

## LITHUANIA/BELARUS



### BELARUSIAN REFUGEES IN LITHUANIA IN NEED

These people are threatened with imprisonment in Belarus and with deportation in Lithuania. After the electoral fraud by the Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko in August 2020 and his brutal persecution, hundreds of thousands of Belarusian refugees were warmly welcomed in EU countries; red and white flags were waved as a sign of solidarity. When Russia launched its war of aggression against Ukraine two years later, more than a million Ukrainians fled the country. The red and white flags were replaced by yellow and blue ones. Solidarity with Ukrainian refugees is still going strong, but solidarity with Belarusians is beginning to wane. The election fraud in Belarus, the more than 1,800 political prisoners and the continued persecution of Lukashenko critics and opponents of the regime have disappeared from the headlines.

Recent reports from the ISHR section in Lithuania are noteworthy:

“Lithuania is a small country with a population of around 2.8 million. 200,000 refugees are currently living in our country and are being cared for, including 80,000 Ukrainians and 62,000 Belarusians. The relationship between the Lithuanian population and the refugees is becoming increasingly tense: even Lithuanians do not earn much, there is high unemployment in rural areas, and prices have risen sharply ... The propaganda and disinformation campaigns by the government in Minsk are increasing mistrust.”



“Today, radical Lithuanians smashed the windows of the Belarusian cultural centre, and the Belarusian Orthodox Church in Lithuania - which supports Ukraine - was attacked and its windows destroyed.”

ISHR continues to send a monthly aid transport to Lithuania in support of the refugees. The transport costs per truck amount to 1,800 euros. But that is not all: lawyers have to be deployed time and again to help with residence issues, but also to hold accountable shady entrepreneurs who exploit the plight of Belarusians. Lawyers working in the humanitarian sector cost 2,500 euros per month including taxes and duties. ISHR plans to support ‘Nash Dom’ with a lawyer so that the organisation can continue to help refugees and report on those who are politically persecuted and imprisoned in Belarus.