

NATIONAL REPORT



COUNTRY:
Lithuania

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1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL SPORT SYSTEM/ARCHITECTURE

Since 2018 and the latest Sports Law, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports has been the main body responsible for the Lithuanian sports public policy strategy. For the implementation, it relies on a partnership with national non-government sports organisations (the national federations in particular). Starting July 2022, a separate national sport agency will be in charge of monitoring the implementation of sport policies at national level.

At the municipal level, according to the Law of Sports of the Lithuanian Republic (2018), it is for city and county departments of physical education and sports to develop and implement public sports policy. A Lithuanian Association of the Heads of the Municipality Sport Divisions (LAHMSD) was also created in 2001. It acts as an umbrella organisation and works closely with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Lithuanian National Olympic Committee and other stakeholders.

2. TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE A SPORT DIPLOMACY STRATEGY?

No formalised or non-formalised Sport Diplomacy strategy exists in Lithuania, beyond periodic investments such as the hosting of international sports events.

3. WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT DIPLOMACY GOVERNANCE AND WHO ARE THE MAIN ACTORS?

Many actors could potentially be involved in international sports events, programmes or measures:.

- The Ministry of Education, Science and Sports
- The Ministry for Foreign Affairs
- The Lithuanian National Olympic Committee
- Lithuanian national sport federations (e.g. the national basketball federation or the football federation)
- Municipalities (e.g. Vilnius or Kaunas)
- Sports clubs
- Individual athletes
- Business or media organisations

4. TOOLS OF SPORT DIPLOMACY

Since the 2018 Sports Law, the allocations of the Sports Support Fund for financing sports projects have more than doubled (€13.6 million in 2019, €6.69 million in 2018). 50% of the allocations are directed to projects that promote physical activity (Lithuania lies far behind the leading EU member states in terms of the population ratio that engages in regular sport and exercise. See WHO (2021)). This significant increase in sport investment shows that, in theory, financial capacities do exist to promote international projects. .

5. SPORT DIPLOMACY'S FUTURE

Although no state-led sport diplomacy can be reported, Lithuania could tap into one source of soft power: basketball. The sport is often referred to as Lithuania's "second religion" after Catholicism. The men's national team won the European Basketball Championship in 1937, 1939 and 2003; and in 1995, 2013 and 2015 it came second. The team also won bronze medals in the World Basketball Championship in 2010. Lithuania has won bronze medals at three Olympiads: 1992 (Barcelona), 1996 (Atlanta) and 2000 (Sydney). Not only has basketball played a key role in building the Lithuanian identity, but it contributes to the reputation of the country on a global scale. Leading clubs (such as Zalgiris Kaunas) or athletes (such as Arvydas Sabonis or his son Domantas Sabonis, an NBA player) could take part in potential Sport Diplomacy programmes (Čingienė & Mizeras, 2020). The influence of basketball on the acquisition of soft power can be asserted by enhanced attraction, global glorification and intensification of the positive image of the state (Čingienė, Damijonaitis & Komskienė, 2014).

Lithuania could also invest in major sports events. It hosted the European Men's Basketball Championship in 2011, which enhanced the self-promotion and image-building of the state (Čingienė & Špokas, 2011). In 2021 Lithuania hosted the FIFA Futsal World Cup, which confirmed the country's capacity in bidding for and hosting large sports events.

A third potential vector for Lithuanian Sport Diplomacy lies in a unique international sport event hosted in Lithuania every four years. The "World Lithuanian games" are games for members of the Lithuanian diaspora at the global level. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport provides funding for these games and requires cities willing to host them to go through a formal bidding process. The games are held every four years and the first one dates back to 1938 (it was named "1st Lithuanian National Olympiad" and was held in Kaunas). The number of disciplines and participants are decided at each edition, and then proposed at the global level. The network of Lithuanian embassies is involved in the preparation and logistics for participant travel. This event plays a key role in nurturing Lithuania's cultural identity through its large diaspora worldwide (there are about 1.3 million Lithuanians worldwide in addition to the 2.8 million who live in Lithuania. See World Bank (2022) and the Innovation in Politics Institute (n.d.)).

6. INTERVIEWS

Experts interviewed:

- **Vilma Čingienė**, professor of the Faculty of Public Management and Business at Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), active member of the European Observatory of Sport and Employment (EOSE).
- **Ramunė Bistrickaitė**, head of the integrity department of the Lithuanian football federation and former lawyer at the Department of Physical Education and Sports under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania between 2011 and 2017.

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