yra tyrimų, teigiančių, kad tam tikra lytis nedidina socialinio nerimo išsivystymo rizikos (Mohammadi et al., 2024).

Aukštas socialinio nerimo lygis yra siejamas su žemesniu išsilavinimu ir bedaryste (Jefferies & Ungar, 2020). Socialinis nerimas siejamas ir su socialiniais rizikos veiksniais. Tyrimai rodo, kad mergaičių socialinis nerimas yra glaudžiai susijęs su tarpasmeniniais santykiais: ribotas artimų draugų ratas, konfliktiški santykiai gali padidinti socialinio nerimo išsivystymo riziką, o kokybiškos draugystės, priešingai, veikia kaip apsauginis veiksnys (Pickering, Hadwin & Kovshoff, 2020). Verta paminėti, jog prastesnė draugystės kokybė gali būti susijusi su didesniu socialiniu nerimu, tačiau pats socialinis nerimas nebūtinai daro įtaką draugystės kokybei. Socialinis nerimas taip pat yra siejamas su mažesniu jaučiamu ir pageidaujamu artumu, kuriant naujus santykius (Ketay, Welker, Beck, Thorson & Slatcher, 2018). Kaip matome, nors tiesioginė socialinio nerimo sąsaja su draugystės intymumu nėra vertinama vienareikšmiškai, tyrimai rodo, kad socialinis nerimas netiesiogiai veikia intymumą per socialinį atsitraukimą, socialiai nerimastingi paaugliai vengia bendravimo, rečiau atsiveria ir dalijasi asmeniška informacija.

Socialinio nerimo ir perfekcionizmo teorijos sąsajos

Clark ir Wells (cit. iš Leigh & Clark, 2018) sukūrė kognityvinį socialinio nerimo modelį, aiškinantį, kodėl socialinis nerimas sukuria „užburą“ ratą ir pats save palaiko. Kognityvinis socialinio nerimo modelis teigia, jog socialiai nerimastingi asmenys pervertina savo socialinio įvaizdžio reikšmę, mano, jog aplinkiniai juos nuolat stebi ir vertina, bet taip pat socialiai nerimastingi asmenys turi neigiamą savęs vaizdą. Šios neigiamos mintys kyla iš žmogaus neigiamų įsitikinimų apie save, kuriuos lydi aukšti lūkesčiai sau. Socialinių situacijų metu neigiamos mintys suaktyvėja, asmenys išgyvena stiprius ir įvairaus pobūdžio simptomus. Taigi, socialinį nerimą patiriantys žmonės vertina socialines sąveikas kaip pavojingas, prognozuoja, kad jiems kažkas nepasiseks ir kitų žmonių dviprasmiškus ar neutralius ženklus interpretuoja kaip neigiamus. Pavyzdžiui, Washburn, Wilson, Roes, Rnic ir Harkness (2016) nustatė, jog socialiai nerimastingi asmenys yra linkę prasčiau atpažinti subtilias socialines užuominas, palyginus su kitų psichikos sutrikimų turinčiais asmenimis. Jie ne tik, kad gali klaidingai įvertinti kitų žmonių siunčiamus signalus, bet apskritai gali nepastebėti aplinkinių palankumo, kadangi dėmesį sutelkia tik į save ir vertindami situaciją remiasi vidine informacija, o ne objektyvia realybe.

Asmenys pervertinantys save yra linkę į perfekcionizmą. Perfekcionizmas – tai asmenybės bruožas, kuriam būdingas nepriekaištingo elgesio siekis ir itin aukštų standartų nustatymas, polinkis pernelyg kritiškai vertinti savo elgesį (Frost, Marten, Lahart & Rosenblate, 1990). Manoma, kad aukštų reikalavimų kėlimas sau ir jų siekimas nėra savaime pataloginiai bruožai. Jie įgauna perfekcionistinį pobūdį tik tada, kai asmuo yra labai savikritiškas, išgyvena stiprų nerimą dėl galimų klaidų ir nuolat nepasitiki savo sprendimais. Mokslininkai siūlo atskirti dvi perfekcionizmo rūšis: teigiamąją, vadinamą normaliuoju perfekcionizmu ir neigiamąją, vadinamą neurotiniu perfekcionizmu. Vėliau ši diferenciacija buvo pavadinta adaptyviuoju ir neadaptyviuoju perfekcionizmu (Wigert, Reiter-Palmon, Kaufman & Silvia, 2012).

Vienas plačiausiai taikomų perfekcionizmo modelių yra daugiamačio perfekcionizmo modelis, kuris išskiria tris perfekcionizmo dimensijas: į save orientuotą perfekcionizmą (angl. *self-oriented perfectionism*, SOP), į kitus orientuotą perfekcionizmą (angl. *other-oriented perfectionism*, OOP) ir socialiai priskirtą perfekcionizmą (angl. *socially prescribed perfectionism*, SPP). Pasak Hewitt ir Flett (2006), perfekcionistais turėtų būti vadinami tik tie

asmenys, kurie keliose gyvenimo srityse griežtai laikosi aukštų standartų ir suteikia pernelyg didelę reikšmę tobulumo siekiui.

Į save orientuotas perfekcionizmas apima į save nukreiptą perfekcionistinį elgesį, kai asmuo kelia itin aukštus arba nerealistiškus reikalavimus sau bei griežtai vertina savo veiklą. Į kitus orientuotas perfekcionizmas pasižymi aukštų reikalavimų taikymu kitiems, griežtu vertinimu ir nepasitenkinimo išreiškimu, jeigu kiti nepatenkina keliamų lūkesčių. Socialiai priskirtas perfekcionizmas yra susijęs su įsitikinimu, jog aplinka kelia labai aukštus reikalavimus ir griežtai vertina, tad žmogus jaučia didelį spaudimą atitikti iš išorės kylančius reikalavimus.

Perfekcionizmo ryšys su socialiniu nerimu. Socialinis nerimas ir perfekcionizmas yra glaudžiai susiję, tai yra kuo stipresnės perfekcionistinės tendencijos, tuo didesnė tikimybė patirti socialinį nerimą, tačiau sąmoningumas gali veikti kaip apsauginis veiksnys, silpninantis šį ryšį (Wang et al., 2022). Pavyzdžiui, socialiai priskirtas perfekcionizmas turi ypač stiprų ryšį su socialiniu nerimu (Ferber et al., 2024; Manova & Khoury, 2023; Nemat Tavousi & Seyf Hashemi, 2025) ir žema savigarba (Stoeber, 2015). Tuo tarpu į save orientuotas perfekcionizmas yra nežymiai susijęs su socialiniu nerimu (Ferber et al., 2024).

Suvokiamų tėvystės stilių teorinio modelio apžvalga

Mokslinėje literatūroje išskiriami trys auklėjimo stiliai: autoritarinį, autoritetingą ir leidžiantį. Leidžiančio auklėjimo stiliaus tėvai siekia palaikyti priimančią bei palaikantį požiūrį į vaiko impulsus, norus ir veiksmus. Šio auklėjimo stiliaus tėvai vengia kontrolės, neskatina paklusti išoriniams reikalavimams ar normoms. Autoritarinio auklėjimo stiliaus tėvai stengiasi formuoti, kontroliuoti ir vertinti vaiko elgesį, nuomonę pagal nustatytą standartą, dažnai pagrįstą religiniais principais; ypatingai vertina paklusnumą, naudoja griežtas priemones, kad slopintų atžalos savarankiškumą bei laisvę. Šie tėvai neskatina diskusijų, tikisi, kad vaikai priims jų nurodymus be ginčų. Trečiasis stilius, tai yra autoritetingas, pasižymi atviro bendravimo skatinimu, vaiko individualumo pripažinimu. Tėvai taisyklės nustato, remdamiesi logika ir diskusijomis su savo atžala. Šio stiliaus tėvai vertina tiek vaiko savarankiškumą, tiek gebėjimą laikytis taisyklių. Konflikto atveju tėvai nustato aiškias ribas, bet nevaržo vaiko. Vakarų kultūrose šis auklėjimo stilius yra ypatingai vertinamas, nes apima tiek kontrolės, tiek emocinės šilumos komponentus (Hibbard & Walton, 2014).

Kalbant apie konkrečius auklėjimo stilius, tyrimai dėl autoritarinio auklėjimo stiliaus ir socialinio nerimo ryšio yra priešaringi. Nors kai kurie tyrimai rodo, kad autoritarinio auklėjimo patirtis yra susijusi su socialiniu nerimu (Nadeem & Misri, 2025), tyrimai vieningai sutaria, jog kuo labiau asmuo suvokia, kad jo tėvai taikė autoritetingo auklėjimo stilių, tuo jo socialinis nerimas yra žemesnis (Nadeem & Misri, 2025). Singh, Gera ir Behmani (2021) nustatė, jog leidžiančio auklėjimo stiliaus paauglių psichinė sveikata yra prastesnė, palyginus su kitais auklėjimo stiliais.

Tuo tarpu suvoktas autoritarinis auklėjimo stilius yra siejamas su įsitikinimu, kad aplinka kelia aukštus reikalavimus (t.y. socialiai priskirtu perfekcionizmu) (Carmo, Oliveira, Brás & Faísca, 2021; Walton, Hibbard, Coughlin & Coyl-Shepherd, 2020). Tyrimo autoriai nustatė, jog autoritetingas auklėjimo stilius yra teigiamai susijęs su aukštais asmeniniais standartais, tačiau neigiamai susijęs su baime suklysti. Gali būti, jog autoritetingų tėvų atžalos nebijo suklysti, tačiau turi aukštus siekius. Autoritarinis auklėjimo stilius yra teigiamai susijęs tiek su baime suklysti, tiek su abejonėmis dėl veiksmų, tiek su aukštais asmeniniais standartais. Galiausiai, leidžiantis auklėjimo stilius, pasak Hibbard ir Walton (2014), gali apsaugoti atžalas nuo jausmo, jog jie yra kritikuojami ir nuo susirūpinimo dėl klaidų.

Tyrimo metodika

Tyrimo dalyviai. Tyrime dalyvavo 139 jauni suaugusieji, kurių amžius svyravo nuo 18 iki 29 metų ($M = 22,69$; $SD = 2,55$). Tyrimo imtį sudarė 113 moterų (81, 3%), 25 vyrai (18%) ir 1 asmuo (0,7%), nurodęs savo lytį kaip „kita“. Dalyvių atranka buvo vykdoma taikant netikimybinę patogiąją atranką, patalpinus kvietimą dalyvauti tyrime ir nuorodą į tyrimą socialinių tinklų platformose („Facebook“ ir „Instagram“) bei išplatinus kvietimą elektroniniame pašte („Outlook“).

1 lentelė. Tyrimo dalyvių sociodemografinės charakteristikos

	M	SD
Amžius	22,69	2,55
	n	%
Lytis		
Vyras	25	18,0
Moteris	113	81,3
Kita	1	0,7
Išsilavinimas		
Pagrindinis	10	7,2
Vidurinis	83	59,7
Profesinis	7	5,0
Aukštasis	39	28,1
Veikla		
Dirba	26	18,7
Dirba ir studijuoja	45	32,4
Studijuoja	64	46,0
Nei dirba, nei studijuoja	4	2,9
Gyvenimo su tėvais statusas		
Gyvena su tėvais	33	23,7
Negyvena su tėvais	106	76,3

Tyrimo instrumentai. Tyrimui atlikti buvo naudoti keturi instrumentai: Tėvų autoritetingumo klausimynas (angl. *Parental Authority Questionnaire, PAQ*) (Buri, 1991); Socialinės fobijos klausimynas (angl. *Social Phobia Inventory, SPIN*) (Connor et al., 2000); Daugiamatnio perfekcionizmo skalė (angl. *Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, MPS*) (Hewitt & Flett, 2006) ir sociodemografiniai duomenys.

Tėvų autoritetingumo klausimynas (angl. *Parental Authority Questionnaire, PAQ*) (Buri, 1991) yra skirtas įvertinti, kokio auklėjimo stiliaus patirties asmuo turėjo vaikystėje ir paauglystėje. Klausimynas yra grindžiamas teoriniu modeliu, kuris išskiria tris tėvystės stilius: autoritarinį, autoritetingą ir leidžiantį. PAQ sudaro 30 teiginių – po 10 kiekvienam iš trijų tėvystės stilių, pavyzdžiui: „Kai augau, mano tėvai supykdamo, jei mėgindavau su jais nesutikti“ (autoritarinis), „Kai augau, tėvai nemanė, kad privalo nukreipti ar pamokyti mane tam tikro elgesio“ (leidžiantis), „Jeigu tėvai priimdavo sprendimą, kuris mane skaudindavo, jie sutikdavo tą sprendimą su manimi aptarti ir pripažinti, jei būdavo suklydę“ (autoritetingas). Kiekvienas instrumento teiginys yra vertinamas pagal Likerto skalę nuo 1 iki 5, kur 1 reiškia „visiškai nesutinku“, o 5 – „visiškai sutinku“. Skalės vidurys (3 balai) žymi neutralią poziciją – „nei sutinku, nei nesutinku“. Šiame tyrime buvo naudota Kontrimienės (2018) parengta lietuviška klausimyno versija. Leidimas naudoti instrumentą buvo gautas susisiekus elektroniniu paštu su lietuviškos klausimyno versijos autore. Lietuviškosios versijos subskalių vidinio suderintumo rodikliai yra šie: leidžiantis auklėjimo stilius – 0,77, autoritarinis auklėjimo stilius – 0,85, autoritetingas auklėjimo stilius – 0,87 (Kontrimienė, 2018). Originalaus klausimyno subskalių Cronbach alpha (α) svyravo nuo 0,74 iki 0,87 (Buri, 1991). Siekiant įvertinti subskalių

patikimumą šiame tyrime, buvo apskaičiuoti Cronbach alfa (α) koeficientai. Instrumento subskalių patikimumo koeficientai buvo tokie: leidžiantis auklėjimo stilius – 0,81, autoritarinis auklėjimo stilius – 0,85, o autoritetingas auklėjimo stilius – 0,89.

Socialinės fobijos klausimynas (angl. *Social Phobia Inventory, SPIN*) (Connor et al., 2000) yra skirtas socialinio nerimo intensyvumui vertinti. Klausimyną sudaro trys subskalės, apimančios pagrindinius socialinio nerimo aspektus: baimės subskalė (6 teiginiai, pvz., „Labai bijau būti kritikuojamas“), vengimo subskalė (7 teiginiai, pvz., „Vengiu veiklos, kurioje būnu dėmesio centre“) ir fiziologinių reakcijų subskalė (4 teiginiai, pvz., „Labai nemėgstu nurausti kitiems matant“). Iš viso 17 teiginių, kuriuos vertinant, respondento yra prašoma nurodyti, kiek per pastarąją savaitę jam buvo būdingi tam tikri sunkumai. Atsakymai žymimi skalėje nuo 0 iki 4, kur 0 reiškia „visiškai ne“, o 4 – „ypatingai“. SPIN yra atviros prieigos instrumentas, kurio naudojimui ar vertimui į kitas kalbas autorių leidimas nėra reikalingas. Šiame tyrime buvo naudojama lietuviška klausimyno versija (Kazlauskas ir Tilvikaitė, 2008), o Želvienė, Kazlauskas, Tilvikaitė ir Tuskenytė (2012) šią versiją adaptavo savo tyrime. Originalaus klausimyno Cronbach alfa (α) koeficientai parodė aukštą patikimumą: visai skalei – 0,94, o subskalėms nuo 0,8 iki 0,9 (Connor et al., 2000). Lietuviškosios SPIN versijos vidinio suderintumo koeficientas visai skalei buvo – 0,88, o subskalėms nuo 0,68 iki 0,76 (Želvienė et al., 2012). Siekiant įvertinti skalės ir subskalių patikimumą šiame tyrime, taip pat buvo apskaičiuoti Cronbach alfa (α) koeficientai. Šiame tyrime viso instrumento bendras patikimumas buvo 0,93, o subskalių patikimumas svyravo nuo 0,88 iki 0,75.

Daugiamačio perfekcionizmo skalė (angl. *Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, MPS*) (Hewitt & Flett, 2006) yra 45 teiginių klausimynas, skirtas įvertinti skirtingas perfekcionizmo dimensijas. Instrumentą sudaro trys subskalės: į save orientuotas perfekcionizmas (pvz., „Stengiuosi būti kiek įmanoma tobulesniu (-e)“), į kitus orientuotas perfekcionizmas (pvz., „Viskas, ką daro kiti, turi būti aukščiausios kokybės“) ir socialiai priskirtas perfekcionizmas (pvz., „Aplinkiniai tikisi, kad man seksis viskas, ko besiišmėčiau“). Vertinant kiekvieną teiginį, respondento prašoma nuspręsti, kiek jis su tuo sutinka ar nesutinka. Atsakymai žymimi 7 balų Likerto skalėje, kur 1 reiškia „visiškai nesutinku“, 7 – „visiškai sutinku“, o 4 žymi neutralią, neapsisprendusią poziciją. Leidimas naudoti ir į lietuvių kalbą versti šį instrumentą buvo gautas susisiekus elektroniniu paštu su teisių turėtoju – Milti-Health Systems Inc (MHS). Daugiamačio perfekcionizmo instrumento vertimas buvo atliktas keliais etapais. Pirmiausia klausimyno teiginiai buvo išversti iš anglų kalbos į lietuvių. Vėliau, siekiant užtikrinti vertimo tikslumą, lietuviškai išverstas variantas buvo pateiktas nepriklausomam vertėjui, kuris atlikto atvirkštinį vertimą (t.y. iš lietuvių kalbos į anglų kalbą). Atvirkštinis vertimas buvo lyginamas su pirmine lietuviška instrumento versija, siekiant užtikrinti vertimo tikslumą. Daugiamačio perfekcionizmo skalės vidinio suderintumo rodikliai įvairiuose tyrimuose svyruoja nuo 0,74 iki 0,89, kas rodo gerą šio instrumento patikimumą (Hewitt & Flett, 2006). Šiame tyrime taip pat buvo apskaičiuoti Cronbach alfa (α) koeficientai, siekiant įvertinti naudojamos skalės patikimumą. Bendras instrumento patikimumo koeficientas buvo 0,90, o subskalių patikimumo koeficientai svyravo nuo 0,93 iki 0,72.

Tyrimo dalyvių sociodemografinė informacija buvo renkama naudojant tyrimo autorių parengtą anketą. Dalyviai buvo prašomi nurodyti savo lytį, amžių, išsilavinimą, ar šiuo metu dirba ar studijuoja, ir ar gyvena nuolat su tėvais/globėjais.

Tyrimo eiga. Šis skerspjūvio tyrimas buvo atliktas 2025 metais. Duomenų rinkimui buvo naudojama „Google Forms“ platforma, kurioje buvo patalpinta apklausa. Dalyvių atranka vyko taikant netikimybinę patogiąją atranką. Prieš pradedant pagrindinį tyrimą, buvo atliktas pilotinis tyrimas – apklausti 30 dalyvių, siekiant patikrinti į lietuvių kalbą išverstos Daugiamačio perfekcionizmo skalės psichometrinės charakteristikas. Gavus tenkinančius

pilotinio tyrimo rezultatus, buvo pradėtas pagrindinis tyrimas. Kvietimai dalyvauti ir nuoroda į apklausą tiek pilotiniame, tiek pagrindiniame tyrimuose buvo patalpinti socialinių tinklų („Facebook“ ir „Instagram“) platformose ir tik kvietimas į pagrindinį tyrimą buvo išplatintas elektroniniu paštu – „Outlook“. Į tyrimą nebuvo įtraukti nesutikę dalyvauti tyrime asmenys. Prieš pradedant apklausą, tyrimo dalyviams buvo pateikta informacija apie tyrimą: apibendrintas tyrimo tikslas, nurodytas kviečiamų dalyvių amžius, tyrimo trukmė, anonimiškumo garantija bei kontaktinė informacija. Dalyviai turėjo patvirtinti savo sutikimą arba nesutikimą dalyvauti tyrime. Verta paminėti, kad viso tyrimo metu dalyviams buvo primenama, jog jie gali bet kada pasitraukti iš tyrimo, nutraukdami apklausos pildymą.

Duomenų analizė. Tyrimo duomenys pirmiausiai buvo perkelti iš „Google Forms“ platformos į „Microsoft Excel“ programą. Iš „Microsoft Excel“ tyrimo duomenys buvo perkelti į IBM SPSS Statistics 30 programinę įrangą, kur buvo atlikta statistinė analizė. Instrumentų patikimumas buvo vertinamas vidinio suderintumo metodu, apskaičiuojant skalių ir subskalių patikimumo koeficientus (Cronbach α). Taip pat buvo atlikta aprašomoji statistika – skaičiuojami dažniai, procentinės dalys, vidurkiai, standartiniai nuokrypiai, minimalios ir maksimalios reikšmės. Buvo tikrinamas duomenų pasiskirstymo normalumas (Shapiro-Wilk testas, Skewness ir Kurtosis koeficientai, histograma ir kvantilių palyginimo (QQ) diagrama) ir nustatoma, jog visi tyrimo duomenys yra normaliai pasiskirstę, buvo taikomi parametriniai kriterijai – Pearson koreliacija ir Student t-testas nepriklausomoms imtims. Pearson koreliacija skirta nustatyti ryšius tarp kintamųjų, o Student t-testas skirtas palyginti vidurkius tarp grupių.

Tyrimo rezultatai

Rezultatų dalyje pristatomi tyrimo duomenys, padedantys atskleisti suvokiamų tėvystės stilių, perfekcionizmo ir socialinio nerimo sąsajas tarp jaunų suaugusiųjų. Šioje dalyje, atsižvelgiant į išsikeltus uždavinius, buvo analizuojami suvokiamų tėvystės stilių, perfekcionizmo, socialinio nerimo ir amžiaus tarpusavio ryšiai. Tikrintas socialinio nerimo lygis, perfekcionizmo dimensijų bei suvoktų auklėjimo stilių dažnis šioje imtyje. Taip pat buvo palyginti socialinis nerimas ir perfekcionizmo dimensijos pagal lytį.

2 lentelė. Ryšys tarp amžiaus, socialinio nerimo, perfekcionizmo ir suvokiamų tėvystės stilių

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. SPIN	-						
2. SOP	0,1	-					
3. OOP	-0,1	0,30**	-				
4. SPP	0,25**	0,43**	0,39**	-			
5. PAQ_leidžiantis	-0,13	0,06	0,03	-0,14	-		
6. PAQ_autoritetingas	-0,13	0,1	-0,05	-0,23**	0,64**	-	
7. PAQ_autoritarinis	0,18*	0,19*	0,11	0,39**	- 0,29**	0,42**	-
8. Amžius	-0,11	-0,08	0,14	0,08	0,03	-0,05	0,00

*Pastaba: * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$*

Pastaba: SPIN – socialinės fobijos klausimynas, SOP – į save orientuotas perfekcionizmas, OOP – į kitus orientuotas perfekcionizmas, SPP – socialiai priskirtas perfekcionizmas, PAQ_leidžiantis – leidžiantis auklėjimo stilius, PAQ_atoritarinis – autoritarinis auklėjimo stilius, PAQ_autoritetingas – autoritetingas auklėjimo stilius.

Siekiant atskleisti ryšius tarp socialinio nerimo, perfekcionizmo ir suvokiamų tėvystės stilių, buvo atlikta Pearson koreliacinė analizė. Antroje lentelėje pateikiami rezultatai rodo, jog socialiai priskirtas perfekcionizmas turi silpną, tačiau reikšmingą teigiamą ryšį su socialiniu

nerimu ($r = 0,25$; $p = 0,003$). Be to, ši perfekcionizmo dimensija turi statistiškai reikšmingą teigiamą ryšį su suvoktu autoritariniu auklėjimo stiliumi ($r = 0,39$; $p < 0,001$) ir statistiškai reikšmingą neigiamą ryšį su suvoktu autoritetingu auklėjimo stiliumi ($r = -0,23$; $p = 0,006$). Stebimas statistiškai reikšmingas, bet silpnas teigiamas ryšys tarp į save orientuoto perfekcionizmo ir suvokto autoritarinio auklėjimo stiliaus ($r = 0,19$; $p = 0,028$). Suvoktas autoritarinis auklėjimo stilius turi teigiamą silpną, tačiau statistiškai reikšmingą ryšį su socialiniu nerimu ($r = 0,18$; $p = 0,040$). Taip buvo patikrinta, ar amžius siejasi su socialiniu nerimu, perfekcionizmo dimensijomis ir auklėjimo stiliais. Taigi, rezultatai atskleidė, jog amžius neturi statistiškai reikšmingų sąsajų nei su socialiniu nerimu, nei su perfekcionizmo dimensijomis, nei su auklėjimo stiliais.

3 lentelė. Socialinio nerimo išreikštumo lygiai pagal SPIN balus: dažniai, vidurkiai, standartiniai nuokrypiai, mažiausi ir didžiausi įverčiai

	<i>n (%)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Socialinio nerimo išreikštumas					
Žemas	12 (8,6)	3,76	1,97	0	6
Vidutinis	60 (43,2)	16,8	4,66	8	25
Aukštas	67 (48,2)	38,28	10,07	26	67

Pastaba: n (%) – dažnis ir procentinė dalis, M – vidurkis, SD – standartinis nuokrypis, Min. – minimali vertė, Max. – maksimali vertė.

3-ioje lentelėje pateikti rezultatai rodo, jog šioje jaunų suaugusiųjų imtyje socialinio nerimo įverčiai yra gana aukšti. Daugiausiai žmonių ($n = 67$) atitinka aukštą socialinio nerimo išreikštumo lygį ($M = 38,28$, $SD = 48,2$), o mažiausiai ($n = 12$) – žemą išreikštumo lygį ($M = 3,76$; $SD = 1,97$).

Taip pat, atlikus aprašomąją statistiką, buvo rasta, jog daugiausiai žmonių ($n = 58$) turėjo suvoktos autoritetingos auklėjimo patirties, kiek mažiau ($n = 53$) – autoritarinės ir dar mažiau ($n = 16$) leidžiančios. Likusieji tyrimo dalyviai ($n = 12$) turėjo kelis dominuojančius suvoktus auklėjimo stilius.

Taip pat, buvo atlikta aprašomoji statistika, siekiant įvertinti, kiek žmonių turi dominuojančią tikrą perfekcionizmo dimensiją. Daugiausiai žmonių ($n = 93$) turėjo į save orientuotą perfekcionizmą, mažiau ($n = 22$) – į kitus orientuotą perfekcionizmą ir dar mažiau ($n = 19$) – socialiai priskirtą perfekcionizmą. Likusieji dalyviai ($n = 5$) turėjo kelias dominuojančias perfekcionizmo dimensijas.

4 lentelė. Vyrų ir moterų socialinio nerimo ir perfekcionizmo dimensijų įverčių palyginimas

	Vyrai ($n = 25$)	Moterys ($n = 113$)			
Skalės	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
SPIN	18,08 (10,5)	27,77 (14,83)	3,10	136	0,002
SOP	66,48 (17,11)	69,68 (19,44)	0,76	136	0,448
OOP	56,68 (9,54)	55,13 (9,82)	0,48	136	0,475
SPP	56,56 (12,32)	55,14 (12,99)	0,62	136	0,619

Pastaba: M – vidurkis, SD – standartinis nuokrypis, t – t testo koeficientas, df – laisvės laipsniai, p – reikšmingumo lygmuo, SPIN – socialinės fobijos klausimynas, SOP – į save orientuotas perfekcionizmas, OOP – į kitus orientuotas perfekcionizmas, SPP – socialiai priskirtas perfekcionizmas. Statistiškai reikšmingi skirtumai pažymėti paryškintu šriftu.

Siekiant palyginti socialinio nerimo įverčių vidurkius tarp vyrų ir moterų, buvo naudotas Student t-testas nepriklausomoms imtims. Tyrimo rezultatai, pateikti 4-oje lentelėje, rodo, jog socialinio nerimo įverčių vidurkiai statistiškai reikšmingai skiriasi tarp vyrų ($M = 18,08$; $SD = 10,5$) ir moterų ($M = 27,77$; $SD = 14,83$); $t(136) = 3,10$, $p = 0,002$. Šie duomenys mums leidžia teigti, jog moterys šioje imtyje turi vidutiniškai aukštesnius socialinio nerimo įverčius nei vyrai.

Lyginant perfekcionizmo dimensijų įverčių vidurkius tarp vyrų ir moterų, naudotas Student t-testas nepriklausomoms imtims. Iš rezultatų, pateiktų 4-oje lentelėje, galime matyti, jog statistiškai reikšmingų skirtumų, lyginant vyrų ir moterų perfekcionizmo dimensijų įverčių vidurkius, rasta nebuvo.

Tyrimo rezultatų aptarimas

Jaunų suaugusiųjų socialinis nerimas

Atliktas tyrimas atskleidė, kad didžioji dalis jaunų suaugusiųjų šiame tyrime patiria vidutinį arba aukštą socialinį nerimą – maždaug kas antras dalyvis patiria aukštą socialinio nerimo lygį. Tai rodo didesnę aukšto socialinio nerimo paplitimą jaunų suaugusiųjų imtyje nei Jefferies ir Ungar (2020) tyrime, kur kas trečias dalyvis atitiko socialinio nerimo sutrikimo kriterijų. Šie rezultatai gali būti aiškinami skirtingu kontekstu. Šis tyrimas buvo atliktas jau po COVID-19 pandemijos, 2025 metais. Gali būti, jog pandemijos metu psichologiškai pažeidžiamiausi paaugliai dabar jau yra jauni suaugusieji mūsų tyrime, tad jų patirtys karantino metu galėjo turėti ilgalaikį poveikį socialinio nerimo padidėjimui. Taip pat rezultatų skirtumas gali būti aiškinamas ne tik laiko, tačiau ir kultūriniu kontekstu. Jefferies ir Ungar (2020) tyrime, dalis tyrimo dalyvių buvo iš Azijos šalių, kur socialinio nerimo paplitimas yra mažas (Brockveld, Perini & Rapee, 2014).

Vertinant apskritai aukštą socialinio nerimo lygį jaunų suaugusiųjų imtyje, būtų svarbu atsižvelgti į tai, jog socialinės medijos yra plačiai naudojamos jaunų suaugusiųjų tarpe (Brailovskaia et al., 2021). Galima manyti, jog socialinės medijos gali būti susijusios su didesniu socialinio nerimo lygiu ir šiame tyrime. Ankstesni tyrimai rodo, jog socialinis nerimas yra glaudžiai susijęs su žema savigarpa ir padidėjusia savikritika (Iancu et al., 2015), na o žemą savigarbą gali lemti lyginimasis su socialinėse medijose stebimais žmonėmis (Vogel et al., 2014). Vertėtų atkreipti dėmesį, jog šiame tyrime respondentai nebuvo apklausti dėl socialinių medijų naudojimo, tad norint patikrinti šias prielaidas Lietuvos populiacijoje, reikėtų atlikti tolimesnius tyrimus, įtraukiant ir socialinių medijų naudojimo dažnį.

Taip pat pakankamai aukštas socialinio nerimo lygis tarp jaunų suaugusiųjų gali būti susijęs su šiam amžiaus tarpsniui būdingomis savybėmis, pavyzdžiui tapatumo paieškomis (Arnett, 2000). Remiantis Mazalin ir Moore (2004) tyrimo išvada, jog naudojimasis socialinėmis medijomis yra susijęs su mažiau brandžiu tapatumu, galime svarstyti, jog, jeigu jaunas žmogus dar neturi aiškaus tapatybės jausmo, socialinėse medijose pateikiamą idealizuotą gyvenimą ir pasiekimus gali priimti kaip siektiną standartą bei pradėti save lyginti su juo. Jeigu šis standartas nėra pasiekiamas, galbūt tai gali neigiamai paveikti jauno suaugusiojo savigarbą ir prisidėti prie socialinio nerimo atsiradimo?

Socialinio nerimo ir socialiai priskirto perfekcionizmo ryšys

Vienas svarbiausių atradimų šiame tyrime yra tai, jog socialiai priskirtas perfekcionizmas yra susijęs su didesniu socialinio nerimo lygiu. Šie rezultatai atspindi ir kitų tyrimų rezultatuose (Cox & Chen, 2015; Ferber et al., 2024; Manova & Khoury, 2023; Nemat Tavousi

& Seyf Hashemi, 2024). Tiek socialiai priskirtas perfekcionizmas, remiantis Hewitt ir Flett (1991), tiek socialinis nerimas, remiantis kognityviniu socialinio nerimo modeliu (Clark & Wells, cit. iš Leigh & Clark, 2018), yra susiję su subjektyvia asmens patirtimi, kiek jo įsitikinimu, aplinkiniai tikisi, kad šis atitiks keliamus reikalavimus. Taigi, tikėtina, jog žmonės, jaučiantys išorinį spaudimą atitikti tam tikrus lūkesčius, dažniau išgyvena socialinį nerimą ypač jeigu mano, kad nėra pajėgūs šiuos reikalavimus atitikti. Stoeber (2015) tyrimas rodo, jog socialiai priskirtas perfekcionizmas yra susijęs su prastesniu savęs vertinimu tiek asmeniniu, tiek tarpasmeniniu lygmeniu – kuo stipriau asmuo jaučia, kad jam aplinkiniai kelia aukštus reikalavimus, tuo mažiau jis linkęs save vertinti teigiamai. Panašūs bruožai būdingi ir socialiniam nerimui, kuris taip pat yra susijęs su žema savigarpa ir didesne savikritika (Iancu et al., 2015). Taigi, galime kelti prielaidą, jog galbūt, žema savigarpa gali būti mechanizmas, jungiantis socialinį nerimą ir socialiai priskirtą perfekcionizmą? Siekiant iširti šią prielaidą Lietuvos kontekste, būtų svarbu tirti ir jaunų suaugusiųjų savigarbos lygį.

Suvokto autoritarinio auklėjimo ryšys su socialiniu nerimu, socialiai priskirtu ir į save orientuotu perfekcionizmu

Šio tyrimo duomenų analizė parodė, jog kuo labiau asmuo suvokia savo tėvus kaip autoritarinius, tuo didesnį socialinį nerimą jis yra linkęs patirti. Tai atskleidžia ir kitų tyrimų rezultatai (Nadeem & Misri, 2025; Sandu & Sharma, 2015), patvirtinantys mūsų rezultatus. Autoritarinis auklėjimas pasižymi griežtumu, o tėvų griežtumas literatūroje yra siejamas su polinkiu į aukštesnį socialinį nerimą (Koydemir-Özden & Demir, 2009). Atsižvelgiant į tai, jog šiame tyrime didelė dalis tiriamųjų suvokė savo tėvus kaip autoritarinius ir į tai, jog tėvų griežtumas prognozuoja didesnę neigiamo įvertinimo baimę (Koydemir-Özden & Demir, 2009), galime svarstyti, kad jaunų suaugusiųjų nerimas gali būti nulemtas neigiamo įvertinimo baimės.

Šio tyrimo rezultatai rodo, jog autoritarinis tėvystės stilius yra susijęs su socialiai priskirtu perfekcionizmu. Šios sąsajos atrandamos ir kituose tyrimuose (Besharat, Azizi & Poursharif, 2011; Carmo, Oliveira, Brás & Faísca, 2021; Walton, Hibbard, Coughlin & Coyl-Shepherd, 2020). Be to, šiame tyrime buvo pastebėta, jog suvokiamas autoritarinis auklėjimas yra susijęs ir su į save orientuotu perfekcionizmu, o tai nurodo ir kiti tyrėjai (Besharat, Azizi & Poursharif, 2011; Carmo, Oliveira, Brás & Faísca, 2021; Walton, Hibbard, Coughlin & Coyl-Shepherd, 2020). Pasak Carmo ir kitų (2021), vaikai augę griežtoje ir autoritariškoje aplinkoje, ilgainiui gali perimti kritišką tėvų požiūrį ir patys pradėti griežtai save vertinti, o tai gali lemti į save orientuoto perfekcionizmo formavimąsi. Galbūt šį teiginį galime taikyti ir socialiai priskirtam perfekcionizmui ir svarstyti, jog autoritarinio auklėjimo patirtį turintys asmenys jaučia, kad aukšti lūkesčiai jiems yra taikomi ne tik šeimoje, bet ir platesniame socialiniame kontekste?

Suvokto autoritetingo auklėjimo stiliaus ryšys su socialiai priskirtu perfekcionizmu

Šis tyrimas parodė, jog autoritetingas auklėjimas yra neigiamai susijęs su socialiai priskirtu perfekcionizmu. Paprasčiau tariant, kuo tyrimo dalyviai buvo labiau linkę suvokti savo tėvus kaip autoritetingus, tuo mažiau jie buvo linkę į socialiai priskirtą perfekcionizmą, tačiau kiti tyrimai tokių sąsajų neranda (Carmo et al., 2021). Vertėtų atkreipti dėmesį į tai, jog Carmo ir kitų (2021) tyrime tyrimo dalyviai buvo mokyklinio amžiaus vaikai, o šiame tyrime, didžioji dalis jaunų suaugusiųjų jau nebegyvena su tėvais, tad gali kitaip prisiminti ir vertinti patirto auklėjimo patirtis. Tuo tarpu vaikai gali būti paveikti momentinės emocijos ar ribotumų reflektuojant.

Atsižvelgiant į tai, jog šiame tyrime buvo taikyta koreliacinė analizė, galime teigti, jog egzistuoja ryšys, tačiau negalime daryti jokių išvadų apie priežastingumą. Vis dėlto galime svarstyti, jog kadangi autoritetingas auklėjimo stilius apima atžalos individualumo priėmimą, kas reikštų, jog aukšti ir griežti reikalavimai nėra taikomi, tokio auklėjimo patirtį turintys asmenys gali jausti mažiau spaudimo iš aplinkos ir jaustis saugesni joje.

Socialinio nerimo ir perfekcionizmo ryšys su lytimi

Šiame tyrime tiek moterys, tiek vyrai buvo vienodai linkę į perfekcionizmą ir jo dimensijas, o tai prieštarauja kitų tyrėjų tyrimų rezultatams, kurie teigia, jog moterys yra labiau linkusios į perfekcionizmą (Ghosh & Roy, 2017; Hewitt & Flett, 2006). Tuo tarpu, vertinant socialinio nerimo lygį, moterys turėjo aukštesnius socialinio nerimo įverčius nei vyrai, kas prieštarauja tam tikriems tyrimams (Jefferies & Ungar, 2020; Kvedaraitė, Želvienė, Elklit & Kazlauskas, 2019). Vis dėlto, yra tyrimų patvirtinančių mūsų rezultatus (Asher & Aderka, 2018; Dell’Osso et al., 2016; Tsui et al., 2017). Vertėtų atkreipti dėmesį į tai, jog lyčių pasiskirstymas šiame tyrime nebuvo tolygus, tad į randamus lyčių skirtumus reikėtų žvelgti kritiškai.

Išvados

Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad socialinis nerimas yra plačiai paplitęs jaunų suaugusiųjų tarpe, ypač tarp moterų, ir glaudžiai susijęs su tuo, kaip jauni žmonės suvokia ankstyvasias tėvystės patirtis bei iš aplinkos jaučiamus lūkesčius. Šie rezultatai leidžia giliau suprasti socialinio nerimo formavimosi kontekstą jauno suaugusiojo raidoje ir pabrėžia ankstyvųjų santykių bei perfekcionistinių nuostatų svarbą psichologinei gerovei.

Svarbu aptarti šio tyrimo ribotumus, kurie galėjo daryti įtaką gautiems rezultatams. Taigi, vienas pagrindinių šio tyrimo ribotumų – maža dalyvių imtis bei netolygus lyčių pasiskirstymas. Dėl itin mažo vyrų skaičiaus lyties skirtumai šiame tyrime galėjo būti iškreipti. Be to, didesnė imtis būtų leidusi atlikti papildomas statistines analizes (pvz., lyginamąją analizę tarp perfekcionizmo dimensijų grupių). Taigi, ateities tyrimams būtų svarbu užtikrinti didesnę tyrimo dalyvių imtį ir tolygesnį pasiskirstymą tarp lyčių. Kitas reikšmingas ribotumas yra tyrimo dalyvių atrankos pobūdis. Tyrime dalyvavo asmenys, surinkti per tyrėjo socialinius tinklus bei universiteto elektroninį paštą, tad negalime šių rezultatų taikyti bendrajai populiacijai. Dauguma tiriamųjų priklausė aukštojo mokslo bendruomenei, o tai gali reikšti homogeniškumą jų patirtyse. Ateityje būtų naudinga taikyti kitokį atrankos metodą, užtikrinantį didesnę tyrimo dalyvių kontekstinę įvairovę (pvz., gyvenamoji vieta, socioekonominis statusas). Trečiasis ribotumas – savistatos metodas. Visi naudojami instrumentai buvo pagrįsti pačių tiriamųjų vertinimais, kurie galėjo būti veikiami socialinio pageidaujamumo dėl vyraujančių stigmos, susijusių su psichikos sveikata. Be to, tiriamųjų atsakymai galėjo būti paveikti momentinės savijautos (pvz., socialinio nerimo įverčiai).

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED PARENTING STYLE, PERFECTIONISM AND SOCIAL ANXIETY IN YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract. Given the rise of perfectionism and the important role of parents in the offspring's life, it is important to investigate how these factors relate to each other and to social anxiety. The aim of this study was to reveal the relationship between perceived parenting styles, perfectionism and social anxiety in young adults. There were 139 participants ranging in age from 18 to 29. The instruments used in this study were: Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) and the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS). The reliability of the instruments was calculated, descriptive statistics, Student's t-test for independent samples and Pearson correlation analysis were performed. The results showed that young adults experience moderate to high levels of social anxiety, with women experiencing higher levels of social anxiety than men. No gender differences were found on the dimensions of perfectionism. The study also revealed that perceived authoritarian parenting style was positively related to socially-prescribed and self-oriented perfectionism and social anxiety. Permissive parenting style was not related to either social anxiety or the dimensions of perfectionism, whereas authoritative parenting style was negatively correlated to socially prescribed perfectionism. Thus, perceived parenting styles, social anxiety and perfectionism are interrelated constructs.

Keywords: perceived parenting styles, perfectionism, social anxiety.



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THE INFLUENCE OF CLOTHING ON ATTRIBUTIONS OF CRIMINALITY AND PERCEPTIONS OF THREAT: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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Abstract. This experimental study investigated the influence of different clothing styles on the perception of criminality and threat. In a single-factor between-subjects design with three conditions (suit, casual wear, hoodie), 113 participants aged 18–29 rated computer-generated stimuli of a male target person. The results showed significant main effects of clothing style on both crime assessment ($F(2,110) = 23.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = .30$) and threat perception ($F(2,110) = 18.53, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$). Post-hoc tests revealed that the hoodie condition led to the highest negative ratings, whilst there was no significant difference between the suit and casual clothing conditions. No gender differences in the ratings were detected. The findings underscore the importance of visual cues for stereotypical attributions and have important implications for legal psychology contexts.

Keywords: Social perception, Clothing style, Stereotypical judgment processes, Attribution of criminality, Perception of threat, Experimental design, Implicit social categorization

Introduction

A person's outward appearance plays a central role in social judgement processes and significantly influences first impressions and subsequent interactions. Visual characteristics such as clothing, posture or facial expression are processed in a fraction of a second and form the basis for spontaneous evaluations that can have far-reaching consequences (Todorov, 2021). Clothing functions here as a socially coded cue through which attributions regarding personality, intentions, moral status or even criminal propensity are made (Mones et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2017).

In social-psychological perception research, such processes are understood as automatic categorisations based on mental schemata and implicit associations (Garms-Homolová, 2021). Even minimal visual cues are sufficient to trigger social and moral judgements before conscious control mechanisms can come into play (Todorov et al., 2021). These rapid, unconscious evaluations are based on learned social stereotypes and can have significant implications for interpersonal encounters.

This issue is particularly relevant in legal psychology contexts, where stereotypical expectations can influence police assessments of risk, the credibility of witness statements, or judicial decisions (Mansel et al., 2021; Dovidio et al., 2010). The associated risk lies in hasty

or distorted judgements based on visual preconceptions rather than objective criteria. This issue makes a systematic investigation of the effect of physical appearance on social judgements scientifically and socially relevant.

Theoretical approach

Clothing is a highly social symbolic system that functions as a vehicle for cultural meanings and serves both self-presentation and the social orientation of others. Group affiliation, status and social distinction are communicated through fashion (Simmel, 2023). Fashion is described as an interplay between imitation and differentiation – it allows individuals to signal belonging whilst simultaneously showcasing individuality. In this sense, clothing becomes a medium of social identity and social comparison. Garms-Homolová (2021) emphasises that such visual markers act as ‘schematic cues’ in social information processing, structuring the perceptual process and activating stereotypical judgement patterns. These automatic processing mechanisms largely occur unconsciously and influence both cognitive evaluations and emotional reactions to other people.

Clothing has a significant influence on both how others perceive us and how we perceive ourselves. Wearing certain clothing can measurably modulate cognitive processes and self-concept (Adam & Galinsky, 2012). Formal attire tends to promote abstract thinking and detached, higher-order processing, whilst casual outfits are associated with more concrete thinking styles (Slepian et al., 2015). At the same time, there is strong empirical evidence that clothing systematically shifts social attributions. Female job applicants wearing masculine or formal-looking clothing, for example, are more frequently judged to be assertive and suitable for leadership roles. Female doctors in white coats or suits are perceived as more competent and trustworthy (Petrilli et al., 2014). These findings illustrate that clothing is not merely a passive covering, but actively influences perceptual processes.

Certain styles of clothing in particular are associated with specific stereotypes in the public perception. Studies show that casual, sporty clothing, such as the so-called ‘hoodie’, is frequently linked to delinquency, poverty or general social marginalisation, whilst formal attire is associated with respectability, competence and law-abiding behaviour (Wilson et al., 2017; Kleider et al., 2008). These processes usually take place unconsciously: visual information activates implicit schemata that influence social judgement even before cognitive control can take effect (Todorov et al., 2021). Even minimal visual cues, such as details of clothing, are sufficient to categorise people into morally relevant categories such as ‘threatening’, ‘criminal’ or ‘trustworthy’ (Petrocelli et al., 2017).

In the context of attributing criminality, clothing proves to be a particularly strong predictor of stereotypical judgements. Kleider et al. (2008) were able to demonstrate that participants were more likely to attribute criminal acts to individuals wearing typical ‘gang clothing’, such as tracksuits or dark hooded jumpers, and even falsely recalled criminal behaviour on the part of these individuals. This points to the distortion of fundamental cognitive processes by stereotypical expectations. Wilson et al. (2017) concluded that merely viewing a picture of people dressed in sportswear led to significantly higher assessments of criminality than in the case of comparators dressed formally. These findings are significant not only theoretically but also practically, particularly in legal-psychological contexts, where they can influence police assessments, witness statements or judicial decisions.

Although previous research has provided important insights into the influence of clothing on social judgements, significant research gaps remain. In particular, there is a lack of experimental studies under controlled conditions that systematically compare the causal

influence of different clothing styles. Furthermore, the simultaneous consideration of perceptions of crime and threat has been insufficiently researched to date. The present study aims to systematically investigate the influence of outward appearance, operationalised through clothing style, on perceptions of crime and threat. The starting point was the assumption that stereotypical notions of a ‘criminal appearance’ are often based on visual characteristics such as clothing, without objective behavioural indicators being present.

Based on the theoretical considerations, the following research question arises: To what extent does clothing style, as a visual cue, influence the attribution of criminality and the perceived threat? As a result and from the empirical findings, three central hypotheses were formulated:

- H₁: There is at least one significant difference in the perception of criminality between the three clothing conditions. (*Directed expectation: Hoodie > Casual ≥ Suit*)
- H₂: There is at least one significant difference in threat perception between the three clothing conditions. (*Directed expectation: Hoodie > Casual ≥ Suit*)
- H₃: Male and female participants differ significantly in their assessment of criminality ($\mu_{\text{male}} \neq \mu_{\text{female}}$).

Methodology

The study was designed as a single-factor between-subjects experiment with three groups in order to investigate the causal effects of clothing style on social judgements in a controlled manner. The choice of a between-subjects approach was made, on the one hand, in accordance with methodological guidelines and, on the other, with the aim of avoiding confounding order effects or learning effects, which frequently occur in within-subjects designs (Rasch et al., 2021). Furthermore, this design allows for a clear separation between the experimental conditions and reduces potential biases arising from reactance or comparison tendencies.

The study was conducted entirely online via the SoSciSurvey platform using a standardised and randomised questionnaire. Online experiments are considered particularly suitable for visually oriented stimuli, as they enable standardised presentation under largely controlled conditions (Field, 2018). Automatic randomisation via the online platform increased the likelihood of an equivalent group distribution, which is crucial for internal validity. Following a brief introduction and the request for consent to participate in accordance with the GDPR, participants were assigned to one of the three experimental conditions via automated randomisation. The corresponding stimulus was displayed for 15 seconds before respondents could click through to the next page.

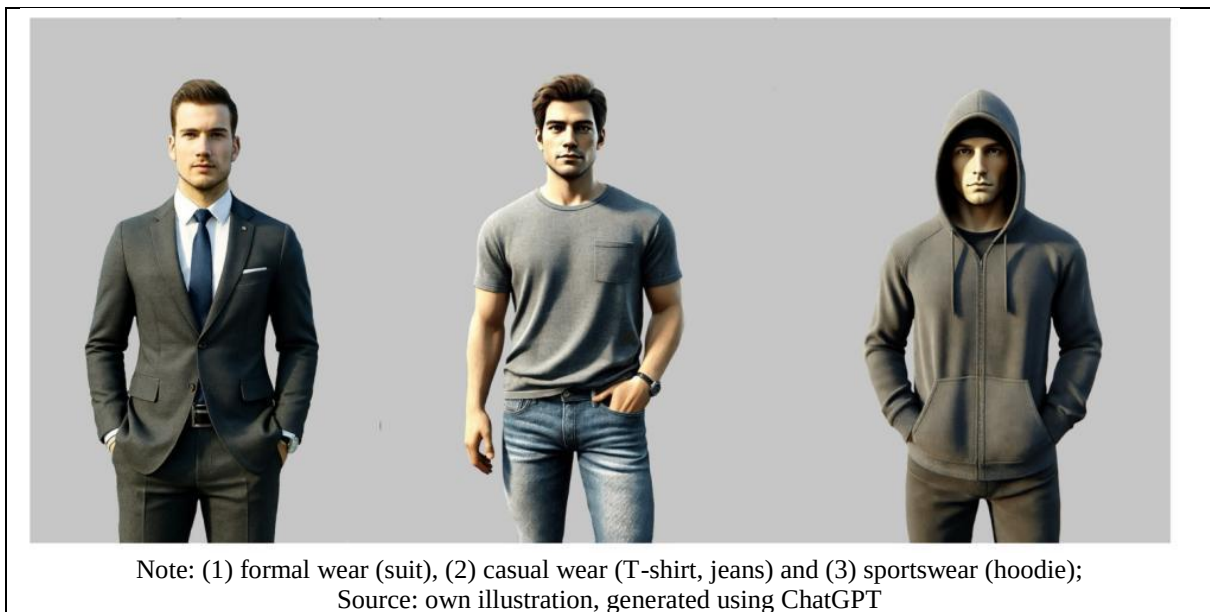


Figure 1 Stimulus material for the three experimental conditions: clothing style.

Each condition (**Figure 1**) consisted of a single image stimulus showing the same male subject wearing different clothing: formal (suit), casual (jeans and T-shirt) or sporty (hooded sweatshirt/hoodie). The stimuli were specifically designed so that the individuals depicted differed exclusively in their clothing style, whilst all other visual characteristics (person, pose, facial expression, background) were kept constant. The aim was to achieve a controlled manipulation of the independent variable whilst maintaining high internal validity.

A total of 139 questionnaires were initiated as part of the data collection. After applying the filter question regarding the age limit (>30 years), 26 data sets were excluded, leaving 113 fully evaluable cases to be included in the analysis. The participants were on average 22.3 years old ($SD = 3.30$) with an age range of 18 to 29 years. In terms of gender, 57.5% of respondents were female and 42.5% male. The group distribution proved to be largely balanced: 34.5% of participants ($n = 39$) saw the formal attire, whilst 32.7% ($n = 37$) each were assigned to the 'casual wear' and 'hoodie' conditions respectively. A chi-square test revealed no significant difference between the groups ($\chi^2(2) = 0.273$, $p = .873$), which suggests successful randomisation.

Various items were developed to measure the central dependent variables as well as supplementary contextual and control variables. The dependent variables 'perception of crime' and 'perception of threat' were each measured using eight items on five-point Likert scales (1 – 5). The response options ranged from 1 = 'Strongly disagree' to 5 = 'Strongly agree'. The scales were constructed specifically for this study to enable a differentiated measurement of both cognitive and emotional perception components. The wording of the items was based on established psychological standards for questionnaire construction. In addition to clear linguistic comprehensibility, particular attention was paid to item diversity, an appropriate scale level and the avoidance of redundant terms.

Table 1. Scales Perception of Crime (PoC) and Perception of Threat (PoT)

<i>Perception of Crime</i>	The person depicted strikes me as criminal. I think it is likely that this person would break the law. I believe that this person poses an increased risk of criminal behaviour. I believe that this person has had previous dealings with the police. I would mistrust this person in a legally sensitive situation. I have the feeling that this person could easily hide a guilty conscience. The person depicted strikes me as suspicious. This person appears to observe rules and norms. (inverted)
<i>Perception of Threat</i>	The person depicted gives me a feeling of unease. I believe this person is capable of deliberately harming others. The person depicted strikes me as intimidating. The person depicted strikes me as dangerous. I perceive the person depicted as a potential threat. I feel that I cannot fully trust this person. I could imagine that others would also feel uncomfortable. I would feel comfortable in this person's presence. (inverted)

In addition, various socio-demographic and contextual variables were collected, including age, gender, educational attainment, type of residence, personal clothing style, experience of crime, subjective sense of safety and occupational background. These served to control for potential biases and enabled exploratory analyses.

The selection of statistical methods was theory-driven, in accordance with the experimental research question and the measurement scale of the collected data. To test the hypotheses, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted (Bortz & Schuster, 2010). This method is particularly well-suited for analysing group differences when dealing with interval-scaled dependent variables and categorical independent variables.

The ANOVA enabled the simultaneous testing of mean differences whilst controlling for the α -error. Where significant results were found, additional pairwise group comparisons were carried out using the Tukey-HSD post-hoc procedure. To test the third hypothesis, a t-test for independent samples was used. All prerequisites (normal distribution, homogeneity of variance) were statistically tested prior to applying the procedures.

Results

The internal consistencies of the two central survey instruments were tested using Cronbach's alpha. For the crime perception scale, a high internal consistency was found with $\alpha = .864$. The scale for threat perception also demonstrated very high reliability ($\alpha = .914$). These values confirm the psychometric quality of the scales used and justify their aggregation into overall scores. The mean values of the dependent variables showed the expected pattern across the three clothing conditions. For the crime perception scale, the following values were obtained: suit ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.56$), casual wear ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.57$) and hoodie ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.76$). A similar pattern emerged for perceived threat: suit ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.86$), casual wear ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 0.73$) and hoodie ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.95$).

To test the hypotheses put forward, inferential statistical analyses were carried out to examine the influence of clothing style on perceptions of crime and threat, as well as any potential gender differences.

Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of crime

To test the first hypothesis, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine differences in perceived crime levels between the three clothing conditions (suit, casual wear, hoodie). The analysis revealed a significant main effect of clothing style on perceived crime levels, $F(2, 110) = 23.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = .30$. This indicates a large effect. The results show that the perceived criminality of the target person varies significantly depending on clothing style. The highest values were observed in the hoodie condition ($M = 3.47, SD = 0.76$), whilst the lowest values were found in the casual clothing condition ($M = 2.52, SD = 0.57$). The suit condition fell in between, with a mean of $M = 2.69 (SD = 0.56)$. Post-hoc analyses using the Tukey HSD test showed that the perceived crime rate in the hoodie condition was significantly higher than in both the suit condition and the casual clothing condition ($p < .001$ in each case). By contrast, there was no significant difference between the suit and casual clothing conditions ($p = .482$).

The alternative hypothesis is therefore accepted: clothing style significantly influences perceptions of criminality.

Hypothesis 2: Perception of threat

To test the second hypothesis, a one-way analysis of variance was also conducted. Here too, a significant effect of clothing style on the perceived threat was found, $F(2, 110) = 18.53, p < .001, \eta^2 = .25$, which also corresponds to a large effect. The descriptive results illustrate that perceived threat was highest in the hoodie condition ($M = 3.68$), followed by the suit condition ($M = 2.89$). The lowest perceived threat was found in the casual clothing condition ($M = 2.67$). The post-hoc analyses confirmed this pattern: the hoodie condition differed significantly from both the suit and the casual clothing conditions ($p < .001$ in each case). By contrast, no significant difference was found between the suit and casual clothing conditions ($p = .396$).

Thus, the alternative hypothesis is confirmed here as well: clothing style has a significant influence on perceived threat.

Hypothesis 3: Gender differences

To investigate possible gender differences in the assessment of crime, a t-test for independent samples was conducted. This revealed no significant difference between female ($M = 2.94, SD = 0.73$) and male participants ($M = 2.82, SD = 0.80$), $t(111) = 0.87, p = .386, d = 0.17$. The effect size is classified as small, suggesting that gender has no significant influence on perceptions of criminality.

Accordingly, the alternative hypothesis cannot be confirmed, and the null hypothesis is retained.

In summary, the results show that clothing style has a significant influence on both the assessment of criminality and the perception of threat. In particular, the target person wearing a hoodie was consistently assessed as more criminal and threatening than in the other conditions. No gender differences, however, could be detected.

In addition to the hypothesis-driven analyses, supplementary exploratory analyses were carried out to investigate the potential influence of socio-demographic and contextual variables on perceptions of crime and threat. First, the influence of the participants' age was analysed using Pearson correlations. This revealed no significant correlations either for perceptions of crime ($r = -.05, p = .609$) nor for perceived threat ($r = -.07, p = .484$), suggesting that age had no systematic influence on the assessment of the target person within the sample under investigation.

Similarly, educational attainment (school-leaving qualification) showed no significant influence on the dependent variables. The corresponding analyses of variance revealed no significant differences between educational groups, neither for the assessment of crime, $F(5,$

107) = 1.13, $p = .349$, nor for the perception of threat, $F(5, 107) = 1.14$, $p = .344$.

No significant effects were found for the type of residence (rural, small town, large city) either. The one-way ANOVAs revealed no significant differences either for the assessment of crime, $F(2, 110) = 0.67$, $p = .513$, or for the perception of threat, $F(2, 110) = 0.58$, $p = .564$. Nor did the participants' own clothing style have a significant influence on the assessment of the target person. The corresponding analyses yielded $F(2, 110) = 1.33$, $p = .268$ for the assessment of criminality and $F(2, 110) = 1.07$, $p = .346$ for the perception of threat.

With regard to personal experiences with crime, no significant differences were found between the groups either. No significant effects were found either for the assessment of criminality, $F(3, 109) = 0.92$, $p = .434$, or for the perception of threat, $F(3, 109) = 0.30$, $p = .828$. For the variable knowledge of offenders within one's circle of friends, t-tests for independent samples were conducted. These revealed no significant differences between the groups, neither for the assessment of crime, $t(111) = 0.82$, $p = .414$, nor for the perception of threat, $t(111) = -0.48$, $p = .636$.

The assessment of the extent to which clothing generally influences the perception of others also showed no significant correlation with the dependent variables. The analyses of variance yielded $F(2, 110) = 0.61$, $p = .543$ for the assessment of criminality and $F(2, 110) = 0.25$, $p = .778$ for the perception of threat. Finally, the influence of a professional context relevant to the assessments was examined. Here too, no significant differences were found between the groups, neither for the assessment of crime, $t(111) = -0.09$, $p = .930$, nor for the perception of threat, $t(111) = -0.46$, $p = .647$.

In summary, the exploratory analyses consistently show that none of the socio-demographic or contextual variables examined had a significant influence on perceptions of crime or perceived threat. The results thus underscore that the differences in the assessments are primarily attributable to the experimental manipulation of clothing style and cannot be explained by individual characteristics of the participants.

Discussion

The results of this study clearly confirm the theoretical assumptions regarding the influence of clothing on stereotypical attributions. Both the first and second hypotheses were confirmed with large effect sizes, which underscores the practical significance of the findings. The consistently higher ratings for the hoodie condition across both dependent variables reflect social stereotypes that associate casual, sporty clothing with deviance and potential risk. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Wilson et al., 2017; Kleider et al., 2008) and extend them by providing a systematic comparison of different clothing styles under controlled experimental conditions. It is noteworthy that suits and casual clothing did not differ significantly across both dependent variables. This suggests that it is not casual clothing per se that elicits positive evaluations, but rather that specific clothing styles (in this case: the hoodie) activate negative stereotypes. Casual clothing appears to represent a neutral reference category that does not trigger either positive or negative attributions to a greater extent.

The parallel effects in crime assessment and threat perception suggest convergent validity of the scales used and support the theoretical assumption that cognitive and affective evaluations are closely linked in social perception. This is consistent with models of automatic social cognition, which assume that visual cues simultaneously activate different evaluation dimensions.

The absence of significant gender differences was not theoretically predictable and could have various causes. It is possible that the stereotypes used are so strongly culturally embedded

that they are activated regardless of gender. Alternatively, the relatively homogeneous and young sample may have contributed to a convergence of evaluation patterns. The significant correlation between subjective sense of security and both dependent variables underscores the importance of individual dispositions for the interpretation of visual cues. Individuals with a lower sense of security exhibit increased sensitivity to potential threat cues, which is consistent with existing research on threat perception (Spencer et al., 2016).

The present study has several methodological limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting the results. Firstly, no explicit manipulation control was carried out, so it remains unclear whether the intended attributions of meaning to the clothing styles were actually perceived by the participants. Whilst the use of computer-generated stimuli increased internal validity by controlling for irrelevant variables, it limited ecological validity. In natural social contexts, clothing and appearance are always embedded in an environment that shapes perception. The deliberate omission of contextual information reduces the generalisability to real-life situations. Furthermore, the sample was relatively homogeneous and consisted predominantly of young, academically educated individuals. This limits the generalisability of the findings to other age and educational groups. Whilst the sample size was sufficient for the analyses conducted, it allowed only limited differentiation in subgroup analyses.

Future studies should specifically address these limitations. The use of real photographs or even video-based stimuli could enhance ecological validity. Multifactorial designs could systematically vary additional influencing factors such as context, the age of the target person or ethnic background. Longitudinal studies could investigate whether and how stereotypical attributions change over time and whether they can be modified through positive experiences or education. Neurobiological approaches could shed further light on the underlying processes of automatic stereotype activation. Extending the research to other cultural contexts appears particularly important, as clothing stereotypes are strongly culturally influenced and international comparisons could provide important insights into the universality versus context-specificity of these phenomena.

Conclusions & recommendations

The findings have direct relevance to legal psychology contexts. The demonstrated systematic biases arising from clothing can influence police assessments, witness perceptions and judicial decisions. This underscores the need to develop awareness-raising measures for stakeholders within the legal system. Training for police officers, judges and other decision-makers should address the automatic nature of stereotypical perception processes and teach strategies for reflecting on one's own prejudices. Structured decision-making processes and explicit checklists could help to reduce the influence of external characteristics.

Beyond the legal sphere, the findings have implications for various social contexts. In educational institutions, dress codes could be critically examined if they lead to the systematic discrimination of certain groups. Employers should be aware of potential biases in recruitment processes. Media literacy programmes could raise public awareness of the power of visual stereotyping and encourage critical thinking about first impressions. This is particularly important in an increasingly image-heavy media landscape, where stereotypical representations spread rapidly. Organisations and institutions should take proactive measures to minimise stereotypical biases. This could include structured assessment procedures, training on implicit bias, and diverse decision-making bodies. Technological tools could be developed to flag potential sources of bias during decision-making processes.

This experimental study provides robust empirical evidence for the significant influence of clothing on criminal attributions and threat perception. The large effect sizes (η^2 up to .30) underscore the practical significance of these automatic perceptual processes. It is particularly noteworthy that specific clothing styles (hoodies) systematically activate negative stereotypes, whilst neutral (casual wear) and formal clothing (suits) do not differ significantly. The findings confirm theoretical assumptions regarding automatic social categorisation and extend them with important empirical insights. They illustrate that even minimal visual cues are sufficient to influence far-reaching social judgements, which can have significant consequences in various social contexts. The role of subjective feelings of safety as the sole significant predictor among the contextual variables points to the importance of individual dispositions in the interpretation of social stimuli. This opens up avenues for preventive interventions. Despite methodological limitations, in particular the restricted ecological validity and the homogeneous sample, the results make an important contribution to the understanding of visual stereotyping. They underscore the need to systematically account for the influence of external physical characteristics in both scientific research and practical application contexts.

Looking ahead, the task is to translate these findings into comprehensive strategies for reducing stereotypical biases, thereby contributing to fairer and more objective social judgement. The study impressively demonstrates that reflecting on one's own patterns of perception is not only of scientific interest but also a social necessity.

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THE EFFECTS OF GENDER AND ARMAMENT ON THE PERCEPTION OF POLICE OFFICERS: AN EXPERIMENTAL EYE-TRACKING AND VIGNETTE STUDY

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Abstract. This experimental study examined how police officer gender and visible weaponry influence pre-interactive social perceptions. This study aims to investigate the effects of officer gender and visible weaponry on the perception of police officers and on visual attention to weapon-related cues.

Using a 2×2 between-subjects design, weapon visibility (armed vs. unarmed) and officer gender (male vs. female) were systematically varied across image-based vignettes. The sample consisted of 78 participants ($M = 21.94$ years), who evaluated depicted police officers using a semantic differential measuring perceived aggressiveness, approachability, friendliness, respectfulness, and trustworthiness. In addition, eye-tracking data were collected to assess visual attention to weapon-related areas of interest. Results indicated significant main effects of weapon visibility and officer gender on several evaluative dimensions. Armed officers were perceived as more aggressive and less trustworthy, while female officers were consistently rated as less aggressive and more friendly, respectful, and trustworthy than male officers. Although interaction effects between gender and weapon visibility were not statistically significant in explicit judgments, exploratory eye-tracking analyses suggested gender-specific differences in visual attention to weaponry, particularly in relation to perceived aggressiveness and friendliness.

Overall, the findings highlight the independent and combined roles of gender and visible weaponry in shaping police perception and underscore the value of integrating subjective evaluations with objective attention measures.

Keywords: police perception; officer gender; visible weaponry; social judgments; eye tracking; visual attention; experimental vignette design

Introduction

The perception of police behaviour is a key factor in public trust in the police, willingness to cooperate, and the legitimacy of police actions. Numerous studies demonstrate that such perceptions often arise before any actual interaction takes place and that they are significantly shaped by visual cues available upon first viewing a police officer (Yesberg et al., 2021; Simpson & Sargeant, 2025). These cues include elements of the uniform, visible equipment, and demographic characteristics such as the gender of the person depicted. Particularly significant are cues that may signal a potential threat, such as the visibility of a service weapon. Several empirical studies show that armed police officers are frequently perceived as more aggressive, less trustworthy and less approachable compared to unarmed officers (Yesberg et al., 2021; Wozniak et al., 2021). The theoretical basis for this is provided by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which assumes that social cues, particularly those signalling potential distance, activate cognitive schemas at an early stage.

In addition to being armed, the gender of the police officer also plays a role in early social evaluations. Whilst text-based studies on police behaviour, such as those by Navarro et al. (2025), found little difference in the evaluation of male and female police officers, visual studies indicate more clearly that female police officers are often assessed more positively. A particularly relevant study comes from Steinle et al. (2025), who used eye-tracking and questionnaire data to show that both uniform elements and the gender of a police officer influence visual attention and subsequent evaluations. Their findings suggest that stereotypical expectations are particularly likely to emerge when visual information is present. The present study builds on this body of evidence by examining the combined effects of armament and the gender of the depicted police officer in a controlled experimental setting. Additionally, eye-tracking data is collected to analyse how eye movements and fixation duration on specific items of equipment correlate with the perceived characteristics of the police officers. The study thus fills a research gap and expands existing empirical findings by incorporating a nuanced examination of visual characteristics.

The objectives of the study were:

1. to examine whether visible weaponry affects perceived aggressiveness, approachability, friendliness, respectfulness, and trustworthiness;
2. to examine whether the gender of the depicted police officer affects these five perceived characteristics;
3. to test whether visible weaponry and officer gender interact in shaping these perceptions;
4. to analyse whether fixation duration on weapon-related areas is associated with the evaluation of the depicted police officer;
5. to explore whether previous experiences with the police are related to the perception of the depicted police officer.

Theoretical approach

Visual cues shape early social categorisation and evaluation processes. Police officers are particularly suitable for the investigation of such processes, as they wear uniform and, at the same time, symbolically charged uniforms and equipment. Simpson and Sargeant (2025) demonstrated in a study that different uniform variants and equipment elements, including weapons, have a significant influence on the perceived legitimacy, effectiveness and approachability of police officers. The visibility of a weapon constitutes a significant cue that, according to Yesberg et al. (2021), promotes negative attributions regarding aggressiveness and trustworthiness. Wozniak et al. (2021) further argue that weapons represent both instruments of security and symbols of the monopoly on the use of force, and can therefore elicit multidimensional reactions. The presence of a weapon can thus trigger spontaneous assessments that are influenced not only by the stimulus itself but also by individual experiences and attitudes.

The gender of the police officer also acts as a social cue. Whilst text-based studies often find no gender-specific differences (Navarro et al., 2025), visual studies, such as those by Steinle et al. (2025), show that female police officers tend to be perceived as less threatening, more approachable and more trustworthy. Steinle et al. (2025) were also able to demonstrate that uniform components and equipment – particularly weapons – attract a significant degree of visual attention. This illustrates that visual perception processes play a central role in spontaneous social assessments. Nevertheless, a research gap remains in that the combined effects of being armed and gender have so far scarcely been investigated experimentally in a factorial design. The present study therefore contributes to closing this research gap.

The central research question is: To what extent do visible armament and the gender of the depicted police officer influence the perception of their social characteristics? To answer this question, five dependent variables were measured: aggressiveness, approachability, friendliness, respectfulness and trustworthiness. For each of these variables, three hypotheses were formulated, predicting a main effect of being armed, a main effect of gender, and a potential interaction between the two factors. This results in a total of fifteen hypotheses. The following section uses the variable ‘aggressiveness’ as an example to illustrate how the hypotheses were formulated for each dependent variable:

H_{1a}: There is a difference in perceived aggressiveness between armed and unarmed police forces ($\mu_{\text{armed}} \neq \mu_{\text{unarmed}}$).

H_{1b}: There is a difference in perceived aggressiveness between male and female police officers ($\mu_{\text{male}} \neq \mu_{\text{female}}$).

H_{1c}: The effects of being armed and gender on perceived aggressiveness interact with one another.

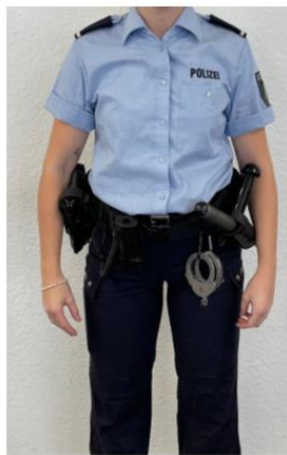
Methodology

The study employed a quantitative experimental laboratory design based on a 2×2 factorial between-subjects design. The independent variables comprised the visible arming of the depicted police officer (visible vs. not visible) and the gender of the depicted police officer (male vs. female). This design allows for the examination of both the main effects and the interaction effects between the two factors. The choice of this design follows theoretical assumptions from previous studies, which suggest that both arming and gender constitute relevant visual cues, the combined effect of which has not yet been systematically investigated. A total of 80 people took part in the study. Two cases had to be excluded due to lack of consent

or minority status, meaning the final sample comprised 78 participants. The participants were aged between 18 and 34, with an average age of 21.94 years ($SD = 2.62$). Of these, 44 identified as female and 34 as male. Recruitment took place in a university setting, meaning the sample consisted predominantly of students. Participation was voluntary and took place following written consent in accordance with GDPR requirements.

The stimuli consisted of four photographs of real police officers (**Figure 1**), taken in a standardised manner. Each image depicted either a male or a female police officer. Both genders were presented in two variants: once with a visible service weapon and once without a visible service weapon. The visible items of equipment included a firearm, a baton and handcuffs. The image cropping was chosen so that the face was not visible, to ensure that only the effect of armament and gender was examined.

Female (unarmed / armed)



Male (unarmed / armed)



Picture 1. Stimulus Material.

To measure the five dependent variables, a semantic differential was used, with one bipolar adjective pair per variable. Ratings were given on a seven-point Likert scale, with higher values reflecting more positive ratings. The five pairs of adjectives corresponded to the study's theoretical assumptions and had also been used in previous studies on the perception of police behaviour. Demographic data were also collected, including the participants' age and gender. Furthermore, previous experiences with the police were recorded on a seven-point scale to enable an exploratory investigation of potential influences on the evaluation of the depicted police officer. Participants were also asked to assess their own reliability of response.

An eye-tracking procedure was used to record visual attention processes. The measurements were taken using Tobii Pro Lab software, which was connected to the relevant hardware in the psychology laboratory. Eye movements and fixation durations were recorded. For armed stimuli, specific Areas of Interest (AOIs) were defined, encompassing the visible weapons. For unarmed stimuli, no weapon-specific AOIs were defined. The stimuli were presented individually and in a randomised order, with participants being shown only one image at a time. During viewing, eye-tracking was used to record eye movements and fixation duration on defined AOIs. Once the participants had finished viewing the stimulus, they completed the online questionnaire. The entire procedure was standardised to minimise experimenter effects and ensure high internal validity.

To test the hypotheses, two-way analyses of variance were conducted to examine the effects of the police officer's armament and gender. In addition, t-tests for independent samples,

Pearson correlations and multiple regression analyses with interaction terms were employed. The assumptions underlying the respective statistical procedures were checked both through graphical inspection and by means of statistical tests, including the Shapiro-Wilk test to check for normal distribution and the Levene test to check for homogeneity of variance. Where certain assumptions were violated, the robustness of the respective procedures was taken into account, and the analyses were carried out nonetheless.

Results

The results are presented in detail below and interpreted in light of the theoretical assumptions. The mean scores for the five assessment dimensions indicated that the police forces depicted were, on the whole, perceived rather positively. The perceived aggressiveness averaged $M = 2.37$ ($SD = 1.70$) and was thus significantly below the scale mean of 4. The responsiveness of the police forces depicted was rated on average at $M = 4.49$ ($SD = 1.76$), which is slightly above the scale mean. The average rating for friendliness was $M = 4.51$ ($SD = 1.57$), whilst respectfulness received the highest rating among the five variables at $M = 4.85$ ($SD = 1.47$). Trustworthiness averaged $M = 4.56$ ($SD = 1.65$). The eye-tracking data showed that, for armed stimuli, the average total viewing duration was $M = 4305.42$ milliseconds ($SD = 2825.54$). The average fixation duration was $M = 3558.05$ milliseconds ($SD = 3251.35$). These high standard deviations suggest that there were significant individual differences in the participants' gaze behaviour, which forms an important basis for the subsequent exploratory analyses.

Analysis of the aggression ratings revealed a significant main effect of the police officer's armament. Police officers with a visible service weapon were perceived, on average, as more aggressive ($M = 2.79$; $SD = 1.89$) than those without visible armament ($M = 1.98$; $SD = 1.41$). This difference was statistically significant, $F(1,74) = 4.89$, $p = .030$, and had a mean effect size of $\eta^2 = .062$. The main effect of gender was also significant. Male police officers were perceived on average as more aggressive ($M = 2.77$; $SD = 1.81$) than female police officers ($M = 1.97$; $SD = 1.50$). This difference was also significant, $F(1,74) = 4.58$, $p = .036$, with a mean effect size of $\eta^2 = .058$. The interaction between being armed and gender, however, was not significant, $F(1,74) = 0.51$, $p = .479$.

For the variable approachability, there were neither significant main effects nor a significant interaction. Neither the gender of the police officer depicted ($F(1,74) = 2.05$, $p = .156$) nor whether they were armed ($F(1,74) = 2.23$, $p = .140$) had a significant influence on perceived approachability. The interaction between the two factors was also not significant ($F(1,74) = 0.09$, $p = .768$). Analysis of the friendliness ratings revealed a significant main effect of the gender of the police officer depicted. Female police officers were perceived on average as friendlier ($M = 4.92$; $SD = 1.53$) than male police officers ($M = 4.10$; $SD = 1.52$). This difference was significant, $F(1,74) = 5.72$, $p = .019$, with a mean effect size of $\eta^2 = .072$. The main effect of being armed was just below the threshold of significance ($F(1,74) = 3.56$, $p = .063$). The interaction between being armed and gender was not significant ($F(1,74) = 0.99$, $p = .322$). A significant main effect of gender was also found for the respectfulness ratings. Female police officers were perceived as more respectful ($M = 5.21$; $SD = 1.22$) than male police officers ($M = 4.49$; $SD = 1.62$). This difference was significant, $F(1,74) = 5.02$, $p = .028$, with a mean effect size of $\eta^2 = .064$. Being armed had no significant influence on respectfulness ($F(1,74) = 0.66$, $p = .418$), and the interaction between the two factors was also not significant ($F(1,74) = 1.35$, $p = .248$). For the trustworthiness ratings, there was both a significant main effect of being armed and a significant main effect of gender. Police officers without a visible

service weapon were, on average, perceived as more trustworthy ($M = 4.97$; $SD = 1.59$) than those with a visible weapon ($M = 4.13$; $SD = 1.61$). This difference was significant, $F(1,74) = 5.74$, $p = .019$, with a mean effect size of $\eta^2 = .072$. Female police officers were also perceived as more trustworthy ($M = 5.03$; $SD = 1.39$) than male police officers ($M = 4.10$; $SD = 1.77$). This difference was also significant, $F(1,74) = 6.87$, $p = .011$, with a mean effect size of $\eta^2 = .085$. However, the interaction was not significant ($F(1,74) = 0.01$, $p = .938$).

In addition to the analyses of variance, exploratory analyses were conducted to investigate correlations between gaze behaviour and ratings, as well as between previous experiences with the police and the perception of the police officer depicted. A t-test for independent samples showed that there was no significant difference in fixation duration on weaponry when male or female police officers were depicted. The fixation duration for male police officers was $M = 3558.05$ ms ($SD = 3251.35$), whilst for female police officers it was $M = 4305.42$ ms ($SD = 2825.54$). The difference was not statistically significant, $t(36) = -0.76$, $p = .454$.

A multiple regression analysis showed that the perceived aggressiveness of the depicted police officer was a significant predictor of fixation duration on the weapon. The model was significant overall, $F(3,34) = 3.35$, $p = .030$, and explained 23% of the variance ($R^2 = .23$). A one-point increase in perceived aggressiveness was associated with an average increase in fixation duration of 975.91 milliseconds ($SE = 320.59$). This effect was significant, $\beta = .61$, $p = .004$. The gender of the depicted police officer also showed a significant main effect, $\beta = .58$, $p = .043$. The fixation duration on the weapon was on average 3438.52 milliseconds longer for female police officers than for male police officers. The interaction term between perceived aggressiveness and the gender of the depicted police officer was not significant ($\beta = -.50$, $p = .090$). A further multiple regression analysis revealed that both perceived friendliness and the interaction term between gender and perceived friendliness were significant predictors of fixation duration. The model was significant overall, $F(3,34) = 3.13$, $p = .038$, and explained 22% of the variance ($R^2 = .22$). A higher rating of friendliness was associated with a reduction in fixation duration ($\beta = -.62$, $p = .008$). The interaction between gender and perceived friendliness was also significant ($\beta = 1.33$, $p = .012$), suggesting that the relationship between perceived friendliness and fixation duration differed between male and female police officers. A bivariate correlation revealed a moderate negative relationship between previous experiences with the police and the perceived aggressiveness of the depicted police officer ($r = -.34$, $p = .016$). Participants who had had negative experiences with the police perceived the depicted police officer as more aggressive. No significant correlations were found for the other evaluation dimensions.

Discussion

The results of this study provide important insights into the effect of visual cues on the perception of police attributes and confirm key theoretical assumptions of social identity theory as well as empirical findings from previous research. The significant main effects found of being armed on perceived aggressiveness and trustworthiness are fully consistent with theoretical predictions and previous empirical findings. Armed police officers were systematically rated as more aggressive and less trustworthy, which supports the assumption that visible weapons function as symbols of social distance and potential threat (Yesberg et al., 2021). These results replicate and extend the findings of Wozniak et al. (2021), who had already highlighted the multidimensional semantic meanings of weapons.

It is particularly noteworthy that the arming effect was not significant in terms of approachability, friendliness and respectfulness. This could suggest that weapons activate

specific cognitive schemas primarily associated with threat and dominance, whilst other social traits are less strongly affected. An alternative explanation lies in the possibility that these traits are more strongly influenced by contextual or interpersonal signals that were not present in static stimuli.

The consistently more positive ratings of female police officers across several dimensions (friendliness, respectfulness, trustworthiness, reduced aggressiveness) provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of gender-related stereotypes in visual perception contexts. These findings stand in stark contrast to text-based studies such as that by Navarro et al. (2025), which found hardly any gender differences, and underscore the particular importance of visual information for stereotype activation processes. The results fit seamlessly with the findings of Steinle et al. (2025), who previously demonstrated that female police officers are perceived as less threatening and more approachable. Our study extends these findings by demonstrating that gender effects remain robust even when examined alongside weaponry in a factorial design. This suggests that gender stereotypes constitute a fundamental and stable component of early social judgement processes. From a theoretical perspective, these findings support approaches to automatic stereotype activation, according to which gender-related schemas are retrieved immediately and unconsciously when corresponding visual cues are present. The consistently more positive evaluations of female police officers could be attributed to culturally embedded associations with care, lower perceived threat and greater willingness to cooperate.

A central and theoretically significant finding is the complete absence of significant interaction effects between armament and gender. This pattern of findings supports an additive model of visual cue processing, according to which different social signals are processed in parallel and independently of one another, without mutually reinforcing or attenuating each other. This finding has important theoretical implications: it contradicts assumptions that certain combinations of visual features (e.g. male and armed) might elicit particularly strong negative reactions. Instead, the results suggest that armament and gender are processed as separate cognitive modules, whose effects add up mathematically but do not interactively reinforce one another.

The eye-tracking analyses provide important supplementary insights into the link between visual attention and social evaluations. The positive correlation found between perceived aggressiveness and fixation duration on weapons suggests that negative evaluations direct attention more strongly towards potential sources of threat. This is consistent with evolutionary psychological approaches that postulate increased vigilance towards threatening stimuli. Of particular interest is the finding that fixation duration was higher for female armed police officers. This could be attributed to the incongruity between female gender and being armed, which triggers enhanced cognitive processing. This interpretation is supported by research on stereotype incongruity, which shows that unexpected combinations of traits generate increased attention. The results confirm and extend the findings of Steinle et al. (2025), who had already highlighted the central role of equipment components in directing attention. Our study further demonstrates that these attentional processes are systematically linked to social evaluations.

The negative correlation between previous experiences with the police and perceived aggressiveness underscores the importance of individual learning histories for the interpretation of visual stimuli. Individuals with negative prior experiences of the police showed increased sensitivity to aggressive traits, suggesting that past experiences act as cognitive filters for the perception of current stimuli. This finding has important practical implications, as it illustrates that public perception is shaped not only by objective visual features but also by subjective experiential contexts. This underscores the need for confidence-building measures in policing. The combination of experimental design and eye-tracking methodology represents an important

methodological innovation. Whilst previous studies used either subjective ratings or objective measures of attention, our approach enables an integrated examination of both conscious judgements and unconscious processing. The strict experimental control provided by the factorial design allows causal statements to be made about the effect of visual cues, which would not be possible in correlational or qualitative studies. The use of authentic police stimuli also enhances ecological validity compared to artificial or highly stylised representations.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that visual cues shape perceptions of police officers even before any direct interaction takes place. Both visible weaponry and gender emerged as independent yet significant factors in early social judgements. Armed police officers were evaluated more negatively, particularly with regard to aggressiveness and trustworthiness, whereas female police officers received more positive evaluations across several social dimensions. At the same time, no significant interaction effects were found between gender and visible armament, suggesting that both factors influence perception independently rather than jointly. The findings are relevant not only to research on perception and stereotypes, but also from a methodological perspective. In particular, the combination of experimental design and eye-tracking technology illustrates how subjective evaluations and objective behavioural measures can be integrated in police research. Overall, the results underline the importance of visual communication in shaping first impressions of police officers.

Recommendations

The findings have direct implications for the strategic communication of police organisations. As visible armament systematically leads to more negative evaluations, police organisations should reflect carefully on when and how armed police officers are depicted in public communication. In context-free situations, such as recruitment campaigns, information materials, and public appearances, the deliberate use of unarmed depictions may contribute to more positive public perceptions. At the same time, the gender-related findings indicate that female police officers are perceived as positive representatives of the institution. This may be considered in trust-building communication strategies, while avoiding the reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles.

For police practice, the findings suggest that the visibility of weapons should be considered on a case-by-case basis, particularly in community policing contexts, prevention events, and other trust-building interactions. This does not imply that safety equipment should be abandoned, but rather that its presentation should be considered more consciously. In addition, the findings should be incorporated into police training and further education in order to raise awareness of the impact of visual signals on public perceptions prior to any direct interaction.

Future research should address the methodological limitations of the present study. Larger and more diverse samples would increase the generalisability of the findings and allow for a more nuanced analysis of subgroup effects. The use of dynamic stimuli, such as videos or virtual reality environments, would further enhance ecological validity. In addition, international comparative studies could help to clarify whether the observed effects are culturally specific or more universal.

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SPECIFICITY OF THE GROUNDS AND FORMS OF EXPRESSION OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION: A RETROSPECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE OF THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES OMBUDSMAN

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Abstract This article examines the grounds of discrimination and the forms of their manifestation in the educational sphere through the practice of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania. The purpose of the article is to determine which grounds of discrimination predominated in the Ombudsperson's educational practice during the period 2015–2026 and to identify the institutional settings in which these grounds manifested themselves. The object of the research consists of the body of decisions and opinions adopted by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson in matters related to education in 2015–2026, supplemented by the annual activity reports of the Ombudsperson for 2015–2025 insofar as they are relevant to the educational context. The empirical corpus comprises 34 decisions and opinions covering preschool, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, vocational and higher education, as well as cases concerning national assessment procedures and final examinations. The annual reports are used as an additional source for identifying broader institutional priorities and structural trends in the Ombudsperson's educational practice. The research is based on document analysis, qualitative content analysis, systemic analysis and comparative analysis. The findings demonstrate that the most prominent grounds of discrimination in the educational sphere were sex, disability and social status. Complaints on the ground of sex were primarily related to gender-based allocation of activities, stereotypical organisation of education, school uniform rules, pregnancy and maternity in higher education, and harassment. Disability-based complaints mainly concerned inclusive education, accessibility of educational services, reasonable accommodation, assessment procedures and adaptation of national examinations. Complaints on the ground of social status were most often linked to admission criteria, access to paid or restricted educational services, the structure of competitive admission scores and the reconciliation of studies with family responsibilities. Less frequently, but still in a legally significant manner, complaints were submitted on the grounds of language, nationality, citizenship, origin, religion and beliefs, sexual orientation and age. The analysis shows that the Ombudsperson's educational practice reveals not merely a broad spectrum of prohibited grounds but also distinct patterns of manifestation across different levels of education. Equality in education therefore extends beyond formal admission or participation and includes educational content, institutional rules, service accessibility, academic culture, assessment systems and the accessibility of state-organised examinations. The article concludes that the Ombudsperson's practice serves not only as a mechanism for individual rights protection but also as an important instrument for identifying structural problems in education law and policy.

Keywords: Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, grounds of discrimination, education, sex, disability, social status

Introduction

Equal opportunities are among the foundational values of a democratic state governed by the rule of law. The constitutional principle of equality before the law requires that every person be afforded equal opportunities to obtain education, pursue a professional career, improve personal competencies and participate fully in public life irrespective of personal characteristics or social position. In legal terms, equal opportunities signify the effective implementation of human rights recognised in national, European Union and international law without discrimination on prohibited grounds.

This principle is of particular relevance in the field of education. Education is not merely a public service aimed at transmitting knowledge; it is also a normative and social environment in which values, behavioural patterns and perceptions of dignity, diversity and equality are formed. International law treats education as inseparable from the prohibition of discrimination. The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education establishes that the right to education must be guaranteed without discrimination and that equality of educational opportunity is a core legal obligation (UNESCO 1960). European equality policy likewise shows that education is one of the principal spaces in which stereotypes and structural inequalities may either be reproduced or reduced (Equinet 2018; EIGE 2020; OECD 2022).

In Lithuania, the domestic legal framework of equality in education is primarily grounded in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the Law on Equal Opportunities, the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the Law on Education (Referendum of the Republic of Lithuania 1992; Seimas 2003; Seimas 1998; Seimas 1991). These acts are supplemented by international and European legal instruments, including the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

The period 2022–2024 was particularly significant for the development of the Lithuanian legal framework relevant to equality in education. During this period, the implementation of inclusive education was strengthened, greater emphasis was placed on the rights of pupils with special educational needs, and heightened sensitivity emerged in relation to harassment prevention and the significance of family-related circumstances in equality protection. These changes materially influenced the practice of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. Cases increasingly concerned not only classic patterns of direct discrimination but also accessibility, adaptation, inclusive participation, safe educational environments and the reconciliation of education with family responsibilities (EOO 2022a; EOO 2023a; EOO 2024a; EOO 2025a).

The role of equality bodies in this context is not confined to the adjudication of individual complaints. European scholarship and policy documents stress that equality bodies perform a wider normative and preventive function: by investigating individual cases they identify systemic weaknesses in legislation, administration and institutional practice (Kádár 2018; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2021). Equinet has likewise emphasised that, in the educational sphere, equality bodies contribute to structural change by producing guidance, recommendations and standards aimed at reducing discrimination and inequality in schools and universities (Equinet 2018). This broader role is visible in the annual activity reports of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania, which show a sustained increase in institutional attention to education-related issues, including discriminatory educational content, gender stereotyping, accessibility for persons with disabilities, safe school environments, harassment prevention and recommendations directed at education policymakers (EOO 2015a; EOO 2016a; EOO 2017a; EOO 2018a; EOO 2019a; EOO 2020a; EOO 2021a; EOO 2022a; EOO 2023a; EOO 2024a; EOO 2025a).

The purpose of this article is to determine which grounds of discrimination predominated in the practice of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson in the field of education during 2015–2026 and to identify the educational settings in which they manifested themselves. The article addresses two interrelated research questions: first, which grounds of discrimination were most frequently invoked in complaints related to education; and second, how did those grounds manifest themselves across different levels of education?

The object of the research is the set of decisions and opinions adopted by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson concerning alleged discrimination in education in 2015–2026, supplemented by the annual activity reports for 2015–2025 insofar as they provide relevant contextual information about educational practice. The subject of the research is the grounds of discrimination invoked in these materials and the forms of their manifestation in different types of educational institutions. The empirical corpus comprises 34 decisions and opinions selected according to the following criteria: the document had to concern the educational sphere; it had to involve at least one legally relevant ground of discrimination; and the factual circumstances had to be sufficiently clear to identify both the ground invoked and the educational level at which the dispute arose. An additional source was the first annex to the 2016 annual report concerning the monitoring of the implementation of Ombudsperson's decisions (EOO 2016b).

The article employs document analysis, qualitative content analysis, systemic analysis and comparative analysis methods. Document analysis enabled the identification of the factual circumstances, grounds of discrimination and institutional setting in each decision or opinion, while the activity reports were used to identify broader institutional priorities and long-term tendencies. Qualitative content analysis allowed the grouping of cases by ground of discrimination and by educational level. The systemic method was used to situate the Ombudsperson's educational practice within the broader framework of equality law and human rights protection. Comparative analysis was applied in order to determine how the same ground of discrimination may manifest itself differently depending on the educational stage and institutional context.

The novelty of the article lies in the fact that it analyses, in a systematic manner, both the grounds of discrimination and the forms of their manifestation in education on the basis of a clearly defined empirical corpus from the practice of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. This approach makes it possible not only to identify which grounds of discrimination are most prominent, but also to demonstrate how their legal and factual expression differs across preschool, school, vocational and higher education, as well as in state-organised assessment systems.

Educational institutions and grounds of discrimination in the analysed practice

The practice of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson demonstrates that complaints concerning alleged discrimination in education were submitted in a remarkably broad range of institutional settings. The analysed cases span preschool institutions, general education schools, vocational education institutions, higher education institutions and the bodies responsible for national assessment and final examinations. This institutional breadth shows that equality issues in education cannot be reduced to a single educational stage; rather, they permeate the entire educational system.

At preschool level, the most visible grounds of discrimination were disability and religion or beliefs. Disability-related disputes were primarily concerned with the refusal or inability of a kindergarten to provide educational services to a child with disability, or with the failure to ensure an environment adapted to the child's individual needs. Cases relating to religion and beliefs arose in the context of food provision and whether the organisation of everyday services properly respected the religious convictions of children and their parents. At this level, equality issues therefore appear in highly practical form: accessibility of services, accommodation of needs and the day-to-day organisation of care and education (EOO 2015b; EOO 2023d).

In primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education, the spectrum of invoked grounds was substantially wider. The most frequent ground was sex. Complaints on this ground

concerned gender-based grouping of pupils in technology and engineering classes, allocation of different activities to girls and boys, school uniform rules based on stereotypical assumptions about appropriate clothing for girls and boys, and disputes as to whether a child's sex could serve as an obstacle to admission to a particular class, such as a dance class. These cases demonstrate that sex-based inequality in schools often manifests not through explicit segregation, but through everyday institutional rules and culturally normalised assumptions about gender roles (EOO 2017c; EOO 2018c; EOO 2023b; EOO 2023c; EOO 2025b).

General education also generated complaints on the grounds of disability, social status, language, nationality, origin, citizenship, religion and beliefs, and sexual orientation. Disability-related cases addressed inadequate educational conditions for children with disabilities and, in some situations, a failure to take account of the broader family context, particularly where the child's educational access was affected by the severe disability of another family member. Complaints on the ground of social status concerned paid educational models, unequal access to school canteens and admission criteria related to the parents' profession. Language, nationality, origin and citizenship appeared in cases involving minority-language education and insufficient communication with parents who did not speak Lithuanian. Sexual orientation arose mainly in relation to educational content and teaching material used in moral education or similar contexts (EOO 2017b; EOO 2017d; EOO 2017e; EOO 2019b; EOO 2019c; EOO 2019d; EOO 2020c; EOO 2021b; EOO 2024b).

In vocational education, the principal ground of discrimination was sex. The relevant cases concerned stereotypical perceptions of certain professions as "female" or "male", manifested through educators' comments and discouraging attitudes. Even where a legal violation was not ultimately established for evidentiary reasons, the case material demonstrates that vocational education remains a setting in which gender stereotypes may shape educational experience and expectations (EOO 2024e).

In higher education, the dominant grounds were sex, social status and disability, with age emerging less frequently and in a narrower range of contexts. Sex-based cases mainly concerned pregnancy, maternity, the adjustment of the study process, sexual harassment and gendered stereotyping in academic environments. Social status-related disputes concerned admission rules, the allocation of additional points in competitive selection and the possibility of reconciling study obligations with family responsibilities. Disability-related cases focused on access to study conditions and the assessment of academic performance, especially where disability was improperly treated as a negative factor in evaluation. The analysed corpus also included age-related disputes in academic or quasi-academic settings, though these were not as central as sex, disability and social status (EOO 2016d; EOO 2019e; EOO 2020a; EOO 2020b; EOO 2021c; EOO 2023a; EOO 2024c; EOO 2026a; EOO 2026c).

A distinct category of cases concerned national educational assessment and final examinations. Here, disability was clearly the predominant ground. Such disputes arose where pupils with autism spectrum disorder or visual disability were not provided with the adaptations previously identified as necessary for participation in state-organised assessments. These cases demonstrate that equality in education extends beyond schools and universities to the technical and procedural design of national testing systems (EOO 2025c; EOO 2026b).

Dominant grounds of discrimination and overarching trends

The empirical analysis reveals that three grounds of discrimination were clearly dominant in the educational sphere: sex, disability and social status. These grounds not only appeared

most frequently but also covered the widest range of factual circumstances and institutional contexts.

Sex was the most prominent ground in the analysed practice. It manifested itself not only in classic cases of differential treatment of girls and boys, but also in more subtle forms: stereotyped educational content, assignment of different activities according to sex, pregnancy- and maternity-related obstacles in higher education, and various forms of harassment. These findings are fully consistent with broader European and international research, which shows that educational inequality on the ground of sex frequently operates through teaching content, hidden curricula, gender segregation and entrenched cultural expectations about appropriate roles for women and men (EIGE 2020; OECD 2022). In other words, the Lithuanian case practice suggests that discrimination on the ground of sex in education is often embedded in ordinary institutional practice rather than expressed in openly exclusionary norms.

Disability was the second dominant ground. Complaints on this ground arose at every level of education: in preschool care, in general education schools, in higher education, in professional practice, and in state-administered assessment and examination procedures. The key legal issue was rarely formal exclusion from education. Rather, the central problem was inadequate adaptation of educational conditions to the individual's needs. This finding reflects the contemporary understanding of inclusive education in international law. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has made clear that inclusive education cannot be reduced to physical presence in mainstream education; it requires systemic adaptation, accessibility, support measures and the removal of institutional barriers that prevent equal participation (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016). The Lithuanian case corpus strongly confirms that point.

Social status was the third most significant ground. It appeared in multiple forms: paid or restricted access to educational services, admission criteria related to parents' profession or status, different weighting of prior educational pathways in higher education admission and the reconciliation of education with family obligations. In several cases, social status also intersected with family circumstances, particularly where the educational system failed to account for childcare, caregiving or other family duties. This suggests that discrimination on the ground of social status in education frequently has a structural character. It often arises not from openly hostile conduct but from formally neutral rules that disproportionately disadvantage certain groups.

Other grounds of discrimination, including language, nationality, origin, citizenship, religion and beliefs, sexual orientation and age, appeared less frequently in quantitative terms but remain legally and analytically significant. They tended to arise in specific institutional contexts: minority education and communication with parents, food provision and religious beliefs, harmful educational content concerning sexual orientation, and age-related restrictions or stigmatising treatment in higher education-related contexts. Their relative numerical modesty does not diminish their importance; rather, it demonstrates that discrimination in education is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to a small number of dominant grounds.

Several broader trends emerge from the analysed practice. First, many disputes concerned not direct and explicit exclusion, but formally neutral rules or practices that placed certain persons or groups at a disadvantage. This underscores the importance of substantive, rather than merely formal, equality in education law. Second, a substantial part of the case law points beyond individual disputes to institutional and systemic deficiencies. This is particularly visible in cases concerning teaching programmes, educational material, admission policies, internal academic rules, examination systems and accessibility standards. Such tendencies correspond to the wider role assigned to equality bodies in European law and policy. By addressing

individual complaints, equality bodies simultaneously identify normative and administrative shortcomings capable of producing systemic inequality (Kádár 2018; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2021).

Third, the prominence of particular grounds varied by educational level. In general education, sex-based stereotyping, social exclusion and linguistic inclusion were particularly visible. In higher education, the principal issues were related to study organisation, evaluation, pregnancy, maternity, harassment and academic culture. In national assessment systems, disability and accessibility became central. Fourth, the annual activity reports support these conclusions. Across the period under analysis, the reports reveal an increasingly explicit institutional concern with education-related equality issues, including discrimination embedded in educational content, accessibility of learning environments, equal participation of pupils with disabilities, and the need for structural guidance directed at educational institutions (EOO 2015a; EOO 2025a).

Forms of manifestation of grounds of discrimination across levels of education

The analysed material demonstrates that the manifestation of a ground of discrimination depends not only on the legal ground itself but also on the educational level in which it arises. The same ground may thus have different legal and factual expression depending on whether the dispute concerns preschool care, school education, vocational training, higher education or national assessment.

In preschool education, discrimination mainly manifests through service accessibility, accommodation of individual needs and the practical organisation of daily care. Disability-related disputes in this area tend to concern whether the institution is capable and willing to adapt its environment, schedule, supervision and communication to a child with special educational needs. Cases involving religion and beliefs arise primarily in connection with everyday service arrangements, such as food provision. Equality issues at preschool level are therefore strongly linked to the institution's practical capacity to ensure basic participation on an equal basis.

In school education, the forms of manifestation are considerably more varied. Sex-based discrimination is typically expressed through stereotyped organisation of educational activities, gender-based division of pupils, discriminatory dress rules or unequal access to particular classes. Such practices show that gender-based inequality in schools often operates through routine institutional choices that appear ordinary or culturally accepted. International research confirms that gender stereotypes in education are reproduced not only through explicit rules, but also through educational content, hidden curricula and social expectations embedded in school life (EIGE 2020; OECD 2022).

Social status tends to manifest through unequal access to services, different opportunities created by paid educational arrangements, or admission rules that reflect family status rather than the educational interests of the child. Disability-related discrimination in schools is most often expressed through insufficient adaptation of educational conditions and, at times, through failure to take account of the broader family context. Language, nationality, origin and citizenship are manifested primarily in communication and inclusion problems affecting both pupils and their parents.

In vocational education, the key manifestation concerns the stereotyping of occupations by sex. Here discrimination is less likely to arise through formal rules and more likely to appear in pedagogical communication, discouraging advice or symbolic exclusion from certain professional paths.

In higher education, the manifestations become more complex. Sex-based inequality frequently appears in relation to pregnancy, maternity, childcare, study scheduling, academic evaluation, comments by lecturers and harassment. Unlike in school education, where sex often appears through role stereotyping and internal school rules, in higher education it is more closely connected with the relationship between the student and the institution or between the student and the lecturer. Disability in higher education is manifested primarily through the accessibility of study arrangements and evaluation procedures, including the way disability is taken into account in practical training and academic assessment. Social status is frequently manifested through rules on admission, competitive scores, additional privileges for certain groups and the practical ability to reconcile study obligations with family life.

National educational assessment and final examinations form a separate category. Here disability manifests through procedural and technical accessibility. The central question is whether state-organised assessments are properly adapted to the pupil's individual needs. The legal significance of this form of manifestation is particularly high because failures in adaptation may directly affect future educational and professional opportunities. International law supports this view: access to assessments and examinations is not an optional accommodation but an integral part of equal enjoyment of the right to education (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016).

Accordingly, while the same ground of discrimination may recur across several educational stages, its concrete legal expression varies substantially. Any serious analysis of equality in education must therefore consider not only the ground invoked but also the institutional and procedural context in which it operates.

Conclusions

The analysis of the decisions, opinions and annual activity reports of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania demonstrates that complaints in the educational sphere reveal a broad spectrum of grounds of discrimination and confirm that equality issues arise across all levels of education, from preschool care to higher education and national examination systems.

First, the dominant grounds of discrimination were sex, disability and social status. Complaints on the ground of sex were mainly related to stereotyped educational organisation, differential treatment of girls and boys, pregnancy and maternity in higher education, and harassment. Disability-based complaints focused primarily on accommodation, accessibility and adaptation of educational conditions and assessment procedures. Complaints on the ground of social status were associated with access to services, admission criteria, competitive scoring systems and family-related burdens affecting educational participation.

Second, the analysis confirms that the manifestation of discrimination differs across educational levels. In preschool education, the key issue is practical access to services and accommodation of needs. In general education, the most visible forms are gender stereotyping, social exclusion and linguistic or cultural inclusion. In vocational education, the central problem is occupational stereotyping. In higher education, the main issues are study organisation, evaluation, pregnancy, maternity, harassment and the compatibility of studies with family responsibilities. In national assessment systems, accessibility for persons with disabilities becomes the decisive equality issue.

Third, the analysed practice shows that discrimination in education is frequently structural rather than overt. Many problems arise not from explicit exclusion but from formally neutral

rules and procedures that place particular groups at a disadvantage. This finding is especially important from the perspective of legal policy and institutional reform.

Fourth, the educational practice of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson should be understood broadly. It encompasses not only educational content in the narrow sense but also admission procedures, internal institutional rules, school and university services, communication with pupils and parents, academic assessment and the accessibility of state-organised examinations. Equality in education is therefore a multilayered legal obligation covering institutional environment, procedure and substance.

Fifth, the practice of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson in education is significant not only as a mechanism for individual rights protection but also as a means of identifying systemic problems in education policy and administration. Even where a formal violation is not established, the investigative process may reveal legal gaps, inconsistent practice or insufficient institutional sensitivity to the needs of protected groups. This understanding accords with the broader European conception of equality bodies as institutions linking the protection of individual rights with preventive and normative influence on public policy (Kádár 2018; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2021; Equinet 2018).

In light of these findings, several **recommendations** follow. Educational institutions should systematically review their internal rules, admission arrangements, service models and assessment procedures in order to identify apparently neutral practices that may create unequal effects. General education and vocational institutions should devote greater attention to the prevention of gender stereotyping in educational content, class organisation, dress rules and career guidance. Inclusive education must be strengthened by ensuring that pupils and students with disabilities receive not merely formal access but effective accommodation and accessible assessment. Higher education institutions should regulate more clearly the reconciliation of study obligations with pregnancy, maternity, childcare and other family responsibilities. Finally, national assessment and examination systems should be reviewed from the perspective of accessibility in order to ensure that adaptations are not nominal but genuinely effective. Future research should move beyond identification of the grounds of discrimination and examine, in greater depth, the legal reasoning of the Ombudsperson, the outcomes of the cases and the practical impact of this body of practice on educational institutions and education law.

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PECULIARITIES OF EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIPS OF MINOR EMPLOYEES IN LITHUANIA: LEGAL REGULATION AND PROBLEMATICS

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Abstract. *The employment of minors in Lithuania is characterised by specific legal requirements and safeguards aimed at protecting their health, education, and overall well-being. As the participation of minors in the labour market continues to increase, the practical implementation of these safeguards becomes increasingly important. Although Lithuanian legislation establishes a comprehensive legal framework governing the employment of minors, questions remain regarding the effectiveness of its implementation in practice.*

The aim of this study is to analyse the national legal framework governing the employment of persons under eighteen years of age and to identify the main legal and practical issues arising in employment relationships involving minor employees. The research is based on document analysis, comparative analysis, and a quantitative survey of individuals who worked in Lithuania before reaching the age of eighteen. A total of 103 employment experiences were analysed.

The results demonstrate that Lithuanian legislation generally complies with international and European Union standards and provides a broad system of safeguards for minor employees. However, the empirical study revealed significant shortcomings in the practical implementation of these safeguards. The most common violations were related to employment formalities, working and rest time requirements, occupational safety and health, unofficial wage payments, and age-based discrimination. The findings also indicate insufficient awareness of employment rights among minors and a low tendency to seek assistance when faced with potential violations.

The study concludes that, despite the existence of a comprehensive legal framework, the protection of minor employees in practice remains insufficient. Strengthening supervision mechanisms and improving minors' awareness of their employment rights are essential for ensuring more effective implementation of existing legal safeguards.

Keywords: *labor law, employment conditions of minors, labour law violations, Lithuania.*

Introduction

The relevance of this study is determined by the increasing participation of minors in the labour market in Lithuania and other European Union Member States. According to Eurostat data, an increasing number of young people begin working while pursuing their education, and combining work and studies has become a common part of youth experience (Eurostat, 2025). As a result, the employment of minors is no longer an isolated phenomenon and requires effective legal regulation and supervision.

The relevance of this topic in Lithuania is further reinforced by the fact that minors are most frequently employed in the service, retail, and seasonal work sectors. Violations related to working hours, rest periods, occupational safety, and remuneration occur more frequently in these sectors. Data published by the State Labour Inspectorate indicate that cases of non-

compliance with legal requirements concerning the employment of minors are still identified in practice (State Labour Inspectorate, 2025). This raises questions about the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing legal framework.

Employment relationships involving minors are closely linked to their health, psychological well-being, and educational development. Improperly organised work may negatively affect their physical and emotional condition, academic performance, and social development (Mortimer, 2010, pp. 3-5). Therefore, the regulation of minor employment is important not only in labour law but also in the broader context of child rights protection.

This article addresses the participation of minors in employment relationships and the legal regulation of such relationships in Lithuania. Although the employment of minors is governed by specific legal norms, practical challenges remain in their application and enforcement. Therefore, the study seeks to evaluate the legal regulation governing the employment of persons under eighteen years of age and to identify the main legal and practical issues arising in employment relationships involving minor employees.

The object of the research is the legal regulation governing the employment of minors and the practical issues arising from its implementation in Lithuania.

The aim of this scientific article is to analyse the national legal framework governing the employment of persons under eighteen years of age and to identify the main legal and practical issues arising in employment relationships involving minor employees.

The study employs both theoretical and empirical **research methods**. The document analysis method is used to examine national and international legal acts, scientific literature, and other sources related to the employment of minors. Comparative analysis is applied to assess the Lithuanian legal framework in the context of European and international standards.

The empirical part of the study is based on a quantitative survey conducted through an anonymous online questionnaire. The survey sought to examine how the legal regulation governing the employment of minors is implemented in practice, identify the most common labour law violations, and assess minors' awareness of their employment rights and available mechanisms for reporting violations. Based on the collected data, the study analyses the experiences of individuals who worked before reaching the age of eighteen and evaluates the working conditions provided to them.

Data were collected between 24 October 2025 and 14 November 2025 using Google Forms. Respondents were recruited through the administration of Utena Dauniškis Gymnasium, social media platforms (Instagram and Messenger), and fourth-year students of the Law and Criminology study programme at Mykolas Romeris University. The final sample consisted of 103 reported employment experiences involving individuals who had worked in Lithuania before reaching the age of eighteen.

Most respondents were young adults: 66% were aged 21-25 and 24.3% were aged 18-21. In addition, 3.9% of respondents were under the age of 18, while the remaining 5.8% were over 25 years of age. Consequently, more than 90% of respondents were younger than 25 years of age, indicating that the reported employment experiences as minors had occurred relatively recently.

The questionnaire consisted of 57 questions, including two demographic questions, fifty-three closed-ended questions, and two open-ended questions aimed at identifying possible violations of minors' labour rights and assessing awareness of employment rights. The questionnaire was designed using branching logic, ensuring that respondents were presented only with questions relevant to their age, employment period, and employment experience. Consequently, the number of questions answered varied among respondents. Participants who had more than one employment experience while being minors were allowed to complete the

questionnaire more than once. Therefore, the unit of analysis in this study is an individual employment experience rather than the respondent.

The study employed a non-probability convenience sampling method. Therefore, the findings cannot be considered representative of all minor employees in Lithuania. Nevertheless, they provide valuable insights into the practical implementation of legal requirements governing the employment of minors and the challenges encountered by young workers in practice.

During the preparation and implementation of the research, the fundamental principles of research ethics were observed (Gaižauskaitė & Mikėnė, 2014, pp. 45-50). At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the intended use of the collected data. Participation was voluntary, and no personally identifiable information was collected, including names, e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, login details, or similar information. The anonymity of respondents was ensured throughout the research process.

The survey results were used to assess the practical implementation of legal requirements governing the employment of minors in Lithuania, identify the most common labour law violations, and evaluate minors' awareness of their employment rights. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the challenges associated with the employment of minors and the effectiveness of the existing legal framework.

Peculiarities and restrictions of employment relationships involving minors

The legal regulation of the employment of minors in Lithuania is based on international, European Union, and national legal instruments. The purpose of this legal framework is to protect minors from economic exploitation and to ensure that employment does not negatively affect their health, development, education, or overall well-being. Therefore, the analysis begins with the international and European legal framework and subsequently examines its implementation in Lithuanian law.

At the international level, the employment of minors is primarily regulated by the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Among the fundamental ILO conventions, Convention No. 138 concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Convention No. 182 concerning the Worst Forms of Child Labour are particularly significant. Convention No. 138 establishes minimum age requirements for employment and provides that the minimum age for admission to employment shall not be lower than fifteen years. However, persons aged thirteen to fifteen may perform light work provided that such work does not harm their health, development, or education (International Labour Organization Convention No. 138 concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 1973). Convention No. 182 complements this framework by requiring states to eliminate the worst forms of child labour. Together, these conventions form the core international legal framework for the protection of children in employment relationships (Mačernytė Panomariovienė, 2010, p. 101; Mačernytė Panomariovienė, Wroclawska, 2025, p. 101).

At the European Union level, the protection of young workers is governed by Council Directive 94/33/EC of 22 June 1994 on the protection of young people at work. The Directive establishes minimum standards concerning the admission of young persons to employment, working time, rest periods, night work, and occupational safety. It defines a child as a person under fifteen years of age or a person who is still subject to compulsory full-time schooling under national law. An adolescent is defined as a person between fifteen and eighteen years of age who is no longer subject to compulsory schooling (Council Directive 94/33/EC of 22 June

1994 on the protection of young people at work, 2019). These definitions provide a common framework for the protection of young workers throughout the European Union.

The requirements established by international and European Union law are implemented in Lithuania primarily through the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania, the Law on Safety and Health at Work of the Republic of Lithuania, and the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania. These legal acts regulate the admission of minors to employment, working and rest time limitations, occupational safety requirements, annual leave, and the termination of employment relationships.

Lithuanian law defines a minor as a person under eighteen years of age, except where a person who has reached the age of sixteen has acquired full legal capacity through emancipation or marriage. The Law on Safety and Health at Work distinguishes two categories of minors: children and adolescents. A child is a person under sixteen years of age, while an adolescent is a person between sixteen and eighteen years of age (The Law on Safety and Health at Work of the Republic of Lithuania, 2026).

This distinction is closely linked to the Lithuanian education system. Education is compulsory until the age of sixteen (The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, 2026). Consequently, different legal requirements apply to children and adolescents entering employment relationships.

The employment of children is subject to stricter regulation and constitutes an exception to the general rule. Under Lithuanian labour law, a person normally acquires legal working capacity at the age of sixteen. However, children aged fourteen and above may also be employed under specific conditions. In such cases, the consent of parents or legal representatives is required and, where prescribed by law, the consent of the educational institution must also be obtained.

One of the most important safeguards established for minors concerns the regulation of working and rest time. Guarantees may be defined as material and non-material measures established by the state to ensure the effective protection of human rights and freedoms (Bagdanskis et al., 2018, p. 253).

Article 111 of the Labour Code defines working time as any period during which an employee is at the employer's disposal or performs duties under an employment contract. Working time also includes preparation for work, physiological and special breaks, mandatory health examinations, and other periods established by labour law. Rest time, by contrast, is time free from work obligations (Bagdanskis et al., 2018; Davulis, 2018, pp. 348-352; The Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania, 2026).

Working time and rest time are closely related. The duration of working time determines both the employee's rest period and remuneration. Since education remains compulsory until the age of sixteen and employment must not interfere with the educational process, the legislator has established stricter working time limitations for minors.

The legal requirements differ for children and adolescents. As a general rule, both groups may work during the academic year provided that work is not performed during school hours. Children may work up to six hours per day and thirty hours per week during school holidays. During the academic year, they may work up to twelve hours per week, including no more than two hours on a school day and no more than six hours on a non-school day. Night work is prohibited. Children may not work between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., and they are also prohibited from working before school between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. (The Law on Safety and Health at Work of the Republic of Lithuania, 2026).

These restrictions are consistent with European Union requirements. Council Directive 94/33/EC provides that children may work up to two hours on school days and up to twelve hours per week during the academic year. Outside the academic year, children may work up to seven hours per day and thirty-five hours per week, while adolescents aged fifteen and above may work up to eight hours per day and forty hours per week. The Directive also prohibits night work for children between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. (Council Directive 94/33/EC of 22 June 1994 on the protection of young people at work, 2019).

Lithuanian regulation therefore complies with the minimum standards established by European Union law. In some respects, it provides stronger protection, as the permitted working hours for children are lower than those allowed under the Directive.

Adolescents are permitted to work longer hours than children. Their working time may not exceed eight hours per day, including time spent in education, and forty hours per week, including school hours. Adolescents are also prohibited from performing night work. However, unlike children, they may work until 10 p.m., as night work is prohibited only between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. (The Law on Safety and Health at Work of the Republic of Lithuania, 2026). These requirements also correspond to Council Directive 94/33/EC of 22 June 1994 on the protection of young people at work (Council Directive 94/33/EC of 22 June 1994 on the protection of young people at work, 2019).

In addition to working time restrictions, minors are entitled to enhanced rest guarantees. Both children and adolescents must be granted at least two rest days per week, preferably consecutively, one of which must be Sunday. Where working time or practical training exceeds four hours, minors must also be provided with an additional break of at least thirty minutes. Furthermore, minors are entitled to a minimum uninterrupted daily rest period within each twenty-four-hour period. Children must receive at least fourteen consecutive hours of rest, while adolescents must receive at least twelve consecutive hours (The Law on Safety and Health at Work of the Republic of Lithuania, 2026). These guarantees correspond to the requirements established by Council Directive 94/33/EC and are intended to ensure that employment does not negatively affect a minor's health, development, or educational process (Council Directive 94/33/EC of 22 June 1994 on the protection of young people at work, 2019).

Minors are also granted broader rights regarding annual leave. Article 126(1) of the Labour Code defines annual leave as time free from work granted to an employee for rest and recovery while maintaining entitlement to holiday pay (The Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania, 2026). The Court of Justice of the European Union has emphasised that the purpose of paid annual leave is to enable employees to rest and enjoy leisure and recreational activities (Court of Justice of the European Union, Judgment of 10 September 2009 in Case C-277/08, *Francisco Vicente Pereda v Madrid Movilidad SA*, CURIA).

Both children and adolescents are entitled to extended annual leave of twenty-five working days. Additional safeguards apply to children. At the child's request, annual leave must be granted during school holidays. In addition, an uninterrupted rest period of at least fourteen calendar days during the summer holidays must be ensured. Even where a child works throughout the entire summer holiday period, he or she must still be granted at least fourteen consecutive calendar days of annual or unpaid leave.

Minors also benefit from the general annual leave guarantees applicable to all employees. At least one part of annual leave must consist of no fewer than ten working days. Furthermore, annual leave may not be replaced by monetary compensation, except upon the termination of employment relationships (The Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania, 2026).

The protection of minors extends not only to the performance of work but also to the termination of employment relationships. As a general rule, the grounds for terminating an employment contract with a minor do not differ from those applicable to adult employees. Article 53 of the Labour Code provides that an employment contract may be terminated by agreement of the parties, on the initiative of either party, at the employer's will, without the will of the parties, upon the death of a party, in other specific circumstances established by law, or on other grounds provided for in the Labour Code and other legal acts (Davulis, 2018, pp. 206-207).

However, Lithuanian law establishes one additional safeguard for children under sixteen years of age. Article 60(1)(3) of the Labour Code requires an employer to terminate an employment contract without prior notice if such a request is submitted by one of the child's parents or legal representatives, the physician supervising the child's health, or, during the academic year, the educational institution attended by the child (The Law on the Approval, Entry into Force and Implementation of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania, 2026).

From the employer's perspective, this provision may appear restrictive. Nevertheless, the rule serves an important protective purpose. Persons under sixteen years of age may lack sufficient life experience to assess whether employment is compatible with their health, education, or overall well-being. For this reason, the legislator grants parents, legal representatives, healthcare professionals, and educational institutions the right to initiate the prompt termination of employment where continued work may be contrary to the child's interests.

In summary, the Lithuanian legal framework governing the employment of minors largely implements the standards established by international and European Union law. In several areas, it provides stronger protection than the minimum standards required by European Union legislation. These safeguards include reduced working hours, restrictions on night work, enhanced rest periods, extended annual leave, and additional guarantees concerning the termination of employment relationships. Compliance with these requirements is a fundamental obligation of employers and serves to protect minors' rights to education, health, and safe working conditions.

Empirical analysis of the experiences and problematics of minor employees in Lithuania

The empirical part of the study examines the practical implementation of the legal safeguards governing the employment of minors in Lithuania. The analysis focuses on compliance with labour law requirements, the prevalence of labour law violations, and minors' awareness of their employment rights.

Of the 103 reported employment experiences, 65% related to female respondents and 35% to male respondents. Most respondents were young adults: 66% were aged 21-25 and 24.3% were aged 18-21. In addition, 3.9% of respondents were under the age of 18, while the remaining 5.8% were over 25 years of age. Consequently, more than 90% of respondents were younger than 25 years of age, indicating that the reported employment experiences as minors had occurred relatively recently.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the age at which the reported employment experience had occurred. The majority of employment experiences (84.5%) concerned adolescents aged 16-17, while 15.5% related to children aged 14-15. This distribution is consistent with the legal framework analysed in the theoretical part of the study. Employment opportunities for adolescents are significantly broader than those available to children, whose

employment is subject to stricter legal restrictions. As a result, adolescents participate in the labour market more frequently and are therefore more strongly represented in the survey results.

The following sections analyse compliance with the legal requirements governing the employment of minors and assess the prevalence of labour law violations identified through the survey.

Among respondents describing employment experiences at the age of 14-15 ($n = 16$), most reported relatively recent employment experiences, having worked within the previous five years. Employment was concentrated primarily in cities and towns (50%) and most frequently in the trade and customer service sector (50%). Other respondents reported employment in advertising, events, arts or sports activities, agriculture or seasonal outdoor work, and construction or repair work (see Figure 1). The majority of respondents (75%) worked during summer holidays, while the remaining respondents worked during the academic year.

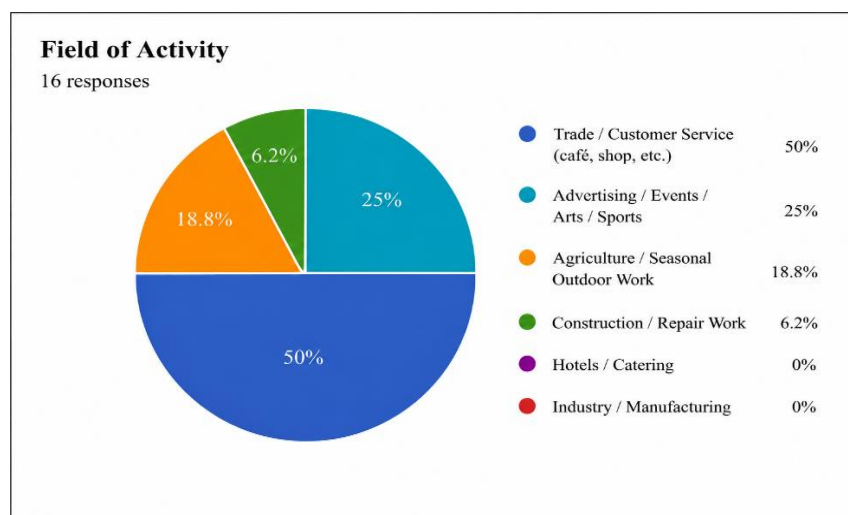


Figure 1. Distribution of employment experiences among respondents aged 14-15 by field of activity, % ($n = 16$)

The analysis of employment experiences during the academic year among respondents aged 14-15 ($n = 4$) revealed several significant breaches of legal requirements. Lithuanian law requires the consent of both parents (or guardians) and the educational institution when children are employed during the academic year. However, none of the respondents indicated that all required consents had been obtained. This finding suggests a lack of compliance with formal employment requirements and raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of legal safeguards intended to protect child employees.

Although all respondents stated that they did not work during school lessons and complied with the prohibition of night work, violations related to working and rest time requirements were identified. Twenty-five per cent of respondents exceeded the maximum permitted working time on school days, while 50% exceeded the daily working time limit on non-school days. Most notably, 75% exceeded the maximum weekly working time limit of 12 hours. These findings indicate that, although the fundamental restrictions related to education and night work were generally respected, compliance with working time limitations was considerably weaker.

The survey also revealed shortcomings in the protection of minors' rest time. Most respondents reported that they were not granted the mandatory 30-minute break when working for more than four hours per day. Although the majority indicated that they were provided with at least two rest days per week, some respondents selected the answer option "usually" rather than "always". This suggests that compliance with rest time requirements was inconsistent and depended largely on the practices of individual employers.

A similar pattern was observed among respondents aged 14-15 who worked during summer holidays ($n = 12$). One-third of respondents reported that the legally required parental or guardian consent had not been obtained before employment. In addition, 50% exceeded the maximum permitted daily working time of six hours, while one-third exceeded the weekly working time limit or worked later than the legally permitted time of 8 p.m.

The results also indicate shortcomings in ensuring adequate rest. Some respondents reported receiving mandatory breaks only rarely, despite the legal requirement to provide such breaks. Although most respondents were granted at least two rest days per week, several cases revealed deficiencies in ensuring proper rest periods. Furthermore, 25% of respondents who worked throughout the summer holiday period were not granted the mandatory uninterrupted 14-day leave period required by law.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that violations among employees aged 14-15 were most frequently related to working time limits, rest periods, and formal employment requirements. While the most fundamental protections, such as the prohibition of work during school hours and restrictions on night work, were generally observed, compliance with several other legal safeguards established specifically for child employees remained insufficient.

A total of 87 respondents described employment experiences at the age of 16-17. Employment was concentrated primarily in cities and towns (63%). The most common field of activity was trade and customer service (46%), followed by industry and manufacturing (18.4%), construction or repair work, and agriculture or seasonal outdoor work (see Figure 2). Smaller proportions of respondents worked in hotels and catering, advertising, events, arts or sports activities, and other sectors, including telephone sales and road maintenance.

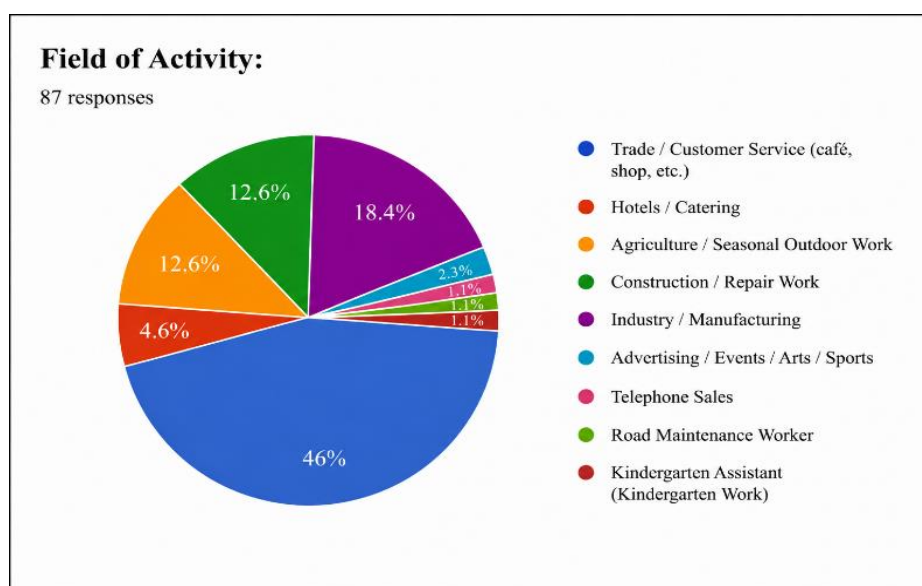


Figure 2. Distribution of employment experiences of respondents aged 16-17 according to field of activity, % ($n = 87$).

The majority of respondents (83.9%) worked during summer holidays, while 13.8% worked during the academic year and 2.3% reported working after leaving school. This distinction is important because Lithuanian labour law establishes different working and rest time requirements depending on whether a minor is employed during the academic year or outside it.

The analysis of employment experiences during the academic year among respondents aged 16-17 ($n = 12$) revealed several significant violations of legal requirements. Although most respondents (91.7%) stated that they did not work during school lessons, 8.3% reported that they did. This finding is particularly important because Lithuanian law explicitly prohibits employment that interferes with compulsory education.

The most common violations concerned working time limits. Three-quarters of respondents stated that the combined duration of school lessons and work usually or always exceeded eight hours per day. The same proportion reported exceeding the maximum weekly working time limit of forty hours. In addition, 41.7% finished work at 10 p.m. or later despite the prohibition of night work for minors of this age. These findings suggest that legal safeguards intended to ensure a balance between education and employment are not always effectively implemented in practice.

Shortcomings were also identified in relation to rest time. Some respondents reported that they rarely or never received the mandatory 30-minute break, while 41.6% indicated that they rarely or never had two rest days per week. This demonstrates that compliance with rest time requirements was inconsistent and depended largely on the practices of individual employers.

A similar pattern emerged among respondents aged 16-17 who worked during summer holidays or after leaving school ($n = 75$). Although the legal restrictions applicable during this period are less stringent than those applicable during the academic year, substantial violations were still identified. Almost half of respondents (48%) worked more than eight hours per day, while 45.3% exceeded the maximum weekly working time limit of forty hours. Furthermore, 24% reported finishing work at 10 p.m. or later.

The survey results also revealed shortcomings in the protection of minors' right to rest. Although some respondents reported receiving mandatory breaks and rest days, 30.6% stated that they rarely or never received a 30-minute break, while 10.7% rarely or never had two rest days per week. These findings indicate that compliance with working and rest time requirements remains problematic even during periods when minors are permitted to work longer hours.

The analysis of employment formalities among all respondents ($n = 103$) revealed additional concerns. A total of 34% of respondents reported that they had not signed a written employment contract, while 33% indicated that their employer had not notified Sodra of their employment. Given that a written employment contract and notification of employment to Sodra are fundamental requirements of lawful employment, these findings suggest that informal employment remains a significant issue among minor employees despite the legal obligation to formalise employment relationships before work begins.

The survey also identified shortcomings in the protection of occupational safety and health. Only 23.3% of respondents reported receiving proper workplace safety instruction, whereas 35% stated that they had received no safety instruction at all. Personal protective equipment was provided to 37.9% of respondents, while 26.2% received it only partially and 8.7% did not receive it at all. Particularly concerning is the fact that 22.3% of respondents believed that they had probably performed work prohibited for minors. This finding is particularly concerning because the prohibition of hazardous work constitutes one of the key

safeguards established by both Lithuanian and international labour law for the protection of minors.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the most common violations experienced by respondents aged 16-17 were related to excessive working hours, insufficient rest periods, deficiencies in employment formalities, and shortcomings in occupational safety and health. Although Lithuanian law provides a comprehensive system of safeguards for minor employees, the results indicate that these protections are not always fully implemented in practice.

In terms of remuneration, most respondents were paid either an hourly wage (52.4%) or a monthly salary (34%) (see Figure 3).

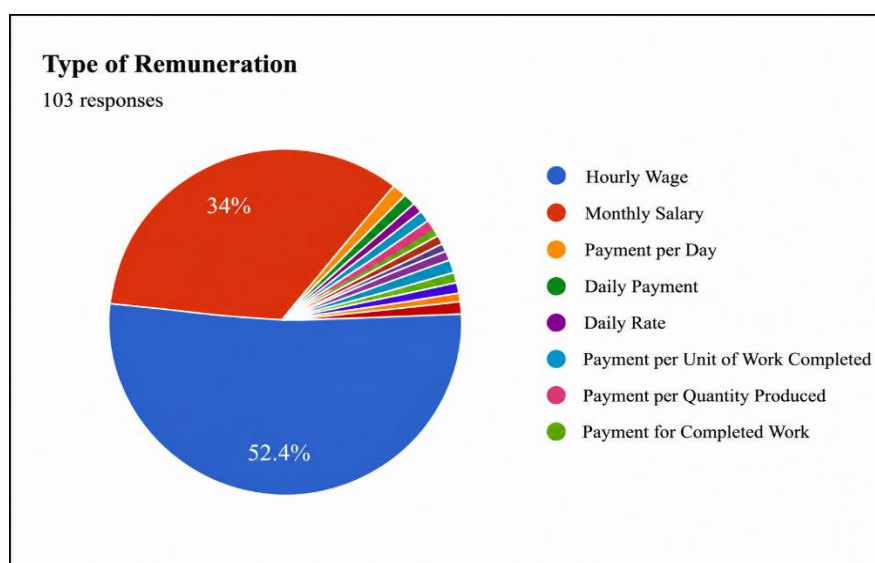


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents according to the type of remuneration received, % (n = 103).

Although remuneration was generally paid using standard payment arrangements, several findings indicate shortcomings in compliance with labour law requirements. A total of 7.8% of respondents reported receiving less than the applicable minimum wage, while 23.3% did not know whether their remuneration complied with the minimum wage requirements. This suggests that a considerable proportion of minor employees lack sufficient information about their employment rights and wage entitlements.

Most respondents (82.5%) stated that their wages were paid on time and in full. However, 41.7% reported receiving part of their remuneration unofficially, commonly referred to as payment “in an envelope”. Such practices not only violate labour and tax regulations but may also negatively affect employees’ social guarantees, including social insurance contributions and future benefit entitlements.

The survey also revealed manifestations of age-based discrimination. Discrimination during recruitment was reported by 5.8% of respondents, while 21.4% experienced discriminatory treatment in the workplace. These findings indicate that unequal treatment based on age remains a relevant issue for some minor employees.

Among respondents who experienced discrimination (n = 22), the most common forms were degrading remarks and bullying (68.2%), less favourable work schedules or shifts (50%), assignment of more dangerous tasks (22.7%), and lower pay for the same work compared with adult employees (18.2%) (see Figure 4).

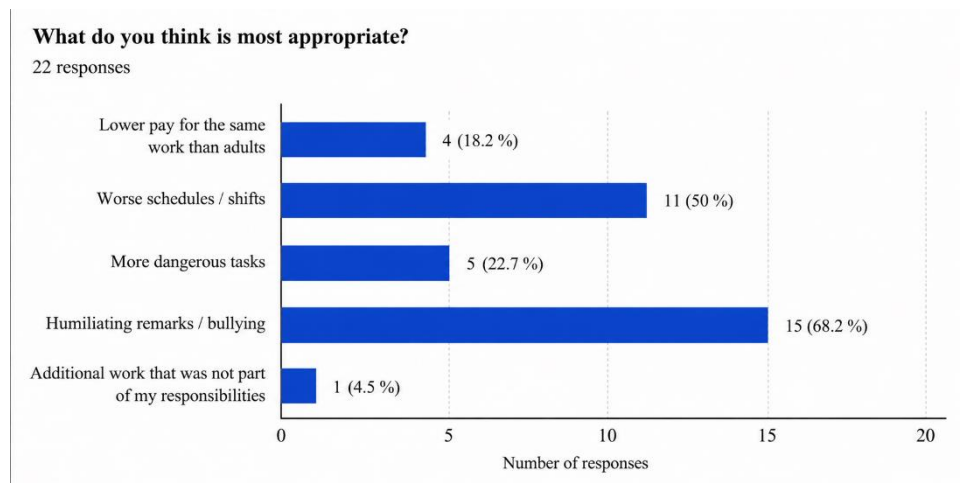


Figure 4. Forms of Discrimination Experienced in the Workplace, % (n = 22)

The prevalence of degrading treatment and unfavourable working conditions suggests that some employers may perceive minor employees as a more vulnerable group with limited ability to defend their rights. Such practices are inconsistent with the principle of equal treatment established in labour law.

The survey also demonstrated insufficient awareness of employment rights among minors. Only 15.5% of respondents stated that they knew their rights as minor employees, while 48.5% reported knowing them only partially. More than one-third of respondents (35.9%) indicated that they did not know their rights at all.

A particularly important finding is that only 5.8% of respondents sought assistance when faced with violations of their rights. The most common reasons for not seeking help were lack of knowledge of employment rights (66%), uncertainty about where to seek assistance (28%), fear of losing employment (20%), and disbelief that seeking assistance would be effective (16%) (see Figure 5).

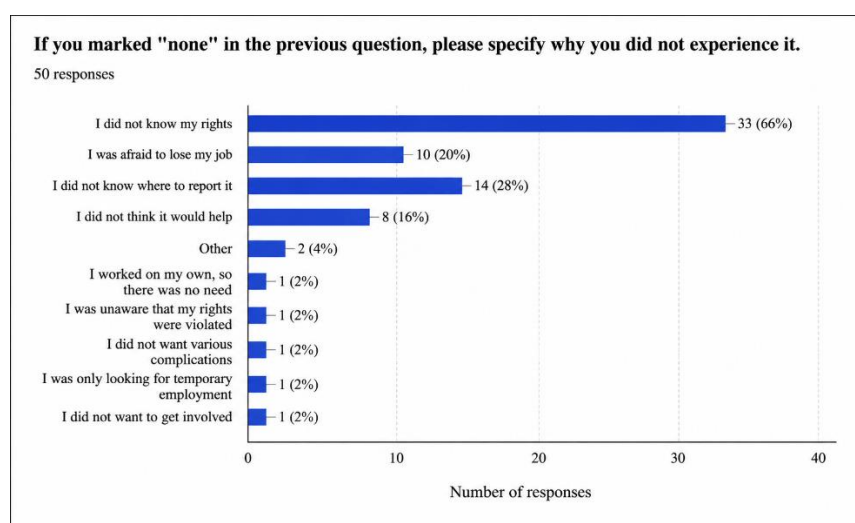


Figure 5. Distribution of reasons for not seeking assistance following violations of minor employees' rights, % (n = 50).

These findings suggest that the protection of minor employees depends not only on the existence of legal safeguards but also on awareness of those safeguards and access to effective support mechanisms. Even where legal protection exists, it may remain ineffective if minors do not know their rights or are reluctant to report violations.

The majority of respondents (91.3%) also indicated that schools should provide more information about the rights of minor employees. This finding highlights the important role of educational institutions in promoting legal awareness and preparing young people for participation in employment relationships.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the legal regulation governing the employment of minors is not implemented consistently in practice. The most common violations were related to working and rest time requirements, employment formalities, occupational safety and health, unofficial wage payments, and insufficient awareness of employment rights. Although Lithuanian law establishes a comprehensive framework for the protection of minor employees, significant shortcomings remain in its practical application. The findings suggest that more effective supervision mechanisms and greater efforts to improve minors' awareness of their employment rights are necessary to strengthen the protection of minor employees in practice.

Conclusions

The analysis of the national legal framework governing the employment of persons under eighteen years of age demonstrated that Lithuanian legislation establishes a comprehensive system of safeguards for minor employees. The Labour Code, the Law on Safety and Health at Work, and the Law on Education regulate the admission of minors to employment, working and rest time, annual leave, occupational safety and health requirements, and the termination of employment relationships. The analysis also showed that Lithuanian legal regulation is generally consistent with international and European Union standards and, in some areas, provides a higher level of protection than the minimum standards established by European Union law.

The empirical study identified several legal and practical issues arising in employment relationships involving minor employees. The most common violations were related to employment formalities, working and rest time requirements, occupational safety and health, unofficial wage payments, and age-based discrimination. Violations were identified among both children aged 14-15 and adolescents aged 16-17, indicating that the legal safeguards established for minor employees are not always effectively implemented in practice.

The results also revealed insufficient awareness of employment rights among minors. Most respondents knew their rights only partially or did not know them at all, while only a small proportion sought assistance when faced with potential violations. The main reasons for not seeking help were a lack of knowledge about employment rights, uncertainty regarding where to seek assistance, fear of losing employment, and doubts about the effectiveness of reporting violations.

The findings suggest that, despite the existence of a comprehensive legal framework, significant shortcomings remain in its practical application. Therefore, more effective supervision mechanisms, greater employer compliance with labour law requirements, and improved awareness of employment rights among minors are necessary to strengthen the protection of minor employees and ensure the effective implementation of existing legal safeguards in practice.

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