



# Šiuolaikiniai migracijos procesai

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## Policy and Media Discourses on Refugees in Lithuania: Shaping the Boundaries between Host Society and Refugees

**Summary.** This article examines the complex interactions of policy and media discourses and public attitudes as contextual factors which contribute to the creation of a social-cultural environment for the integration of refugees. It applies comparative integration context, system justification and sanctioned theories and identifies the discursive practices and implications for maintaining the existing socio-political system of the host country. Critical discourse analysis of policy, media, semi-structured and focus groups interviews of experts, refugees, and policy actors reveal the normative assumptions about integration policies which provide the prospects for interpretation about the creation of both distances and opportunities for interaction between the host society and refugees.

**Keywords:** refugees' integration policies, policy discourse, media discourse, public attitudes, Lithuania.

### Introduction

The number of refugees and asylum seekers constitutes a small part of Lithuanian society. Lithuania offers two types of international protection: refugee status (art. 86(1) of the Law on Legal Status of Aliens and the status of subsidiary protection (art. 87(1) of the Law on Legal Status of Aliens).<sup>1</sup> In this article we apply the more general concept of refugees which

<sup>1</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos įstatymas „Dėl užsieniečių teisinės padėties“, No. IX-2206, 2004 April 29, *Žin.*, 2004, No. 73-2539.

is usually indicated and described in policy and media discourses. The asylum procedure has been implemented in Lithuania since 1997, when the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and its Protocol (1967) were ratified and the Law on the Status of Refugees (later replaced by the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens on 30 April 2004) entered into force. In the past 20 years almost 700 persons have been granted refugee status and more than 500 persons received the status of subsidiary protection in the country.<sup>2</sup>

In 2015, Lithuania joined the European Commission Emergency Relocation Scheme and began the relocation of foreigners from the EU Member States that face numerous asylum seekers.<sup>3</sup> Lithuania has committed itself to receiving 1,105 refugees and has relocated 460 persons by the end of 2017. In accordance with unofficial estimates of March 2018, approximately 349 relocated asylum seekers had left the country.

Regardless of the small number of refugees in Lithuania, social distance between the majority population and refugees is relatively high. A Lithuanian public opinion poll of 2017<sup>4</sup> shows that more than half of respondents agree that refugees are a burden for national taxpayers and a threat to social welfare and are thus considered to make a very limited contribution to the national economy and enrichment of culture.<sup>5</sup> Most recent surveys on public attitudes towards refugees in Europe also demonstrate the negative views of society towards migrants and refugees, highlighting economic, cultural and security threats as explanatory factors.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, scientific studies of media discourses reveal the

<sup>2</sup> Migracijos departamentas, Prieglobsčio skyrius (Migration Department, Division of Asylum), „Prieglobstis Lietuvoje 2017 metais: metinė ataskaita“ (“Asylum in Lithuania 2017: Annual Report”), *mipas.lt*, 2018, accessed 2018 November 13, <http://mipas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2017ATASKAITA.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė. Nutarimas „Dėl užsieniečių perkėlimo į Lietuvos Respublikos teritoriją“, No. 628, 2015 June 22, last amendment 2018 March 17. *TAR*, 2018 March 16, No. 4097.

<sup>4</sup> The survey was performed by the survey company “Baltic Surveys” at the request of the Lithuanian Social Research Centre’s Institute for Ethnic Studies under the research “Prieglobstį gavusių užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo vertinimas ir integracijos procesų stebėseną” and funded under the Lithuanian Research Council (Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, *Reikminių tyrimų projektas „Prieglobstį gavusių užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo vertinimas ir integracijos procesų stebėseną“*. Projekto ataskaita, 2017c, accessed 2018 November 13, <http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Baigiamoji-ataskaita1.pdf>). The fieldwork of the survey was carried out from July 11 to August 3, 2017. A total of 1,050 Lithuanian residents, 15 years of age and older, from different districts of the country (117 sampling points) participated in the study. The error of the results does not exceed 3%, the margin of reliability 0.95. The public attitudes survey examines the Lithuanian public attitudes towards refugees and other ethnic, religious, and social groups (Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, “Visuomenės nuostatų monitoringo rezultatai”, in *Reikminių tyrimų projektas „Prieglobstį gavusių užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo vertinimas ir integracijos procesų stebėseną“*, 2017, 62–88, accessed 2018 November 13, <http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Baigiamoji-ataskaita1.pdf>).

<sup>5</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, “Visuomenės nuostatų monitoringo rezultatai”.

<sup>6</sup> Dempster, Helen and Hargrave, Karen, “Understanding Public Attitudes Towards Refugees and Migrants. Shaping Policy for Development”, *Working paper 512. Chatham House and ODI’s Forum of Refugee and Migration Policy*, 2017; Klaus, Witold et al., “Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Central European Countries: Reality, Politics and the Creation of Fear in Societies”, in *Refugees and Migrants in Law and Policy*, eds. H. Kury and S. Redo. Cham: Springer, 2018, 457–494; Hermanni, Hagen von and Neumann, Robert, “‘Refugees Welcome?’ The Interplay Between Perceived Threats and General Concerns on the Acceptance of Refugees – a Factorial Survey Approach in Germany”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45(3) (2019), 349–374, doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1459183; Dustmann, Christian and Preston, Ian P., “Racial and Economic Factors in Attitudes to Immigration”, *The B. E. Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy* 7(1) (2007), 1–39; Card, David, Dustmann, Christian and Preston, Ian, “Understanding Attitudes to Immigration: The Immigration and Minority Module of the First European Social Survey”, in *CREAM Discussion Paper 03/05* (2005), 1–43.

prevalence of negative framing of refugees associating them with a threat to national security, culture, welfare or health care systems.<sup>7</sup> Similar trends of refugees' images could be identified in Lithuanian research which analyzes media's narratives and visuals.<sup>8</sup>

This article examines national context for refugees' integration in Lithuania in the period of 2015-2017 following the research findings which suggest examining policy discourse, media discourse, and public attitudes within the national context in which they are formed and therefore could be best understood.<sup>9</sup> Refugees' successful resettlement in new host countries, as some authors argue, depends on various social and political factors such as relatively positive attitudes of the host society, protection of well-being of refugees, and their effective integration into new host countries.<sup>10</sup> The article analyzes broader questions of refugees' integration in the context of public attitudes towards refugees and aims at contributing to European research on migration and integration studies. It focuses on contextual factors such as policy, media, and social discourses to better understand how policy and media discourses can create opportunities either for detaching or for bridging between the host society and newcomers.

## Applied Theoretical Framework

There is an abundant academic literature on attitudes towards immigrants that highlights divergent patterns of public opinion towards immigrants and refugees within Europe<sup>11</sup> and wide-spread anti-immigrant emotions across Europe.<sup>12</sup> Research suggests a complex analysis of individual (micro-level) and structural (macro-level) determinants to explain

<sup>7</sup> Berry, Mike, Garcia-Blanco, Inaki, Moore, Kerry, "Report Prepared for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees", Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries. Cardiff: Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, 2015; Greussing, Esther and Boomgaarden, Hajo G., "Shifting the Refugee Narrative? An Automated Frame Analysis of Europe's 2015 Refugee Crisis", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43(11) (2017), 1749–1774; Lawlor, Andrea and Tolley, Erin, "Deciding Who's Legitimate: News Media Framing of Immigrants and Refugees", *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017), 967–991; Parker, Samuel, "Unwanted Invaders: The Representation of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK and Australian Print Media", *Myth and Nation* 23 (2015), [http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_404384\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_404384_en.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Balsiūnaitė, Ieva, "Neapykantos kalbos raiška Lietuvos interneto dienraščių publikacijose apie pabėgėlius", *Komunikacija ir informacija / Communication and Information* 11 (2016), 78–102; Matas, Darius, "The Image of Refugees and the Features of Its Development in Lithuanian Online Newspapers", *Komunikacija ir informacija / Communication and Information* 10 (2016), 72.

<sup>9</sup> Dempster and Hargrave, "Understanding Public Attitudes Towards Refugees and Migrants. Shaping Policy for Development".

<sup>10</sup> Esses, Victoria M., Hamilton, Leah K. and Gaucher, Danielle, "The Global Refugee Crises: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications for Improving Public Attitudes and Facilitating Refugee Resettlement", *Special Issues and Policy Review* 11(1) (2017), 78–123.

<sup>11</sup> Heath, Anthony et al., "Contested Terrain: Explaining Divergent Patterns of Public Opinion Towards Immigration Within Europe", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(3) (2020), 475–488. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2019.1550145; Hermann von and Neumann, "Refugees Welcome? The Interplay Between Perceived Threats and General Concerns on the Acceptance of Refugees – a Factorial Survey Approach in Germany".

<sup>12</sup> Davidov, Eldad and Semyonov, Moshe, "Attitudes Towards Immigrants in European Societies", *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 58(5) (2017), 359–366; Janmaat, Jan G. and Keating, Avril, "Are Today's Youth More Tolerant? Trends in Tolerance Among Young People in Britain." *Ethnicities* 19(1) (2019), 44–65; Klaus et al., "Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Central European Countries: Reality, Politics and the Creation of Fear in Societies".

the tendencies of population attitudes and their links with immigration and integration policies.<sup>13</sup> Many research findings show the construction of perceptions of economic, symbolic (cultural), and security threats as the most influential determinants that contribute to the attitudes of the host society.<sup>14</sup>

The contextual or macro-level factors, such as size of the migrant population, national immigration and integration policies, and claims by national media about immigration, matter in an analysis of the effects of political and social responses to migration and integration.<sup>15</sup> The quantitative analysis of correlations of these structural determinants with public attitudes suggests that perceived or real tendencies of flows of migrants and refugees, restrictive and exclusionary integration policies, and negative media reports about potential risks of terrorism and economic, political, and cultural insecurity may all contribute to more negative attitudes of the host society.<sup>16</sup>

A slightly different perspective on the analysis of population attitudes suggests theoretical approaches that analyze political, social, and cultural contexts for settlement and adaptation of migrant communities. By examining complex pathways of upwards or downward mobility, theories of segmented assimilation and new assimilation theory, for example, claim that migrants confront a number of contextual factors of the receiving society in their efforts to adapt in the host countries.<sup>17</sup> The recent studies recognized limitations of the

<sup>13</sup> Coebanu, Alin M. and Escandell, Xavier, "Comparative Analysis of Public Attitudes Towards Immigrants and Immigration Using Multinational Survey Data: A Review of Theories and Research", *Annual Review of Sociology* 36(1) (2010), 309–330.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; Davidov, Eldad, et al., "Direct and Indirect Predictors of Opposition to Immigration in Europe: Individual Values, Cultural Values and Symbolic Threat", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(3) (2020), 553–573. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1550152; Davidov and Semyonov, "Attitudes Towards Immigrants in European Societies"; Blažytė, Giedrė, "Visuomenės nuostatos imigracijos atžvilgiu ir jų atsiradimo prieštados", *Etniškumo studijos* 1 (2015), 107–134; Hermanni von and Neumann, "Refugees Welcome? The Interplay Between Perceived Threats and General Concerns on the Acceptance of Refugees – a Factorial Survey Approach in Germany"; Klaus et al., "Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Central European Countries: Reality, Politics and the Creation of Fear in Societies".

<sup>15</sup> Heath et al., "Contested Terrain: Explaining Divergent Patterns of Public Opinion Towards Immigration Within Europe"; Coebanu and Escandell, "Comparative Analysis of Public Attitudes Towards Immigrants and Immigration Using Multinational Survey Data: A Review of Theories and Research"; Callens, Marie-Sophie, "Integration Policies and Public Opinion: In Conflict or in Harmony?" *LISER Working Papers*, 2015, accessed 2018 November 13, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2694592>; Ueffing, Philipp, Rowe, Francisco and Mulder, Clara H., "Differences in Attitudes Towards Immigration Between Australia and Germany: The Role of Immigration Policy", *Comparative Population Studies* 40(4) (2015), 437–464; Green, Eva G. T. et al., "When Integration Policies Shape the Impact of Intergroup Contact on Threat Perception. A Multilevel Study Across 20 European Countries", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(3) (2020), 631–648. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1550159; Callens, Marie-Sophie and Mueleman, Bart, "Do Integration Policies Relate to Economic and Cultural Threat Perceptions? A Comparative Study in Europe", *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 58(5) (2016), 367–391.

<sup>16</sup> Davidov et al., "Direct and Indirect Predictors of Opposition to Immigration in Europe: Individual Values, Cultural Values and Symbolic Threat"; Callens and Mueleman, "Do Integration Policies Relate to Economic and Cultural Threat Perceptions? A Comparative Study in Europe"; Esses, Hamilton and Gaucher, "The Global Refugee Crises: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications for Improving Public Attitudes and Facilitating Refugee Resettlement".

<sup>17</sup> Portes, Alejandro and Rumbaut, Rubenn G., *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. New York: University of California Press, Russell Sage Foundation, 2001; Portes, Alejandro and Rivas, Aejandro, "The Adaptation of Migrant Children", *The Future of Children* 21(1) (2011), 219–246; Portes, Alejandro and Zhou, Min, "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530 (1993), 74–96; Kwok-Bun, Chan and Pluss, Caroline, "Modelling Migrant Adaptation: Coping with Social Strain, Assimilation, and Non-integration", *International Sociology* 28(1)

quantitative analysis of explicit links between contextual factors that affect public attitudes on the one hand<sup>18</sup> and linear processes of migrants' adaptation embedded in the segmented assimilation and new assimilation theoretical framework on the other.<sup>19</sup> Comparative integration context theory offers an examination of social and political contexts for better understanding social and cultural participation, belonging, and integration as on-going processes.<sup>20</sup> An analysis of three basic types of discursive contexts, namely, political discourse, the social discourse of everyday communication and interaction, and media discourse, serves as an influential factor in the construction of a political and social climate which might explicitly or implicitly affect possibilities and positions of immigrants and their children in society.<sup>21</sup> Research suggests investigating the contextual factors and understanding the mechanism to maintain existing socio-political systems (system justification theory) or support the change of established status quo (system-sanctioned theory)<sup>22</sup> which might lead to society's reduced or increased support for refugees' integration processes.

In addition, research has shown that European media discourses tend to create negative public perceptions of refugees through superficial, inaccurate, fragmentary, and repetitive information without contextualization.<sup>23</sup> Media are a very important and usually the sole source of information for society on the European refugee crisis and its political consequences.<sup>24</sup> The media apply various discursive techniques and depict refugees in association with threats (to national security, culture, welfare or health systems), undermining the validity of refugees' claims, linking Islam with terrorism, and dehumanizing refugees.<sup>25</sup>

(2013), 48–65; Alba, Richard, Jimenez, Tomas R. and Marrow, Helen B., "Mexican Americans as a Paradigm for Contemporary Intra-group Heterogeneity", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37(3) (2009), 446–466.

<sup>18</sup> Callens and Mueleman, "Do Integration Policies Relate to Economic and Cultural Threat Perceptions? A Comparative Study in Europe".

<sup>19</sup> Crul, Maurice, "Super-diversity vs. Assimilation: How Complex Diversity in Majority-minority Cities Challenges the Assumptions of Assimilation", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46(1) (2016), 54–68; Grzymala-Kozłowska, Aleksandra and Philimore, Jenny, "Introduction Rethinking Integration. New Perspectives on Adaptation and Settlement in the Era of Super-diversity", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44(2) (2018), 179–196.

<sup>20</sup> Crul and Schneider, "Comparative Integration Context Theory: Participation and Belonging in New Diverse European Cities".

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*; Blinder, Scott, "Imagined Immigration: The Impact of Different Meanings of 'Immigrants' in Public Opinion and Policy Debates in Britain", *Political Studies* 63(1) (2013), 80–100.

<sup>22</sup> Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher, "The Global Refugee Crises: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications for Improving Public Attitudes and Facilitating Refugee Resettlement".

<sup>23</sup> Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, "Report Prepared for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees", 8; Abid, Raith Zeher, Manan, Shakila Abdul and Rahman, Zuhair Abdul Amir Abdul, "A Flood of Syrians Has Slowed to a Trickle: The Use of Metaphors in the Representation of Syrian Refugees in the Online Media News Reports of Host and Non-host Countries", *Discourse & Communication* 11(2) (2017), 121–140; Blinder, "Imagined Immigration: The Impact of Different Meanings of 'Immigrants' in Public Opinion and Policy Debates in Britain".

<sup>24</sup> Greussing and Boomgaarden, "Shifting the Refugee Narrative? An Automated Frame Analysis of Europe's 2015 Refugee Crisis", 1764.

<sup>25</sup> Szyłko-Kwas, Joanna, Gajlewicz-Korab, Katarzyna, Grutza, Anna and Jupowicz-Ginalska, Anna, "Immigrants in Polish and German Online Media: A Comparative Analysis", *Komunikacija ir informacija / Communication and Information* 12 (2018), 39–72; Allen, William, Blinder, Scott and McNeil, Robert, "Media Reporting of Migrants and Migration", in *World Migration Report 2018*, Geneva: IOM, 2017; Lawlor and Tolley, "Deciding Who's Legitimate: News Media Framing of Immigrants and Refugees"; Abid, Manan and Rahman, "A Flood of Syrians Has Slowed to a Trickle: The Use of Metaphors in the Representation of Syrian Refugees in the Online Media News Reports of Host and Non-host Countries".

This article integrates several theoretical approaches and suggests underpinning the complexities of interaction with contextual factors such as policy, media discourses, and public attitudes which matter to sustain the normative assumptions about the economic, social, and cultural boundaries of the host society with a limited window for refugees' acceptance and inclusion. Based on the integration context theoretical framework we analyze how these three contextual factors operate and interplay to identify the opportunities and barriers for refugees' integration.<sup>26</sup> The complex nexus of policy and media towards public attitudes suggests grasping discursive practices that adhere to the perceived threat to the current socio-political system. Nevertheless, official governmental support and positive media discourses towards refugees can change the negative dynamics and serve as a framework for reducing the threat and fostering more favourable public attitudes of the host society. The article presents empirical data on refugees' integration in Lithuania and suggests grasping the complexities of the discursive factors in both responding to society's concerns about perceived socio-economic and symbolic threats towards refugees and reshaping public opinion in a broader social context.

## Methodological Approach

The present article applies discourse analysis of the refugees' integration policy documents and qualitative interview methods to examine the policy context for integration in Lithuania. The article inquires into legal (Law on Legal Status of Aliens, Law on Citizenship) and policy (The Action Plan on Implementation of Foreigners Integration Policies for 2015-2017; Regulations for Support for Persons who are Granted Asylum in Lithuania to Assist them in the Integration Process (hereinafter – Regulation) documents, that explicitly address integration policies for refugees' integration to capture the concepts and domains that the state operationalizes to open the opportunities for integration. Discursive framing of policies, as feminist research highlights, provides opportunities to uncover what and how the problem is represented in the documents (“diagnosis”) and which solutions are proposed (“prognosis”).<sup>27</sup> Mieke Verloo defines the policy frame as “an organizing principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included.”<sup>28</sup> We follow this methodological approach of policy frame analysis and analyze refugees' integration policies as a normative policy process in which integration is defined as a problem and normatively framed concrete measures are designed to achieve the expected results to solve the problem.<sup>29</sup> Critical frame analysis helps to uncover how

<sup>26</sup> Esses, Hamilton and Gaucher, “The Global Refugee Crises: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications for Improving Public Attitudes and Facilitating Refugee Resettlement”.

<sup>27</sup> Verloo, Mieke, “Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Europe. A Frame Analysis Approach”, *The Greek Review of Social Research* 117(B') (2005), 11–34; Forest, Maxime and Lombardo, Emanuela, *The Europeanization of Gender Equality Policies. A Discursive–Sociological Approach*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Verloo, “Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Europe. A Frame Analysis Approach”, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Callens, “Integration Policies and Public Opinion: In Conflict or in Harmony?”

integration is conceptualized, where and in which structures integration problems and their solutions are located. The applied discursive analysis provides answers to questions on how the state defines who has access to citizenship and political recognition, how access to welfare and equal footing is ensured in society, and how the environment for diversity is fostered. By examining the state's formal regulations of the legal-political, socio-economic, and cultural dimensions of refugees' integration this framework helps to capture the empirical reality that refugees face in the integration process.

The individual semi-structured interviews with 14 experts (service providers, employers, and national and international migration experts), 12 relocated refugees, of whom five were single men and one was single woman and six were men who have families, and three focus groups with government, municipal and NGOs representatives<sup>30</sup> have brought different voices which reflect and contribute to the policy frame analysis. The findings of interviews reflect the most recurrent themes concerning the positions, opinions, and interests of diverse actors about integration processes, outcomes, and expectations.

The investigation of the main themes, topics, the rhetoric of the articles, and the predominant argumentation in the publications about refugees in the Lithuanian media spanning a two-year period (from March 2015 to March 2017) reveals the images constructed about refugees. For the analysis of Lithuanian media discourse on refugees this article examines six of the most popular Lithuanian online newspapers, namely "Delfi.lt"; "15min.lt"; "Lietuvos rytas.lt"; "Vz.lt", "Alfa.lt and "Tv3.lt"<sup>31</sup>. Using associated keywords, 1071 articles on refugees in Lithuania were selected for the research through the internet monitoring system Newspoint. Criteria of popularity (the most popular online news portals based on "Gemius" audience research data<sup>32</sup>) were used for selecting the articles for

<sup>30</sup> 14 interviewed experts (EX) are the following 4 social workers, 1 psychologist, 2 NGO experts in the field of foreigners' integration, 2 school directors, 2 businessmen, 3 representatives of International organizations. 12 interviewed refugees (RG) Focus groups (FG) covered three different institutional settings: 1) governmental institutions (5 representatives from each institution: Ministry of Social Security and Labor, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Health and Labor Exchange), 2) municipalities: representatives of 6 municipalities: Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, Kedainiai. Elektrenai and Jonava), and 4 representatives of NGOs that work in the field of foreigners' integration (Caritas, Red Cross, Maltese organization). The individual experts and focus groups were asked to share their experiences and present their opinions on the state's effort to develop and implement integration policies in six main fields of integration: legal measures, infrastructure and human resources, financial commitments, institutional cooperation, awareness raising and media, and socio-economic measures. Relocated refugees were asked to share their stories of arrival to Lithuania, experiences of their residence in Refugees' Support Centre; experiences of independent living in the municipalities; access to employment; communication with the state institutions; state service providers and NGOs; and experiences of participation and interaction with local communities and society in general. The interviews were conducted by the research fellows of the Institute for Ethnic Studies of the Lithuanian Social Research Center Monika Frejute-Rakauskienė, Karolis Žibas and Vilana Pilinkaite Sotirovič in 2016–2017 under the research "Prieglobstį gavusių užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo vertinimas ir integracijos procesų stebėseną" funded under the Lithuanian Research Council (Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras 2017).

<sup>31</sup> The Lithuanian media discourse analysis was performed by the senior researcher Monika Frėjutė-Rakauskienė under the research "Prieglobstį gavusių užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo vertinimas ir integracijos procesų stebėseną" funded under the Lithuanian Research Council.

<sup>32</sup> 'Gemius', 'gemius Audience multiplatform', 2015 December, 2014 December, accessed 2019 July 29, <http://media-house.com/tinklarastis/r-rimkunaite-kaip-per-2015-uosius-metus-pasikeite-interneto-portalu-skaitomumas-ir-kas-tikruju-yra-didziausi/>; 'Gemius', 'gemius Audience', 2016 November, accessed 2019 July 29, <http://www.gemius.lt/interneto-ziniasklaidos-naujienos/lapkriti-internautus-trauke-specializuotos-svetaines-3333.html>.

analysis; therefore, Lithuanian online dailies in other languages (such as Polish and Russian) were excluded from the study. Principles of critical discourse analysis were applied to investigate the peculiarities of the content of articles on (various areas of) refugees' integration and asylum (resettlement) policies.<sup>33</sup> "Discourse" refers to sets of representations, common or prevailing in a particular community or group, and formally describable as idealized cognitive models, covering a range of representation and validation strategies. "Recurring topoi" (Burden, Character, Crime, Culture, Danger, Disadvantage, Disease, Displacement, Exploitation, and Finance) and "typical associations" classified in Christopher Hart's study on new perspectives in analyzing the immigration discourses and specific to the description of immigration<sup>34</sup> were applied in analyzing the widespread images of refugees in Lithuanian press discourse.

The number of articles related to certain frequently repeated themes identified the frequency of attention to refugees in Europe and Lithuania. Analysis of the publications in Lithuanian media published in the period of March 2015–March 2017 suggests the following recurrent themes on the issues of refugees' migration and integration processes: (1) the relocation of refugees and relocated refugees in Lithuania (449 articles); (2) the integration of refugees and its aspects (religion, labor market, housing, health care, education, and language, 268 articles); (3) the challenges of the "migration crisis" for Lithuania and other countries (209 articles); and (4) the attitudes of Lithuanian society to the "migration crisis" and refugees (145 articles).

## Integration Frameworks for Refugees in Policy and Media Discourses

There is much discussion in academic research about the limitations of the analysis of the concept of integration.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, it continues to dominate in policy discourses about foreigners' adaptation and incorporation into the receiving society.

For decades, the Government of Lithuania did not prioritize foreigners' integration policies due to the low numbers of migrants to Lithuania. The state framed the integration areas for persons who are granted asylum in Lithuania (recognised refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) in the Law on Legal Status of Aliens.<sup>36</sup> The law does not define the concept of integration, but outlines integration measures, which are located in the domain of welfare policies and cover support to learn the state language, access to education, employment, housing, social support, health care support, and awareness

<sup>33</sup> van Dijk, Teun A., *Communicating Racism: Ethnic Prejudice in Thought and Talk*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987; van Dijk, Teun A., *Ideology. A Multidisciplinary Approach*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000; Hart, Christopher, *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science. New Perspectives on Immigration Discourse*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Hart, *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science. New Perspectives on Immigration Discourse*, 67.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Grzymala-Kozłowska, Philimore (2017) on this discussion.

<sup>36</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos įstatymas „Dėl užsieniečių teisinės padėties“, No. IX-2206, 2004 April 29, *Žin.*, 2004, No. 73-2539.

raising of the host society about refugee integration. This socio-welfare framework of integration has become the baseline for integration policies in later decades.

The Action Plan on Implementation of Foreigners Integration Policies for 2015–2017 (hereafter – Action Plan) is one of the first main policy documents on integration that targets broader group of foreigners, including persons who are granted asylum in Lithuania and migrants.<sup>37</sup> This document defines integration as a mutual adaptation process of foreigners and host society and that both groups need to commit themselves in their own way: foreigners to put in an effort to integrate into the host society and the host society to make an effort to accept foreigners in their life. This document prioritizes foreigners' integration in labor market and education, and supports their participation in host society's life. The measures cover development of better conditions for access to the labor market (provision of Lithuanian language courses and social-legal-psychological consultations) and equal access to education based on individual needs and possibilities. Among the seven priorities of integration policies, this is the only one that calls for the host society to inform the public about the positive aspects of migration through awareness-raising campaigns.

In 2016 the Government of Lithuania approved Regulations for Support for Persons who are Granted Asylum in Lithuania to Assist them in the Integration Process (hereinafter Regulations).<sup>38</sup> This specific policy document targets exclusively refugees and defines the framework under which the integration is organized, supported, and sustained or renewed. Here integration is defined as a one-way process in which refugees have to make an effort to adapt to and engage in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the Republic of Lithuania.<sup>39</sup>

The documents on integration draw the representation of the problem of integration along material lines through the access and redistribution of resources for foreigners as a target group. The dominant frame of integration, thus, covers the services for guiding refugees to build their independent life in the new host country. The limited awareness-raising measures suggest the marginal frame of integration that hardly addresses the issues on cultural diversity. This might support the interpretation that the host society needs to learn facts about migrants and refugees in order to be persuaded away from anti-immigrants' attitudes, prejudices, and stereotypes.

The media covers diverse recurrent themes to address the context for refugees' opportunities to settle and integrate in the host society. Nevertheless, most often articles on refugee's integration repeat the dominant policy framework and describe the process focusing on services for housing, health care, language, and education in Lithuania. An important focus is also on financial support for the refugees' integration process.

Additionally, the integration theme is significantly merged into the information about the flows and numbers (planned or real) of relocated refugees, their age, family status and

<sup>37</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministras, Įsakymas „Dėl užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo 2015–2017 m. veiksmų plano patvirtinimo“, No. A1-683, 2014 December 31. *TAR*, 2014 December 31, No. 21297.

<sup>38</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, Nutarimas „Dėl Valstybės paramos prieglobsčio gavėjų integracijai teikimo tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo“, No. 998, 2016 October 5. *TAR*, 2016 October 13, No. 25094.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

composition, and professional background obtained in the country of origin. In this context, the recurrent themes in media cover the challenges of the “migration crisis” for the policies and actions of the EU institutions and predominantly describe the “flows” of migrants and potential security threats, including the threat of terrorism. The headlines of the articles reinforce threats and fears about refugees’ migration to Europe by exposing a variety of myths about the negative impact on host societies (e.g., “The holey selection of migrants: drug addicts and economic migrants have been brought to Lithuania”;<sup>40</sup> “Refugees and illnesses: real danger and myths”;<sup>41</sup> “No savings for refugees: they will be given enviable benefits”;<sup>42</sup> “Accepting the Muslim refugee? Prepare to accept a Muslim terrorist”;<sup>43</sup> “Will we provide the refugees with the environment of a Roma settlement?”;<sup>44</sup> “Mass immigration – a threat to national security”;<sup>45</sup> etc.). Similar developments could be identified in the research of other European countries highlighting the threat to national security and economic costs in media discourse while the description of refugees as victims of the situation is less detectable.<sup>46</sup>

Both policy and media discourse address the same framework of the measures for refugee integration, such as access to the labor market and education, language courses, social services, and awareness raising. This allows the interpretation that the policy provides opportunities for the refugees to settle in the host country. However, through communication of information about refugees the media discuss the integration framework in the context of threats for the host society. This kind of communication by media impacts on shaping uncertainty and concerns about migrants.<sup>47</sup> Perceived threats usually have stronger impact on the formation of negative attitudes regardless of the real factors, which do not demonstrate any actual threat.<sup>48</sup> The public opinion poll carried out in 2017 reiterates the

<sup>40</sup> “Skylėta pabėgėlių atranka – į Lietuvą atvežtas ir narkomanas, ir ekonominiai migrantai“, *15min.lt*, 2016 October 21, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/skyleta-pabegeliu-atranka-i-lietuva-atveztas-ir-narkomanas-ir-ekonominiai-migrantai-56-700847>.

<sup>41</sup> BNS, “Pabėgėliai ir ligos: realus pavojus ir mitai“, *Delfi.lt*, 2015 September 14, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.delfi.lt/sveikata/sveikatos-naujienos/pabegeliai-ir-ligos-realus-pavojus-ir-mitai.d?id=69002296>.

<sup>42</sup> Spurytė, Virginija, “Pabėgėliams eurų negailės: bus skiriamos pavydėtinos išmokos“, *Delfi.lt*, 2015 September 16, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/pabegeliams-euru-negailles-bus-skiriamos-pavydetinos-ismokos.d?id=69010270>.

<sup>43</sup> Bačiulis, Audrius, “Priimi musulmoną pabėgėlį? Ruoškis priimti ir musulmoną teroristą“, *Tv3.lt*, 2015 November 17, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/lietuva/852616/audrius-baciulis-priimi-musulmona-pabegeli-ruoskis-priimti-ir-musulmona-terorista>.

<sup>44</sup> Čyvas, Tomas, “Užtikrinsime pabėgėliams taboro buitį?“, *Lrytas.lt*, 2015 June 4, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvsdiena/aktualijos/2015/06/04/news/uztikrinsime-pabegeliams-taboro-buiti--3643672/>.

<sup>45</sup> Lapėnas, Saulius, “Masinė imigracija – grėsmė nacionaliniam saugumui“, *Lrytas.lt*, 2015 September 9, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvsdiena/aktualijos/2015/09/09/news/masine-imigracija-gresme-nacionaliniam-saugumui-2923008/>.

<sup>46</sup> Greussing, Esther and Boomgaarden, Hajo G., “Shifting the Refugee Narrative? An Automated Frame Analysis of Europe’s 2015 Refugee Crisis”; Innes, Alexandria J., “When the Threatened Become the Threat: The Construction of Asylum Seekers in British Media Narratives”, *International Review* 24(4) (2010), 456–477; van Gap 2005 cited from Greussing and Boomgaarden, “Shifting the Refugee Narrative? An Automated Frame Analysis of Europe’s 2015 Refugee Crisis”, 1763.

<sup>47</sup> Blinder, “Imagined Immigration: The Impact of Different Meanings of ‘Immigrants’ in Public Opinion and Policy Debates in Britain”; Kosho, Joana, “Media Influence on Public Opinion Attitudes Towards the Migration Crisis”, *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research* 5(05) (2016), 86–91.

<sup>48</sup> Callens, “Integration Policies and Public Opinion: In Conflict or in Harmony?”

same tendencies of unfriendly conditions for the newcomers and demonstrates a large social distance (the degree of closeness or alienation of social, ethnic, and religious groups) between respondents of the survey and such migrants groups as Muslims and refugees. Almost half (45%) of Lithuanian respondents claimed that they wouldn't like to live in the same neighbourhood with Muslims and 39% – with refugees.<sup>49</sup> Muslims and refugees are not most welcome co-workers as well. 37% of the respondents claimed that they wouldn't like to work at the same workplace with Muslims and 30% – with refugees. An even higher proportion of the Lithuanian population wouldn't like to rent an apartment to these groups of people. Around 49% of the respondents expressed their unwillingness to rent an apartment to Muslims and 42% – to refugees.<sup>50</sup>

## Making boundaries or creating prospects: contexts for refugees' integration

### *Socio-Economic Conditions for Integration*

In the context of refugees' migration in Europe in 2015,<sup>51</sup> the Government of Lithuania revised its policies of relocation for foreigners who need asylum and committed to relocate 1035 foreigners from EU countries and 70 from non-EU countries until 31-12-2017.<sup>52</sup> In total, the government committed to relocate 1105 refugees, which is a very small number and share within the EU countries. This policy commitment to a certain extent corresponds to the social context that justifies the government's decision. Data of the public opinion poll of 2017 show that a majority of respondents (79%) support the government's decision to strictly control the influx of refugees and more than half of the respondents (55%) refuse to participate in the refugee resettlement and relocation process.<sup>53</sup>

The social integration of refugees outlined in Regulations<sup>54</sup> defines the conditions for monetary subsidies and its duration, possibilities to access labor market and education, including language courses, health care, and other social services to help refugees to sustain themselves and participate in the life of society. This set of measures is rather positively accepted by the host society. Data of public opinion poll of 2017 suggest that most respondents in Lithuania agree on access to education for refugee children (72%), access to Lithuanian language courses (70%), and assistance in managing official documents (for

<sup>49</sup> For comparison the highest percent of unwillingness to live in the same neighbourhood is towards Roma people (64%), the lowest is towards Belarusians (4.7%) (see more in Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Visuomenės nuostatų monitoringo rezultatai").

<sup>50</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Visuomenės nuostatų monitoringo rezultatai".

<sup>51</sup> UNHCR Mid-Year Trends 2015, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, Nutarimas „Dėl užsieniečių perkėlimo į Lietuvos Respublikos teritoriją“, No. 628, 2015 June 22, last amendment 2018 March 17.

<sup>53</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Visuomenės nuostatų monitoringo rezultatai".

<sup>54</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Nutarimo „Dėl valstybės paramos prieglobsčio gavėjų integracijos teikimo tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo“ analizė", in *Reikminių tyrimų projektas „Prieglobstį gavusių užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo vertinimas ir integracijos procesų stebėseną“*, 2017d, 5–62, accessed 2018 November 13, <http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Baigiamoji-ataskaita1.pdf>.

residence permits, social benefits, etc.) (up to 64%). More than a half support labor market integration measures (59%), the provision of free legal consultations (55%), and employing more social workers to assist refugees (53%). Almost half of the respondents (48%) agree that the state should pay more attention to the refugees' integration.<sup>55</sup> This complex interaction of policy discourse and public attitudes might suggest the options envisioned by the host society about refugees' settlement which suggest support without any changes in society's economy, welfare, or culture.

A slightly different perspective emerges when focus turns to the distribution of resources between host society and refugees. The Regulations aim to shorten the period of integration in the Refugee Reception Center by halving financial support from 204 EUR to 102 EUR in half a year.<sup>56</sup> The document defines support by the state integration period up to 15 months (3 months of integration in the Refugee Reception Center and 12 months in municipalities). The extension of integration up to 36 months is possible exclusively for vulnerable persons (women with children, disabled or elderly persons).<sup>57</sup> The measure aims at speeding up independent integration in municipalities by cutting monetary support to make it equal to the local social benefits system and motivating the refugees to enter the labor market and start independent living. As a representative of the government asserted:

“We (the state) are ready to help these people and this is our official policy... but we cannot advance them and provide better conditions than our citizens. We can invest into newcomers as much as this would not affect our citizens and spark any anger among our citizens.”  
(the respondent of the focus group of the representatives of the Government of Lithuania<sup>58</sup>).

The media discuss financial support as a specific aspect of the refugees' integration, but construct the narratives based on certain topoi and rhetorical phrases of refugees as a burden and economic and social hardship for the Lithuanian state, which is small and can barely cope with the influx of refugees. The “financial burden to the state” topos highlights the limited resources for the support of integration for refugees, including financial support from the EU. The texts conclude that refugees will not bring any benefits to the Lithuanian economy.

“Show me any other EU country which economically and socially lags behind and wants to show off before the other countries by widely opening its doors and inviting foreigners and planning considerable money for their integration, but does not care about their own citizens who suffer economic shortages.”<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, “Visuomenės nuostatų monitoringo rezultatai”.

<sup>56</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, “Nutarimo „Dėl valstybės paramos prieglobsčio gavėjų integracijos teikimo tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo“ analizė”.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, “Sociologinė analizė ir lauko tyrimo rezultatai”, in *Reikminių tyrimų projektas „Prieglobstį gavusių užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo vertinimas ir integracijos procesų stebėseną“*, 2017b, 88–149, accessed 2018 November 13, <http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Baigiamoji-ataskaita1.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> Zasciurinskas, Mečislovas, “Migrantų krizė. Lietuva pretenduoja į Nobelio taikos premiją?”, *Delfi.lt*, 2016 March 4, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/m-zasciurinskas-migrantu-krize-lietuva-pretenduoja-i-nobelio-taikos-premija.d?id=70600256>.

Some texts say that refugees will occupy Lithuanian citizens' jobs and produce a cheap labor force. Local people, as the media present it, will suffer themselves because of shortages of social housing and low benefits, while benefits for refugees exceed the current pensions of local pensioners. The host society's perception about equal rights and equal treatment shows that more than a half of the respondents tend to prioritize the interests of Lithuanian citizens (51%) and disregard equality principles in receiving social support (53%) and social housing (56%).<sup>60</sup>

These contextual factors resemble negative tendencies about refugees' opportunities and environment to adapt in the host society. The stipulated measures in the policy documents provide certain possibilities for refugees to integrate in labor market and education. The predominance in public discourse of economic threats and social burdens, on the one hand, and society's distance towards refugees in regard to equal share of distribution of resources, on the other, contributes to the narratives of economic threat<sup>61</sup> and preservation of control over refugees' integration.<sup>62</sup>

### *Political Dimension of Integration*

The Policy Action Plan<sup>63</sup> and the Regulations<sup>64</sup> for integration, as mentioned above, do not include the political dimension of integration such as access to citizenship and political participation. This is regulated by legal acts, which define the framework of rights and freedoms for political integration. The foreigners recognized as refugees in Lithuania receive a permanent resident permit. This status gives them rights to participate in the election of local government (municipalities) and be elected to the councils of municipalities, but does not allow them to participate in elections to the Parliament or President. Recognised refugees have the right to set up associations and join trade-unions and enjoy freedom of assembly.<sup>65</sup> Under the legal regulations of citizenship, only foreigners who are granted refugee status have the right to double citizenship, but do not have the right to establish political parties or participate in their activities.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile beneficiaries of subsidiary protection obtain a temporary residence permit for two years. This status does not give them political rights to vote and to be elected to any political offices, but their social rights and social guarantees are similar to those of refugee status.

<sup>60</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Visuomenės nuostatų monitoringo rezultatai".

<sup>61</sup> Dempster and Hargrave, "Understanding Public Attitudes Towards Refugees and Migrants. Shaping Policy for Development"; Coebanu and Escandell, "Comparative Analysis of Public Attitudes Towards Immigrants and Immigration Using Multinational Survey Data: A Review of Theories and Research".

<sup>62</sup> Esses, Hamilton and Gaucher, "The Global Refugee Crises: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications for Improving Public Attitudes and Facilitating Refugee Resettlement".

<sup>63</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministras, Įsakymas „Dėl užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo 2015–2017 m. veiksmų plano patvirtinimo“, No. A1-683, 2014 December 31.

<sup>64</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, Nutarimas „Dėl Valstybės paramos prieglobsčio gavėjų integracijai teikimo tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo“, No. 998, 2016 October 5.

<sup>65</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, Diversity Development Group, *Prieglobstį gavusių užsieniečių integracijos politikos strateginis dokumentas*, 28–29, accessed 2019 September 16, <http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/PRIEGLOBSTI-GAVUSIU-UZSIENIECIU-INTEGRACIJOS-POLITIKOS-STRATEGIJOS-DOKUMENTAS2.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

The issue of citizenship is not communicated through the whole process of integration as designed in the policy documents of both the Action Plan and the Regulations. There is no long-term perspective of integration defined by the state. The current policy documents only outline the measures of short-term integration – language, access to labor, independent living, and so on.

*“Oh... we did the job, money were allocated for integration, people got them, we did a great job... but what is next? What happens with the people after? No state strategy or vision at all about these people.”* (Respondent of the NGO in the focus group of the NGO representatives).

In general, the change of status does not provide huge differences, but, as interviewed NGO experts mentioned, there is kind of integration goal: *“I have lived here, paid taxes, learned language, but still different, a resident without country”* (Respondent of the NGO in the focus group of the NGO representatives).

The interviewed relocated refugees did not express any long-term intentions of living in Lithuania. Many of interviewed relocated refugees said that they are not sure about their plans. Some of them mentioned that they would like to try to learn more about the country to decide what will they do in the future, some of the interviewees mentioned that they would like to join their relatives in Germany or Sweden and did not consider Lithuania as the country for their long-term residence (Refugee representative, a woman from Syria; Refugee representative, a man from Syria<sup>67</sup>).

Lithuania as a country is situated in a kind of transit position satisfying the interests of refugees for temporal refuge and the state for committing to short-term integration. In the current so called “refugees’ crisis” the government accepts the obligation of solidarity to share the burden of the West European countries, but does not envision the refugees’ perspective for full inclusion into society.

*“Lithuania is a transit country and by now we cannot suggest anything that is beyond our capacities. Maybe in the future step-by-step something will be achieved, but now...”*  
(Respondent in the focus group of the Government representatives).

Media also construct the messages that there is no pay-off for society because refugees will use Lithuania as a temporary and transit station. Other narratives in the media question the system of quotas in the relocation process which is sometimes considered as coercion rather than solidarity and as failure to solve the problems. In the mind-set of society, refugees are considered as temporary residents. A majority of respondents in Lithuania (85%) agree with the statement that refugees seek to use Lithuania as a transit country and do not plan living here.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, regardless of the legal basis framing the opportunities to obtain citizenship for refugees, in practice a long-term vision of integration is very limited in Lithuania. The targets for integration in the short term are clear but further commitments of the

<sup>67</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, “Sociologinė analizė ir lauko tyrimo rezultatai”.

<sup>68</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, “Visuomenės nuostatų monitoringo rezultatai”.

government remain uncommunicated (Respondent in focus group of the Government<sup>69</sup>). The attitudes of the population in Lithuania also demonstrate that refugees are not seen as future residents of the country. Lithuanian media research analysis also confirms that media's discourse on refugees strongly contributes to the accumulation of the notion about refugees' temporal and transitional status.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the interplaying policy, media and social contexts construct the discourses of refugees' exclusion and distance between the majority and the refugees in a long-term perspective.

### *Awareness-Raising of Society as Cultural Dimension of Integration*

The policy integration documents such as Action Plan and Regulations for integration define the measure of awareness-raising for society. The Action Plan defines awareness raising measures in a very abstract way such as information campaigns on foreigners' integration and initiatives to promote diversity and intercultural dialogue.<sup>71</sup> Regulations list the possible trends for activities to inform society about refugees. The awareness-raising is linked to the broader prevention of refugees' exclusion, reduction of xenophobia, and fostering the tolerance of society. Dissemination of success stories of integration through various channels including websites, media, forums, seminars, conferences, and joint activities in local communities are the main potential steps to make the host society open to accept cultural differences. These general measures are the only one to address the host society.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile media emphasize the "cultural differences of refugees" and provide information about their social exclusion, "ghettoization," and cultural mismatch.<sup>73</sup> The narratives on "Islamization" are very strong and present several thematic issues. Media identify refugees with Muslim and Islam and frequently name them as troops of the "Islamic State." These messages strongly resonate in the context of the terrorist attacks in Europe and link refugees to terrorism, the ISIS organization and its crimes, on the one hand, and inability to ensure security in Europe, on the other. The "crimes" topoi states that Islam is associated with terrorism, radicalization, and the weakness of the EU to resist the extremism brought by refugees.

"You cannot pretend and explain that Islam is a religion of peace, or that all religions are the same. <...> No, not all religions are the same and in the name of Islam and Allah crimes are committed."<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Sociologinė analizė ir lauko tyrimo rezultatai".

<sup>70</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Žiniasklaidos monitoringo rezultatai", in *Reikminių tyrimų projektas „Prieglobstį gavusių užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo vertinimas ir integracijos procesų stebėseną“*, 2017a, 88–149, accessed 2018 November 13, <http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Baigiamoji-ataskaita1.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos socialinės apsaugos ir darbo ministras, Įsakymas „Dėl užsieniečių integracijos politikos įgyvendinimo 2015–2017 m. veiksmų plano patvirtinimo“, No. A1-683, 2014 December 31.

<sup>72</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Nutarimo „Dėl valstybės paramos prieglobsčio gavėjų integracijai teikimo tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo“ analizė".

<sup>73</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Žiniasklaidos monitoringo rezultatai".

<sup>74</sup> Urbonavičius, Vidas, "Kaip Europa galėtų kovoti su ekstremizmu ir kaip ji to nedaro", *Delfi.lt*, 2016 July 24, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/v-urbonavicius-kaip-europa-galetu-kovoti-su-ekstremizmu-ir-kaip-ji-to-nedaro.d?id=71875466>.

The “crimes” topoi constructs the message that refugees are young aggressive men who harass women,<sup>75</sup> the places where refugees live turn into ghettos and crime centres:

“Thousands of young men are tortured by sexual thirst, unable to understand a democratic system that is in contradiction to their primitive male-female relationship culture (since nobody taught them in this new country) and threatens the civilized European community.”<sup>76</sup>

The “danger” topoi describes the EU as hostage to its own policies on human rights, while refugees take advantages and misuse the benefits of these policies. This is further interpreted as a failure to ensure the EU’s border control and security of its citizens, to stop the activities of terrorist organisations and prevent tensions in society and its support for radicalization:

“In the case of supporters of the Islamic state living in Europe, this means that it is not enough to observe them or try to re-educate and integrate them. Participation in a terrorist organization, even if you have not killed anyone, is a crime, and the limit of tolerance must be set here.”<sup>77</sup>

“Migration flow – this is a real hybrid war, where fighting is by unconventional ways and means.”<sup>78</sup>

The fear of “Islamization” is not only constructed discursively but is also reflected in the results of the Lithuanian public opinion poll of 2017. To the question about accepting refugees (Muslim climate refugees, Muslim war refugees, political refugees, Christian climate refugees, and Christian war refugees) and labor migrants from non-EU countries, the respondents tended to minimize the importance of the circumstances which forced foreigners to apply for refugee status in the country and to maximize the attention towards their religion. The majority of the respondents stated that they would not accept Muslim climate refugees (68% compared to 45% saying they would not accept Christian climate refugees) and Muslim war refugees (65% compared to 39% Christian war refugees). A total of 56% of survey participants disagreed with the statement that Lithuania should accept labor migrants and 49% disagreed with the statement that Lithuania should accept political refugees. In addition to these statements, almost two thirds of the population (68%) disagreed with the statement that refugees will enrich the cultural life of Lithuania.<sup>79</sup> The studies on European public polls manifest similar tendencies. Non-white, culturally and religiously distinct groups are not welcomed to enter many European countries, particularly

<sup>75</sup> See, e.g., Rettberg, Gajjala (2016) on portrayals of male refugees in online media.

<sup>76</sup> Vinokuras, Arkadijus, “Nekaltųjų kraujas. Ir vėl, ir vėl, ir vėl”, *Lrytas.lt*, 2016 July 15, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.lrytas.lt/pasaulis/rytai-vakarai/2016/07/15/news/nekaltuju-kraujas-ir-vel-ir-vel-ir-vel-1227664/>.

<sup>77</sup> Peluritis, Laurynas, “Religija, terorizmas ir priešai – kur brėžti ribas”, *15min.lt*, 2016 January 17, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/pasaulis/laurynas-peluritis-religija-terorizmas-ir-priesai-kur-brehti-ribas-57-567181?comments>.

<sup>78</sup> Bačiulis, Audrius, “Musulmonų migrantų įsiveržimas į Europą – tai pats tikriausias Hibridinis karas”, *Tv3.lt*, 2015 September 14, accessed 2020 February 3, <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/lietuva/846041/audrius-baciulis-musulmonu-migrantu-isiverzimas-i-europa-tai-pats-tikriausias-hibridinis-karas>.

<sup>79</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, “Visuomenės nuostatų monitoringo rezultatai”.

in Austria, Poland, Hungary, France, and Belgium.<sup>80</sup> Thus, religion matters in the context of refugees' acceptance by the host society.

Though the policy measures described above suggest the state's intention to foster a friendly environment for refugee integration and take the lead in changing negative attitudes to refugees; however, a long-term awareness strategy is still pending (the respondent in the focus group of the Government representatives; the respondent of the focus group of NGOs' representatives). Meanwhile, the media use discourses of cultural alienation between the host society and the refugees through stereotypical narratives of threat to personal and national security. Some international research findings suggest that regardless of the importance of providing accurate and evidence-based information about refugees, the understanding and influencing of public attitudes demand a more complex approach on population concerns, sentiments, and rational thinking when drafting policy measures.<sup>81</sup>

### *Positive Examples of Refugees' Acceptance: Perspectives for Change?*

As mentioned in a previous section above, the public opinion poll of 2017 suggests the existence of a rather high social distance between host society members and refugees. In particular respondents of the poll highlighted their unwillingness to live in the same neighborhood with refugees and to rent them living space. Meanwhile, the interviewed refugees mentioned that they had very few contacts with members of the majority society. Everyday communication with the local population and neighbors is rather scarce and irregular. The interviewed respondents and experts often mentioned their challenging experiences in search for an apartment outside the Refugee Reception Center. The owners are reluctant to rent an apartment and usually reject the rent:

“Both husband and wife spoke English and had only two children, not six like some others. ... They tried many times to find lodgings and approached agencies to help them. They had agreements already five times, but were rejected the last day ... When they [the owners – author's comment] learn that you are refugee, you get your agreement cancelled.”  
(interviewed expert, psychologist).<sup>82</sup>

There was a case in one municipality when the leadership of the municipal administration took the responsibility to help a Syrian refugee to find an apartment, negotiated with the owner, organized a meeting with the neighbors in the apartment block, and informed them about the refugee family settling in the neighborhood. It seems that this kind of awareness-raising worked regardless of some skeptical voices. The active engagement of the municipal leadership paved the way for contacts and diminished certain prejudices (respondent of the focus group of the municipal representatives<sup>83</sup>). International research provides information on the impact of political leadership in communicating positive and

<sup>80</sup> See, e.g., Dempster, Hargrave (2017) and Semyonov et al. (2008) for broader overview.

<sup>81</sup> Dempster and Hargrave, “Understanding Public Attitudes Towards Refugees and Migrants. Shaping Policy for Development?”

<sup>82</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, “Sociologinė analizė ir lauko tyrimo rezultatai?”

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

inclusive messages about refugees' arrival and resettlement in the country. This worked as a policy responsive to facilitating both public attitudes and media discourse.<sup>84</sup>

Lithuanian media analysis also revealed that positive stories which counteract the prevailing negative statements are presented in the discourse on refugees. For example, a few articles emphasize the needs and benefits of the solidarity of EU countries regarding the challenges of flows of refugees. Others present positive examples of the successful integration of refugees in Lithuanian society. A few articles challenge the feelings of fear towards the arrival of refugees and bring up stories from the past about acceptance of refugees who escaped the Soviet regime. Another group of positive stories cover critical issues on insufficient financial support for refugees and remind society that the EU funds cover their basic needs in the integration process. According to media research analysis, some texts challenge the rhetoric relating the relocation of refugees to terrorist attacks and threats to national security and question the intolerant and hostile attitudes of Lithuanian citizens towards refugees.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, the positive narratives are marginal and almost invisible in the context of negative discourses towards refugee migration in the EU and their integration. The results of the Lithuanian public opinion poll of 2017 lead to the opinion that Lithuanian society could accept more information on refugees and change their attitudes, since a majority of respondents (around two thirds) recognize refugee problems such as difficulties to find jobs, rent lodgings, and the prevalence of negative attitudes of society towards them.<sup>86</sup> Regardless of the prevailing attitudes about refugees as a threat, almost half of the respondents (46%) consider refugees as a vulnerable group that needs integration services to be provided for them by the state.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, almost half of the respondents (48%) agree that the state should pay more attention to refugee integration and appoint more social workers for work with refugees (54%).<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusions

This article examines the complex interactions of policies, media discourse, and public attitudes towards refugees in Lithuania. The comparative integration context theory offers to examine three discursive contexts, namely, political discourse, the social discourse of everyday communication and interaction, and media discourse,<sup>89</sup> which may serve as influential factors in the construction of a political and social climate for the integration of immigrants and their children in the host society. Following this theoretical approach,

<sup>84</sup> Esses, Hamilton and Gaucher, "The Global Refugee Crises: Empirical Evidence and Policy Implications for Improving Public Attitudes and Facilitating Refugee Resettlement"; Ueffing, Rowe and Mulder, "Differences in Attitudes Towards Immigration Between Australia and Germany: The Role of Immigration Policy"; Callens and Mueleman, "Do Integration Policies Relate to Economic and Cultural Threat Perceptions? A Comparative Study in Europe".

<sup>85</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Žiniasklaidos monitoringo rezultatai".

<sup>86</sup> Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centras, "Visuomenės nuostatų monitoringo rezultatai".

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Crul and Schneider, "Comparative Integration Context Theory: Participation and Belonging in New Diverse European Cities".

the analysis of empirical data in this article suggests certain conclusions for better understanding the mechanism either of maintaining existing socio-political systems (system justification theory) or of supporting a change in the established status quo (system-sanctioned theory). The examined policy and media discourses in Lithuania reveal their potential to serve as contextual factors both to respond to and to construct the society's concerns about perceived socio-economic and symbolic threats towards refugees. Empirical data analysis in Lithuania suggests that the discourse on threats to national culture and security constructs negative images about refugees and as such contributes to the creation of boundaries of social-cultural context of host society and distance to refugees, making for strong exclusionary and hostile statements and sentiments. The media discourse analysis reveals that narratives often incorporate the economic and financial burden of competition in the labor market and limited resources for the local population. The constructed storylines about cultural and religious distinctiveness of refugees in media strengthen the discourses on threat to national culture, lifestyle, and security. In Lithuania public attitudes illustrate the distance to refugees due to religious differences as well as to prejudices, insecurity feelings, and distrust about the refugees' contribution to the cultural enrichment of the host society. This case analysis shows the similar trends revealed in research of media discourse about refugees in other European countries.

At the same time, the policy discourse analysis grasped certain positive developments in the complex nexus between policies of integration and public attitudes; however, reshaping outcomes can be identified with difficulty. Policies on integration have outlined the potential of socio-economic integration by providing access to Lithuanian language courses, employment, education, social, and health services. Through communication on integration policy measures the government suggests that support for refugees is necessary. The examined public attitudes have revealed tendencies of favorable attitudes towards socio-economic integration in terms of support for language courses, education, and social services. Nevertheless, the inquiry into public attitudes presents the tendencies that the population agrees less on equal share of resources, equal access to health services and equal rights in general. The analyzed policy discourse reveals the government's limited effort to communicate a complex strategy to target society and broaden the space for population's concerns on equality and cultural diversity. These findings suggest the conclusion that society's concerns remain open for both interpretations and interactions of other contextual and sometimes contradictory factors which make an impact on public attitudes to maintain the status quo of the current social-cultural situation in host society.

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## POLITIKOS IR ŽINIASKLAIDOS DISKURSAI APIE PABĖGĖLIUS LIETUVOJE: KAIP KURIAMOS RIBOS TARP PRIIMANČIOS VISUOMENĖS IR PABĖGĖLIŲ

**Santrauka.** Straipsnyje analizuojami pabėgėlių integracijos konteksto, susijusio su visuomenės nuostatomis, klausimai. Skiriamas dėmesys pabėgėlių integracijos kontekstiniams veiksniams, tokiems kaip sąveikaujantys politikos ir žiniasklaidos diskursai bei visuomenės nuostatos pabėgėlių atžvilgiu, kurie, manoma, nulemia sociokultūrinę pabėgėlių integracijos aplinką. Autorės taiko lyginamojo integracijos konteksto, sistemos pagrindimo ir (ne)palaikymo teorijas ir išskiria politikos ir žiniasklaidos diskursus kaip įrankį esamai priimančiosios šalies socialinei ir politinei sistemai išlaikyti. Pasitelkiant kritinę politikos diskurso, žiniasklaidos diskurso, *focus* grupių ir pusiau struktūruotų interviu su pabėgėlių integracijos ekspertais, pabėgėliais ir politikos veikėjais analizę, atskleidžiamos normatyvinės integracijos politikos prielaidos, kurios brėžia socialinio ir kultūrinio konteksto simbolines ribas ir drauge kuria galimybes užmegzti ryšius tarp priimančiosios visuomenės ir pabėgėlių.

**Raktažodžiai:** pabėgėlių integracijos politika, politikos diskursas, žiniasklaidos diskursas, visuomenės nuostatos, Lietuva.

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