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Ministry of Social Security
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CIVIC EMPOWERMENT INDEX 2024: RESEARCH REVEALS THE PRECONDITIONS FOR CIVIC PREPAREDNESS IN LITHUANIA

Findings from the 2024 Civic Empowerment Index research reveal that, over the past year, the overall civic power of Lithuanian society has remained largely unchanged. At the same time, a closer look at the preconditions for civic preparedness highlights the importance of volunteering experience and engagement in organizations.

The 2024 Civic Empowerment Index shows that Lithuanian society's civic power did not change significantly compared to the previous year: in 2024, the average index score reached 36.8 out of a possible 100 points (compared to 36.7 in 2023). Still, some minor changes are visible across specific dimensions of the index.

Looking at the perceived risks of civic activity, the 2024 data indicate that, compared to previous years, citizens were less inclined to associate civic engagement with various risks. For example, 10 percentage points fewer respondents believed that an active citizen might be considered eccentric (46% in 2024). Similarly, 5–6 percentage points fewer associated civic engagement with threats of retaliation, the risk of losing a job, or suspicion of acting out of self-interest (these risks were considered likely by 37%, 34%, and 52% of respondents, respectively, in 2024). In addition, 4 percentage points fewer respondents believed that an active citizen might be publicly attacked (44%).

On the other hand, the nature of civic activity in 2024 also changed to some extent. First, participation decreased in activities that had become particularly popular with the onset of Russia's large-scale war in Ukraine or the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to 2023, engagement in political consumerism (buying or boycotting for moral or political reasons) declined by 8 percentage points, and charitable donations fell by 7 points. Second, the "election year" (with presidential, European Parliament, and parliamentary elections held in 2024) slightly reshaped political participation: participation in protest politics decreased (attendance at demonstrations and rallies dropped by 3 percentage points, and participation in strikes by 2 points), while contacting politicians and discussing politics within close social circles increased.

The most popular activities remained charitable donations (45%), participation in community clean-up campaigns (32%), and involvement in local community activities (23%). Moreover, 65% of respondents reported discussing politics with friends, relatives, colleagues, or neighbors. It is also worth noting that general interest in public affairs remained relatively stable in 2024.

Alongside the slight decline in actual civic activity, potential civic activity – that is, willingness to act if certain problems emerged in society – also decreased. Another component of the Civic Empowerment Index, the Civic Influence Index, did not change significantly overall; however, in the election year citizens tended to evaluate the influence of most government institutions and bureaucracy more negatively. Respondents attributed less power to members of parliament, local elders and mayors,

and state officials to affect important societal decisions (with decreases of 0.3 to 1.0 points on a 10-point scale). Similar downward trends were also observed in the perceived influence of business actors and the media (drops of 0.3–0.5 points out of 10). Among the state institutions included in the study, only the Office of the President and municipal councils managed to avoid a noticeable decline in attributed influence.

In the 2024 Civic Empowerment Index research, special attention was devoted to the analysis of **civic preparedness**, which is regarded as a crucial component of the principle of total defense. While the 2023 Civic Empowerment Index examined citizens' personal preparedness for emergencies, the 2024 study focused on other dimensions of civic preparedness – citizens' willingness to volunteer in crisis management (including their overall volunteering experience and engagement in organizations), and social cohesion.

The study revealed that approximately one in ten (9%) Lithuanian residents stated they would **definitely contribute as volunteers in managing a crisis** (epidemic, natural disaster, or war). A further 44% indicated that they would be more likely than not to do so. Among those willing to volunteer, most preferred to act individually (34%) or together with family, friends, or neighbors (33%). Only about one in ten (11%) expressed readiness to contribute through non-governmental organizations, and similar proportions indicated willingness to join activities organized by state institutions (8%) or by their workplace (10%). These findings suggest that, in the current context, the majority of potential volunteers are unfamiliar with institutionalized pathways for engagement.

Previous volunteering experience in crisis situations (such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the migration crisis) strongly influences future intentions. About 19% of respondents reported having such prior crisis volunteering experience. However, only 2% volunteered for more than a month, while 12% did so occasionally. Importantly, more than eight out of ten of those who contributed to crisis management, whether for a longer period or occasionally, indicated that they would be willing to do so again in the future. A similar correlation was observed with intentions to contribute to national defense in the event of war: 87% of those willing to defend the country by force of arms also expressed readiness to engage in voluntary crisis management activities, as did 76% of those who intended to defend the country through other means.

When analyzing overall civic power, respondents who would be willing to participate in voluntary activities during a crisis demonstrated a significantly higher Civic Empowerment Index. The index reached 48.9 points among those who stated they would definitely contribute, and 42.6 points among those who would probably do so. In comparison, the score among those unwilling to volunteer was only 22.4 points. Certain demographic groups stand out in terms of potential voluntary engagement during crises: working-age adults (30–50 years), higher-income and higher-educated citizens, civil servants, specialists, and managers were considerably more likely to indicate willingness to volunteer.

The majority of those willing to contribute to voluntary activities during crises indicated they could assist with humanitarian aid (food and water distribution, 84%), informing the public (78%), or producing necessary supplies (69%). By contrast, far fewer were prepared to contribute to organizing international aid (27%) or to providing/organizing psychological (34%) or medical (36%) assistance.

The study also revealed that individuals engaged in **volunteering under normal circumstances** are also inclined to volunteer in times of crisis. Looking more closely at broader volunteering experience, 14%

of respondents reported participating in some form of voluntary activity during the past 12 months, while additional 15% indicated that they had volunteered at some point in the past. Another 20% stated that, although they had not volunteered before, they would like to do so. In total, nearly half of respondents have either already volunteered or would like to in the future.

Among those who have volunteered at some point, only one in ten (9%) do so regularly (at least once a week). One-fifth (20%) reported volunteering once a month, while the rest did so less frequently, and 35% stated that they volunteer only on special occasions, such as events or campaigns. Nearly one-quarter (23%) reported devoting up to two hours per month to volunteering, and a similar share (23%) reported dedicating three to five hours per month. However, as many as 30% of respondents were unable to specify the amount of time they dedicate. Compared to 2021, both participation in volunteering and willingness to volunteer increased (by 5 percentage points each), as did the share of those engaging less frequently but on a more regular basis.

Almost half (49%) of volunteers reported having supported Ukraine or Ukrainians. Large shares also reported contributing to the organization of cultural and artistic events (42%), participating in local community activities (35%), assisting older people (32%), fundraising for charity (31%), supporting persons with disabilities (29%), and helping children and young people (29%). By contrast, the least popular activities were providing psychological or social support (4%), assisting other vulnerable groups (8%), and offering professional consulting services (9%).

Respondents who had not volunteered were asked why they did not participate. The most common reason was lack of time (55%). Many also noted that no one had invited or encouraged them to volunteer (39%). Age and health were cited by 30%, and lack of information about volunteering opportunities by 29%. Nineteen percent of respondents said they considered volunteering a waste of time, and the same share noted that there were no volunteering opportunities in their local area. These findings suggest that there is clear potential for expanding volunteering, with particularly high potential among people aged over 60.

The 2024 Civic Empowerment Index study also examined the **organizational embeddedness** of society. Survey results showed that 51% of residents had, over the past 12 months, belonged as members to or participated as volunteers in the activities of various organizations. The largest share, 22%, belonged to or participated in the activities of one organization; 12% were involved in two; 8% in three; and 9% in four or more. Meanwhile, 49% of respondents reported that they had not belonged to or participated in the activities of any organization during the past year.

The most common areas of organizational involvement (as members or volunteers) were charitable organizations (21%), associations such as homeowners', gardening, or housing cooperatives and parent committees at schools (17%), local community organizations (16%), leisure, hobby, or sports organizations (15%), and organizations that assist or unite particular groups (10%). Although direct comparison is complicated due to adjusted question wording, it can reasonably be assumed that the density of organizational membership in 2024 remains similar to that observed in 2020, and higher than in 2016.

Combining data on organizational embeddedness with willingness to volunteer during crises reveals a clear correlation: the more embedded an individual is in organizations (as a member or volunteer of one or more), the stronger their willingness to contribute to crisis management. Among those not belonging to any organization, 36% indicated that they would volunteer in such activities; this share increased to 55% among those affiliated with one organization, 70% among those with two, and 81%

among those with three or more. Greater embeddedness was also linked to higher certainty: in the most engaged group (participating in three or more organizations), 6% were uncertain about volunteering in crisis management activities, compared to 19% among the non-affiliated. Likewise, 15% of the most engaged group responded “definitely yes, I would contribute,” compared to 5% among those not embedded in any organizations.

A closer examination of the **public image of non-governmental organizations** (NGOs) showed that a large share of Lithuania residents still lack a clear opinion about them: when asked whether they trust NGOs, 54% chose the neutral response “neither yes nor no.” Among those with a clear opinion, 3% reported “complete trust” and 30% “trust,” while 2% indicated “complete distrust” and 11% “distrust.” Compared to other institutions, the level of trust in NGOs was very similar to that in municipal authorities and higher than trust in the media, business, or national political institutions.

A majority of respondents (64–68%) viewed NGOs as carrying out socially valuable work, uniting people driven by ideals, and representing public interests. By contrast, a smaller share (18–21%) expressed more negative views, describing NGOs as organizations established to absorb funds, lacking public authority, or misusing resources. Twenty percent of respondents considered NGOs to be passive.

Most society members reported having only limited knowledge about NGOs: 39% said they knew “somewhat,” 34% “very little,” and 13% “nothing at all.” Only 13% assessed their knowledge more positively, with just 2% of them rating their knowledge as “very good.” When asked in an open-ended question which organization they first thought of when hearing the term “non-governmental organization,” the most prominent examples cited at the end of 2024 were large charitable (mainly) organizations such as Caritas (14%), Blue Yellow (8%), the Red Cross (8%), and Food Bank (7%).

When asked about the character of their personal engagement with NGOs, respondents most frequently reported donating through or to NGOs: 30% had donated money, 33% goods, and 26% had allocated 1.2% of their income tax to NGOs. Eleven percent said they had participated in NGO events, rallies, demonstrations, or protest actions. Fourteen percent reported having volunteered for NGOs, and 8% said they were (or had been) NGO members or employees.

In terms of **societal cohesion**, Lithuanian residents themselves most often state **observing divisions** between those who support LGBTQ+ rights, including the right to marriage, and those who oppose them (68%). The second most visible division is between supporters of different political parties (56%), and the third between those with differing views on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic (49%). Only 13% of respondents reported perceiving no societal divisions along any of the listed twelve lines. Perceived visibility of societal divisions are related to individuals’ views on how freely they can express their beliefs and opinions, as well as their willingness to volunteer in a crisis or defend the country. Those who believe that everyone can openly express their opinions perceive less societal division compared to those who think otherwise; people who feel unable to publicly say what they truly think are more likely to perceive greater divisions within society.

The study also showed that half of Lithuanian residents (51%) believe that in Lithuania everyone is **allowed to openly express their opinions and beliefs**, while one-third (34%) hold the opposite view. The most frequently cited consequence of expressing one’s views publicly was facing disagreement (67%). A majority (seven out of ten residents) were confident they would not lose close personal relationships due to their opinions. At the same time, half of respondents considered it likely that their

opinions could offend others, and an equal share thought it likely that they could be attacked on social media for expressing their views openly.

Lithuanians' attitudes toward public expression of opinion are closely linked to their sense of pride in Lithuania, their willingness to volunteer in the event of a national crisis, their readiness to defend the country, and all components of civic power. Those who are more trusting and confident in their own ability to express opinions publicly are more likely to express pride in Lithuania, to say they would volunteer during a crisis, or defend the country. They also demonstrate higher levels of civic power.

Since 2007, Civic Empowerment Index has been annually calculated by the Civil Society Institute, based on the methodology prepared by scientists Prof. Ainė Ramonaitė, Dr. Rūta Žiliukaitė and Dr. Mindaugas Degutis.

The research of the Civic Empowerment Index is based on representative surveys. In November 2024, such society's survey was carried out by the public opinion and market research centre "Vilmorus".

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