

# DRUG POLICY AND HEALTH IN LITHUANIA

*A Profile Prepared by the Drug Law and Health Policy Resource Network*

*25 March 2002*

## Policy Indicators

**HIV EPIDEMIC STATUS:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**MAIN TRANSMISSION MODE:** *INJECTION DRUG USE*  
**DRUG POLICY CONDITIONS:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**INTERVENTION LEVEL:** \_\_\_\_\_

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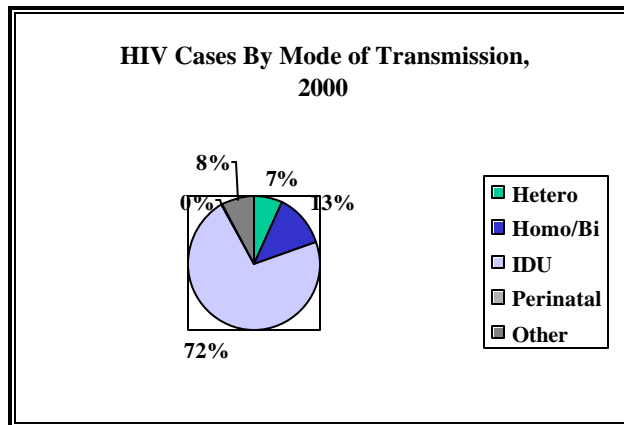
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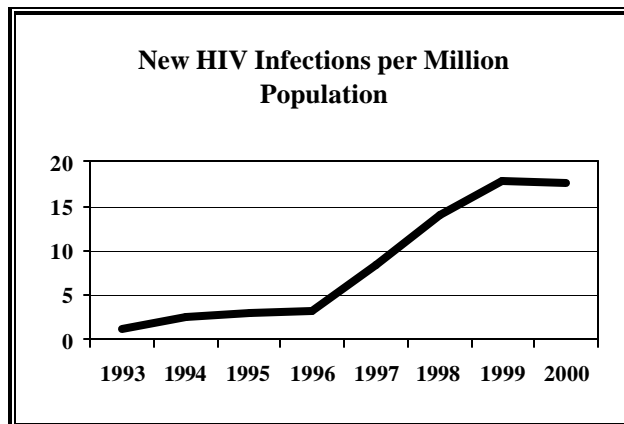
## Summary

### I. HIV/AIDS

Although data are incomplete, the HIV prevalence rate in Lithuania is low compared with the rest of Eastern and Central Europe. However, the country experienced two peaks in the number of HIV cases reported in the 1990's—one in 1994 and one in 1997. The 1997 peak has been linked to intravenous drug use. (1)

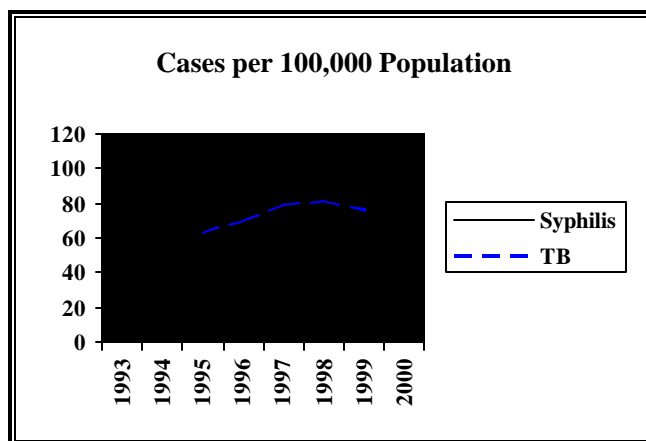


Source: (19)



Source: (19)

## II. OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES



Sources: (12) (19)

## III. INJECTION DRUG USE

**Drug Use.** The number of registered drug users is about 3,000. However, the actual number is thought to be as high as 30,000 out of a population of 3.7 million. (1)

**Risk Behavior Information.** Over 90 percent of drug dependency cases in Lithuania are intravenous drug users. (1)

**Social Attitudes.** Social attitudes toward drug users have been improving. The government launched a public awareness campaign in 2000. As a result, Lithuanians have been more understanding about the problems associated with drug dependency. (1)

## IV. LAW AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES

### Law on the Books

- ? Syringe purchase and possession, as well as SEPs, are not prohibited
- ? Methadone treatment is legal.
- ? Those accused of a crime have the right to an attorney
- ? Drug possession is illegal

### Actual practice

- ? Police and government officials have been supportive of harm reduction efforts
- ? Methadone treatment facilities are available in all major cities.
- ? There is a shortage of well-trained advocates.

? Law enforcement is not funded well enough to combat drugs.

## V. PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

**Harm Reduction Programs Generally.** Needle Exchange Programs and Methadone treatment clinics are available in every major city. The government helps to fund many of these programs and has been supportive of harm reduction in general. (1)

**Drug Treatment.** Drug dependant people have the right to confidential health care and social services. However, 35 % of the officially registered drug dependant people had access to treatment. (1)

## VI. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDICATORS

The Transparency Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians. In 2001, the rank for Lithuania is 38. (14)

The Human Development Index value is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. In 1999, Lithuania ranked 62 out of the 174 countries measured. (8)

The GINI index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or in some cases consumption expenditures) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. The GINI index of zero equals perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality. The GINI index for the most recent reported year for Lithuania was 32.4 (1996). (20)

Unemployment refers to the share of the labor force without work but available for and seeking employment. Definitions of labor force and unemployment differ by country. Lithuania's unemployment rate rose from 6.7% in 1997 to 10.8% in 2000. (16)

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total of all economic activity in one country, regardless of who owns the productive assets. There has been a precipitous decline in GDP in Lithuania during the past decade. In 1999, the GDP was \$10,634 USD. The average annual growth of the economy from 1990 to 1999 was – 4.0%. (20)

# DRUG POLICY AND HEALTH IN LITHUANIA

## *A Profile Prepared by the Drug Law and Health Policy Resource Network*

### Full Report

#### I. INTRODUCTION

The Drug Law and Health Policy Resource Network is an international research collaboration designed to improve data collection and policy analysis on drug policy and health in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. The information in this report was gathered by staff at Temple University's Beasley School of Law and the University of Connecticut Health Sciences Center. It will be augmented by further research in 2002 by network collaborators in the study region.

This Report presents available information in six domains: HIV/AIDS, other infectious diseases, injection drug use, law and law enforcement practices, public health interventions, and economic and social indicators. It concludes that Lithuania is in the early stages of a serious HIV epidemic driven primarily by injection drug use. With sufficient external support and dramatic internal changes in drug policy and law enforcement practice, a public health effort against HIV and other blood-borne diseases could be successful.

#### II. HIV/AIDS

Accurate and complete data on HIV in Lithuania are not available. The data presented here are from a variety of sources and may not entirely agree. These data generally do not represent HIV incidence, and depend heavily upon patterns of HIV testing and reporting that remain very incomplete in the most severely affected countries. HIV infection is defined as an individual with HIV infection confirmed by a laboratory according to country definitions and requirements. AIDS cases are reported according to a uniform AIDS case definition originally published in 1982 and revised in 1985, 1987 and for adults and adolescents (age >13) in 1993. The 1993 European AIDS surveillance case definition differs from that used in the United States in that it does not include CD4 lymphocyte criteria.

**Overall Data.** The HIV prevalence rate is low in Lithuania as compared with the rest of Eastern and Central Europe. The country saw two peaks in the disease one in 1994 in the seafarer community and once in 1997. The 1997 peak is thought to be linked to the increase in intravenous drug use. Lithuania's HIV rate is thought to be low thanks to the early efforts of projects like the Lithuania AIDS Centre. As early as 10 years ago, the project started launching education programs in the schools and community. This is thought to have helped keep the epidemic under control. (1)(3)

**Data from The European Center for the Epidemiological Monitoring of AIDS (19)**

Year	Reported AIDS cases		Reported New HIV infections		Homo/bi Contact #		Injection Drug Use #		Heterosexual Contact #		Perinatal Transmission #	
	#	Rate/ Million	#	Rate/ Million	HIV	AIDS	HIV	AIDS	HIV	AIDS	HIV	AIDS
1993	0	0.0	4	1.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1994	2	0.5	9	2.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1995	1	0.3	11	3.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1996	5	1.3	12	3.2	3	3	4	0	5	2	0	0
1997	3	0.8	31	8.4	5	2	23	0	3	0	0	0
1998	9	2.4	52	14.1	8	8	37	0	5	1	0	0
1999	5	1.4	66	17.9	9	2	46	1	4	1	0	0
2000	7	1.9	65	17.7	9	5	47	1	5	1	0	0

**Regional Distribution.** Klaipeda has the largest number of HIV infected people. However, HIV infection rates are increasing in the drug dependant population fastest in the city of Vilnius. The majority of HIV infected people are under 30. (1)

**Stigma and Social Attitudes toward HIV/AIDS.** According to the Lithuanian AIDS Centre, 90 percent of Lithuanians consider themselves Roman Catholic and are socially conservative. But thanks to the educational efforts of the project, they have been able work to reach these people and educate them about the reality of AIDS. The Centre's director Saulius Caplinskas said, "When 10 years ago, we started to celebrate so-called condom days, this was like shock therapy, but now we see the results." (3)

### III. OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES

The spread of HIV is related in important ways to the incidence of other infectious diseases. Unsterile injection drug use is a risk factor not only for HIV, but also Hepatitis. Incarceration in many countries in this region is a risk factor for tuberculosis. Sexually transmitted diseases may increase the likelihood of HIV transmission during sex.

According to data from the Vilnius Public Health Centre, 44 percent of Hepatitis C infected persons admitted were intravenous drug users. (1)

**Data from (12) (19)**

Year	TB		Syphilis	Hepatitis A	Hepatitis B	Hepatitis C
	#	Rate/ 100,000	Rate/ 100,000	#	#	#
1993	-	-	18.6	-	-	-
1994	-	-	57.5	-	-	-
1995	2,362	63.2	90.9	-	-	-
1996	2,608	70.0	101.3	-	-	-
1997	2,926	78.7	84.9	-	-	-
1998	3,016	81.3	62.8	1,434	-	111
1999	2,800	76.0	45.3	266	-	120
2000	-	-	31.7	-	-	-

**IV. INJECTION DRUG USE**

This section reports available information about drug use levels, trends and risk behaviors, as well as social attitudes about drug use and information about the problem of drug overdose. Drug treatment and other interventions to reduce the morbidity and mortality of drug use are discussed in section V, below. Data about drug use come primarily from unofficial sources, including more or less rigorous rapid assessments, consultant reports and the news media.

There are more than 3,000 officially registered drug dependant people in Lithuania. Narcotics use is concentrated in the cities. Police estimate that over 30,000 out of a population of 3.7 million people consume narcotics. Half of these people live in Vilnius.

(1)

**Trends in Drug Use.** Until 1998, the most popular narcotics were cheap local substances, such as locally grown poppies and “Ephedrone”. As the country’s standard of living increased, so did its demand for synthetic drugs. Around 2000, sophisticated laboratories for amphetamine production appeared. As of 1999, heroin became the drug of choice in Lithuania, because it became twice as cheap to purchase in that year-down to five U.S. dollars per dose. Narcotics traders have moved their efforts into school areas. As a result, young people are getting involved in the drug trade at an early age. The

number of children who try drugs among 15-16 year olds is growing rapidly. Marijuana, ecstasy, LSD and amphetamines are now considered an integral part of the alternative youth sub-culture, leading to the use of stronger drugs. (1)

**Risk Behavior.** Over 90 percent of drug dependency cases are intravenous drug users. An increasing number of young people try heroin first. (1)

**Drug Traffic Information.** Lithuania is part of a major transit route for heroin from Asia to Western Europe. However, the export of poppy straw from Lithuania to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad and Latvia is decreasing. Marijuana and hashish arrive to Lithuania from the east and from the west by both land and sea. Heroin had been arriving via Russia from Afghanistan. Cocaine arrives from Central and South America via Germany and the Netherlands. Most amphetamines come from Poland and the Netherlands but they are also produced locally. Lithuanian authorities say that Lithuanian-produced pills are being exported to Russia and Sweden. (1)

**Social Attitudes Toward Drug Users.** The Lithuanian government as well as non-governmental agencies initiated a series of public awareness campaigns in 2000. Experts say there has been a rapid rise in public awareness of the hazards associated with narcotics use as a result of the campaign. (1)

**Drug Overdoses.** No information was available.

## V. LAWS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES

### A. Drug Law

This section describes what is known about both the drug-related laws on the books and the way these laws are enforced. The section covers syringe access, drug possession, drug treatment, drug trafficking, and the handling of drug arrestees and prisoners within the criminal justice system. It also lists the international drug-related instruments to which the country is a signatory.

**Syringe Access/Needle Exchange Programs - Law.** Needle exchange programs are legal. (1)

**Syringe Access/Needle Exchange Programs - Practices.** Anonymous consultation and needle exchange offices operate in all major cities. (1)

**Substitution Therapies.** Methadone treatment programs have been in all major cities since 1995. (1)

**Drug possession Law.** Possession of narcotics and psychotropic substances is illegal. (4)

**Drug Possession Law-Practices.** Law enforcement does not have enough funding to effectively enforce the drug possession laws. (1)

**Drug treatment Law.** In 1997, Lithuania passed a law that provides drug dependant people with the right to confidential health care and social services. Approximately 35% of the officially registered drug dependant people had access to treatment and rehabilitation. (1)

**Compulsory Treatment –Practices.** No information was available.

**Drug Trafficking Law.** In 2000, provisions were added to the criminal code to increase the penalty for production of narcotics with an intent to distribute them. Recommendations were drawn up for determining the difference between small and large amounts of narcotics. The Interior Ministry is preparing amendments to the code which would allow increasing penalties for distribution of narcotics among young people. The law enforcement system is poorly funded. Police lack the personnel and special equipment to fight narcotics-related crimes more effectively. (1)

**Drug Treatment Regulation.** No information was available.

**Drug Treatment Regulation-Practices.** Police have assisted drug treatment efforts by staging efforts to educate the public. (1)

**Criminal Justice System- Law.** Lithuania is a parliamentary democracy. The people directly elect the president. The judiciary is separate from the other branches. No person may be arbitrarily arrested or detained. Police may detain suspects for up to 48 hours based on reliable evidence and with approval by an investigator or prosecutor. A district judge may prolong that period of detainment from 6 to 18 months. The accused has the right to counsel. Bail is available. (18)

**Criminal Justice System- Practices.** Though, the accused has the right to counsel, there is a shortage of trained advocates. The detention periods have been criticized as being excessive. This has been blamed on the slow trial system. The government is trying to remedy this by finding additional qualified judges. Bail is not widely used. Prison conditions are overcrowded and dangerous. The government is attempting to remedy the situation with assistance from other nations, but this has been a slow process. (18)

**International drug conventions signed.** The country is a party to the following international drug agreements.

- ? 1988 UN Drug Convention
- ? 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances
- ? 1961 Single Convention
- ? 1972 Protocol
- ? 1924 Extradition Treaty supplemented in 1934 with the United States

- ? 1999 Bilateral Mutual Assistance Treaty with the United States
- ? 2000 UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (1)

## **B. Public Health and Human Rights Law**

This section describes what is known about public health and human rights law on the books, as well as the way these laws are enforced. The section covers the rights to healthcare, privacy, HIV reportability and anti-discrimination generally and for HIV/AIDS patients. It also lists the international human rights instruments to which the country is a signatory.

**Right to Health Care/HIV Treatment –Law.** No information was available.

**Right to Health Care/HIV Treatment –Practice.** No information was available.

**Reportability of HIV, AIDS, HCV, HBV – Law and Practice.** No information was available.

**HIV Testing Provisions–Law and Practice.** HIV testing had been mandatory for blood donors, pregnant women, STD patients, injection drug users and prisoners until 1993. Testing is now systematic for blood donors and STD patients, but consent is obtained first. (1)

**Anti-Discrimination Provisions based on HIV or drug use – Law and Practice.** A 1991 Lithuanian law protects disabled persons from all forms of discrimination regardless of the cause of their disability. (13)

**Privacy Generally and HIV in Particular –Law and Practice.** There are greater protections of privacy and confidentiality in Lithuanian law than in most of other countries in that region. The Lithuania AIDS Centre provides confidential HIV testing as well as pre and post-test counseling. However, privacy is not given to HIV infected prisoners. (9)(10)(11)

**Criminal Penalties for Exposing/Transmitting HIV.** No information available.

**Criminalization of Prostitution –Law and Practice.** Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus has said he is against a ban on prostitution. “Prostitution is more of a social and moral issue. It may seem very painful and horrible to some people. We will not find the answer that is going to be good for everyone in this respect,” he said. (7)

**Criminalization of Homosexuality –Law and Practice.** Homosexuality is not illegal. However, the age of consent is higher for homosexual sex than it is for

heterosexual sex. Also, critics say that the government has ignored demands to pass anti-discrimination laws based on sexual orientation. (6)

**Status of International Human Right Conventions.** Lithuania's status in relation to major international human rights instruments follows.

- ? International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR): **signed November 20, 1991**
- ? International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR): **signed November 20, 1991**
- ? International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Optional Protocol (CCPR-OP1): **signed November 20, 1991**
- ? International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Second Optional Protocol (CCPR-OP2-DP): **signed September 8, 2000**
- ? International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD): **signed December 10, 1998**
- ? Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): **signed January 18, 1994**
- ? Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Optional Protocol (CEDAW-OP): **signed September 8, 2000**
- ? Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT): **signed February 1, 1996** (2)

## VI. PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

This section provides information on interventions to reduce HIV transmission and other health problems among drug users, the availability of drug treatment, and HIV prevention programs.

### A. Interventions to Reduce Disease and Other Injuries Associated With Drug Use

**Government Position.** The government set up a program set to run from 1999 until 2003 that focuses on drug prevention. The program not only focuses on counter-narcotics trade efforts, but also includes programs to educate the public about the dangers of drug use and curing drug dependant people with the goal of eventually re-integrating them into society. The government funds needle exchange programs such as the Centre for Anonymous Consulting of Drug Users and Exchange of Syringes and Needles in Klaipeda. Local government in Klaipeda acted in 1996 when the first four cases of HIV were found in injection drug users. That is when this drop in centre was launched well as education programs in the local schools. The centre now provides counseling for clients as well. (1)(5)

**Needle Exchange Programs.** Needle exchange programs have been available in all major cities since 1997. Open Society Institute funds four programs in Lithuania-one in Druskininkai, one in Klaipeda, one in Vilnius and one in Visaginas. They report great assistance from local authorities. In Klaipeda, local police have allowed outreach workers to distribute needles in all parts of the city including where illegal drugs are prepared and sold. The slow growing rate of HIV in the injection drug community as compared to the rest of Europe has been in part due to the targeted response of the Lithuanian AIDS Centre and other institutions. (1)(17)

### **B. Drug Treatment Programs/Availability.**

**Programs/Availability.** Drug dependant people have been guaranteed confidential health and social services since 1997. Estimates show that 35 percent of the officially registered drug dependant people have had access to this treatment. (1)

**Substitution Therapies.** Methadone therapy is available in all major cities. (1)

### **B. Other Public Health Measures to Prevent HIV and other Significant Diseases**

**Programmatic Details.** The total number of HIV tests performed, excluding unlinked anonymous testing and testing of blood donations by year (1996 – 2000) was:

1996:	190,976
1997:	193,779
1998:	165,410
1999:	151,571
2000:	132,556

The rate of HIV testing /1000 population was 34.5. (19)

## **VII. SOCIOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT**

A variety of data and data indices are commonly used to characterize social, political and economic factors in a country. The following are several of these for Lithuania.

Perceived corruption in government is measured by the Transparency Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranked countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians. The most recent measure was in 2001.

? Country Rank:	38
? 2001 CPI Score:	4.8

- ? Surveys Used: 5
  - ? Standard Deviation: 1.5
  - ? High-Low Range: 3.8 – 7.5
- (14)

The GINI index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or in some cases consumption expenditures) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Lorenz curve plots the cumulative percentages of total income received against the cumulative number of recipients, starting with the poorest individual or household. The GINI index measures the area between the Lorenz curve and the hypothetical line of absolute equality, expressed as a percentage of the maximum area under the line. This the GINI index of zero equals perfect equality, while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality

- ? GINI Index, 1996: 32.4
- (20)

The Human Development Index is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.

- ? Human Development Index Rank (HDI) in 1999 – 62/174
- (8)

Unemployment rates refer to the share of the labor force without work but available for and seeking employment. Definitions of labor force and unemployment differ by country.

- ? Unemployment rate (1997) - 6.7 %
- (8)

- ? Unemployment rate (2000) - 10.8 %
- (16)

?

Standard & Poor's Insurer Financial Enhancement Rating is a current opinion of the creditworthiness of an insurer with respect to insurance policies or other financial obligations that are predominantly used as credit enhancement and/or financial guarantees. The ratings range from 'CC', which is defined as "currently highly-vulnerable" to a rating of 'AAA', which is defined as "extremely strong" capacity to meet its financial commitments.

- ? Local Currency:
- ? Long-Term rating: BBB+
- ? Outlook: Stable
- ? Short-Term Rating: A-2
- ? Foreign Currency:
- ? Long-Term rating: BBB-
- ? Outlook: Stable

? Short-Term Rating: A-3 (15)

The Social Indicators of Poverty represents the health status of individuals in different socioeconomic groups within countries for the last survey year (1995).

- ? Infant Mortality Rate:
  - Poorest Quintile: Unavailable
  - Richest Quintile:
- ? Child Immunization Rate:
  - Poorest Quintile:
  - Richest Quintile:
- ? Prevalence of Child Malnutrition:
  - Poorest Quintile:
  - Richest Quintile:
- ? Low Mother's Body Mass Index:
  - Poorest Quintile:
  - Richest Quintile:
- ? Total Fertility Rate:
  - Poorest Quintile:
  - Richest Quintile:

The National Poverty Line is the measurement of the percentage of the population below the defined income level of poverty. In Lithuania \_\_\_\_ of the population has an income below the poverty line.

? Population Below the Poverty Line, (BPL), 1996: unavailable

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total of all economic activity in one country, regardless of who owns the productive assets. The GDP per capita is the total output divided by the population. This value is then adjusted to convert to a common currency, which adjusts for national variations in the process paid for goods and services. There has been a precipitous decline in GDP in Lithuania during the last decade with an average annual growth rate in the economy of \_\_\_\_.

Gross Domestic Product per Capita (PPP US\$): unavailable

Gross Domestic Product - Average Annual Growth:  
1980-1990: ---  
1990-1999: -4.0% (20)

Gross Domestic Product in \$ USD Millions:  
1990: 13,254  
1999: 10,634 (20)

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