

SOCIAL PROTECTION AS A TOOL FOR PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL MEMORY AND TRUST BUILDING

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Guiding questions

1. How did Lithuania's social security reforms address inequality and historical wounds after 1990?
2. How can social security systems support the preservation of historical memory and trust-building.

Foreword

*Our society has a **moral debt** to those people who are the strongest, who have stood and still stand guard over the state and do not hesitate when it comes to making the necessary decisions - this is source of inspiration and strength for future generations.*

*Decent welfare + preservation of historical memory = **trust building***

I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT



(source: genocid.lt)

- The Soviet Union created a **gigantic Gulag** system until 1953.
- Occupied Lithuania felt the destructive power of the totalitarian regimes in 1940-1990: during the German occupation, the Nazis destroyed almost the entire Lithuanian Jewish community – about 200 thousand people. The Soviets deported about 130 thousand Lithuanian residents in 1941-1953 (*E. Grunskis, 1996, A. Gelžinis, 2024*); in total - **around 300 thousand** including political prisoners (total population in Lithuania in 1941 was around 3 million).
- Marked as “*enemies of the people*” under Soviet regime.
- Deportation years **excluded from pensions** and social rights.
- Upon return during soviet era, they often **faced restrictions** in employment, higher education, and even residency rights in cities.
- Post-1990: urgent task was to **develop the social welfare**, as well as **historical justice** and **restore the trust** for the state.

Recognition of the status

- The Genocide and Resistance Research Centre, together with the Commission for the Rights of Resistance Participants (Resisters), is entrusted with considering applications for the recognition and granting of the legal status of a victim (almost 21 thousand applications already considered). The status is important for social benefits.
- In 1991, the **Law on the Legal Status of Victims of Occupation** was adopted:
 - the law declared deportees and political prisoners as special legal category.
 - the law stipulated that **each year spent in exile or imprisonment would count as one and a half years of employment** for the purpose of pension calculation.
 - **special compensatory pensions** were introduced.

This law – is an act of moral recognition, transforming years of exclusion into years that the democratic state deemed valuable.

Ensuring basic social rights

In 1992, the Government adopted the **Action Plan supporting the return of political prisoners and deportees** and providing them with housing, work, integration and other social protection measures, including these tasks:

- signing intergovernmental agreements with ex-Soviet countries on the return of people to their homeland, including financial benefits and compensations for deportees and political prisoners on the ground of the illegal deportations;
- informing Lithuanian communities operating in the territory of the former USSR and families of political prisoners and deportees about the possibilities and conditions of returning to Lithuania;
- providing funds for the construction of residential space for political prisoners and deportees;
- prioritizing the allocation of land for these persons and provide preferential long-term credits for the construction of their own residential houses;

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- prioritizing the allocation of land for these persons and provide preferential long-term credits for the construction of their own residential houses;
- registering unemployed returnees, provide all employment services, including the payment of benefits to persons of working age;
- preparing special territorial employment programs financed from the budget, including the creation of new jobs, organize training, retraining for returnees;
- declaring that all periods of work in the territory of the former USSR, and the time spent in prison and exile and the time during which they were prohibited from returning to Lithuania – should be tripled;
- organizing permanent guardianship or care in priority manner, when needed;
- creating conditions for returnee political prisoners and exiles and their families to integrate into the cultural life of Lithuania, resolve issues of studying in various Lithuanian educational institutions, compensate language courses.

*These measures have provided opportunities to fulfil the **legitimate expectations** of returnees and to comply with the **obligations assumed by the state** (periodic payments, provision of housing, integration measures, etc.).*

Constant continuation of social support

- Nowadays, the Ministry of Social protection and labour is responsible for the social welfare of deportees and political prisoners (social benefits, housing etc.) and its strengthening.
- The latest (2024-2026) Action Plan for the Return of Political Prisoners and Exiles and Their Family Members to Lithuania (the Government revises this Action plan each two years) provides the obligations to ensure consistent state support for deportees returning to Lithuania, and to cover the costs of resettlement/social integration.
- Therefore, besides the general social protection schemes, the special social policy measures encompasses integration and resettlement assistance with material benefits and services; housing; transport benefits; special state pensions and municipal support.

It is important that integration continues at the state level, thereby preserving human rights, the connection of individuals with the state and historical memory.

II. SOCIAL POLICY MEASURES



State pensions

- **State pensions** are allocated from the state budget to persons who suffered the most from the occupations of 1939-1990: deportees, political prisoners, those taken to forced labor, etc.
 - *The average age of recipients of state pensions for victims (excluding widows and orphans) is 78 years. The number of recipients of state pensions decreases by about 4 percent every year.*
- **The amount** differs depending on the legal status of the victim, the level of working capacity for reasons related to the victim
 - for example, political prisoners, exiles, those taken to forced labor, those who were in ghettos and concentration camps, if they have a 45 percent or higher level of lost working capacity for reasons related to the victim.
- In addition, state pensions for **widows and orphans** of victims are paid.

Employment

- Employment reintegration measures:
 - Hiring protections, retraining programs, counseling.

Healthcare

- Free / reduced medicine costs.
- Priority access to healthcare.
- Municipal housing/social care for elderly deportees.

Housing and transportation

- In the period 1992-2016, 2,012 exile families were provided with apartments.
- In 2023, 23 families of returning people were still registered on the lists of returning persons wishing to secure apartments in municipalities.
- Transport discounts at the national level (up to 80%) or free travel (by local government decisions).

III. MEMORY EMBEDDED IN THE POLICY



Key Mechanisms:

- 1. Codification** – exile years counted in law = recognition.
- 2. Prevention of “second exclusion”** – avoiding poverty in old age.
- 3. Intergenerational memory** – pensions & status certificates transmit history within families.
- 4. Trust-building** – first time state “helped, not punished.”
- 5. Symbolic re-legitimation** – victims publicly honored.

Genocide and research center

- For more than three decades, the Genocide and Resistance Research Center has been carrying out a task that many democratic states have entrusted to similar institutions - to investigate crimes committed by totalitarian regimes, commemorate the victims, and defend historical truth.
- The result is the creation of databases of resisters, repressed individuals, and freedom fighters, the purposeful development of the memorial landscape, collections of analyzed and publicized KGB documents, museums.
- The center is not just an academic or administrative institution - it unites historians, communities of exiles and political prisoners and their descendants, who today operate as various civic organizations, and brings together heritage and culture specialists, museum workers, guides, educators, archivists, and archaeologists

- The center's museums – the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Struggles, located in the former KGB building, and the Tuskulėnai Memorial – carry out extensive educational activities.
- The Museum of Occupations and Freedom Struggles provides comprehensive consultations to resistance museums in the regions, and a Soviet propaganda exhibition "Project - HOMO SOVIETICUS" has been opened at the Tuskulėnai Memorial.



Today, the **Genocide and Resistance Research Center** operates as a unique institution that not only studies Soviet repressions, the Holocaust and resistance, but also:

- assists both the executive branch and law enforcement by preparing historical certificates,
- responding to educational needs,
- developing and implementing educational measures,
- taking care of the search for partisan remains,
- publishing scientific publications,
- organizing the work of inter-institutional commissions for granting status and de-Sovietization,
- defending administrative decisions in this area in courts,
- conducting international cooperation,.

Through this work shaping the state's historical memory policy.

Monuments outside Lithuania:

- Kazakhstan (Spassk): by 1990, several memorials had already been erected (1990, 2011, 2014), and another regular sculptural complex was unveiled in 2022.
- Russia (Tomsk): in 2016, a granite monument to Lithuanian exiles and political prisoners was unveiled in Tomsk (project “Mission Siberia”)
- Russia – Perm Region (Galiashor): in 2016, a monument dedicated to Lithuanian (and Polish) exiles was erected, but in 2023 it was secretly demolished

Voices of Deportees and institutional support

“When I received my first pension, I felt for the first time that the state was on my side.” (*Interview testimony, Lithuanian exile, 1995*)



Challenges

- Adequacy of compensations and services often questioned.
- Adequacy of special state pensions: *However, by the Parliament decision in 2024, the pensions of the affected persons were increased by 87 percent (they were always the lowest). This affected about 48 thousand persons.*
- Generational transition: how to sustain memory after survivors pass away?

Currently there are no clearly legalized pensions specifically for deportees or political prisoners for forced labor or repressions during the Soviet era. There were proposals for the Government to negotiate with Russia on compensation (e.g. pensions for years worked during exile or health damage), but they were not formally implemented.

Conclusions

Lithuania's welfare system = more than redistribution.

It became:

- **Archive of memory**
- **Protector against renewed exclusion**
- **Educator across generations**
- **Builder of institutional trust**

Welfare policy = bridge between **historical trauma** and **democratic renewal**.

Decent social protection can serve as the guarantor of **social justice**, a **carrier of memory** and a fundament of **trust to the state**.

- Deportees and political prisoners are now at old age, each of their fates is unique, and their **memories are priceless**. The state must show exceptional attention to these people, including ensuring a dignified old age and integration measures for their children.

“Deportees and political prisoners do not hide; they miss state support.” (Petras Musteikis, Deputy Chairman of the Union of Political Prisoners and Deportees, 2019, LRT).

Thank you for your attention!