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## A studyvisit from Lithuania

The COA has a special relationship with the reception of asylum seekers in Lithuania. Mariska Werkman, deputy location manager of the POL in Ter Apel, helped set up a new location in Lithuania for four months in 2021. At the end of 2021, a group of Lithuanians came to the Netherlands to look at the chain approach. At the time, they visited among others location Budel (Cranendonck).

There was a follow-up visit from January 31 to February 2, 2023. The delegation consisted of employees from the Lithuanian shelter and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. Lithuania is currently developing a new reception and integration mechanism for asylum seekers with the help of the EUAA. "In doing so, we like to gain knowledge, experiences, best practices and inspiration from the Netherlands and Sweden," says Deputy Minister Justina Jakštienė, who also took part in this study visit.

### Sharing knowledge and looking around

The visit consisted of site visits and intensive exchange of knowledge on various topics, such as the set-up of the reception system in the Netherlands and Lithuania, the challenges of capacity planning and budgeting, and the reception of vulnerable groups.

In Ter Apel, the Lithuanians got an impression of what chain cooperation entails in practice. Under the guidance of Mariska Werkman, they visited the Aliens Police, the IND, the Marechaussee and the COL and POL of the COA itself.

The Lithuanians were very impressed. Both the chain strategy and the reception's appearance were appealing. The deputy director of the asylum facility in Vilnius, Gediminas Pocius, walked around in Ter Apel and remarked, "It all looks beautiful. It seems as if I am walking around in an English village".

The Lithuanian visitors were given an inside look at a regular asylum seeker center in Den Helder as well as the reception and supervision of unaccompanied minors (UMA). Following a talk by Elizabeth Bremer-Artho and Elizabeth Tams, COA colleagues, resident Ruba from Syria led visitors on a tour of the azc.

This was followed by a tour of the amv location, also by residents. Dorian Reijers and Sifra Krabbendam then presented how the UMA reception in Den Helder works. Also in Den Helder, the Lithuanian guests showed a lot of interests and had many questions.

### Lessons to remember

"We have learned a lot," says Beatričė Bernotienė, director of the asylum reception center based in Rukla, "because the reception system in your country is excellent. It is valuable to see the best examples for yourself. It is great that the COA wants to share this expertise with us."

They also saw things that you better avoid. For example, Laura Perevičiūtė, head of the integration unit of the ministry, concluded: "COA is actually held hostage by the rest of the chain, because stagnations at other chain partners increase the pressure that COA feels". That's a good lesson to keep in mind.

We are curious how the experiences and lessons from the Netherlands will be translated into the new system in Lithuania. We will continue to monitor it with the International Knowledge Platform.

Many colleagues have made this study visit a success. In addition to the people mentioned above, special thanks go to Michiel Schrauwen, Huub Wilbrink, Antoon van Doorn, Nicole van Vijfeijken, Jeanine Slik, Tamara van 't Klooster, Ihsane el Faddali, Arjenne Plaizier and last but not least Elles Maaskant.

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