MYKOLO ROMERIO UNIVERSITETO

VIEŠOJO SAUGUMO AKADEMIJA



VISUOMENĖS SAUGUMAS IR VIEŠOJI TVARKA (38) Nr. 1

Mokslinis žurnalas

PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER (38) Nr. 1

Research Journal

Kaunas 2026

VISUOMENĖS SAUGUMAS IR VIEŠOJI TVARKA (38) Nr. 1

Mokslinis žurnalas

Atsakingasis redaktorius
Prof. Dr. Rūta Adamonienė, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva

Atsakingojo redaktoriaus pavaduotoja
Prof. Dr. Aurelija Pūraitė, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva

Vykdantysis redaktorius
Doc. Dr. Rasa Dobržinskienė, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva

Nariai:
Prof. Dr. Nino Abesadze, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisio Valstybinis universitetas, Gruzija
Prof. Dr. Rita Bendaravičienė, Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Lietuva
Doc. Dr. Mantas Bileišis, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva
Prof. Dr. Piotr Bogdalski, Ščytno Policijos Akademija, Lenkija
Doc. Dr. Ramunė Čiarnienė, Kauno Technologijos universitetas, Lietuva
Prof. Dr. Joanna Ejdys, Balstogės technologijos universitetas, Lenkija
Doc. Dr. Larisa Kapranova, Pryazovskyi valstybinis Technikos universitetas, Ukraina
Doc. Dr. Jekaterina Kartašova, Middlesex universitetas, Didžioji Britanija
Dr. Laetitia Langlois, Angers universitetas, Prancūzija
Dr. Lienite Litavniece, Rezeknes Technologijų Academija, Latvija
Prof. Dr. Snieguolė Matulienė, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva
Prof. Dr. Tatjana Viktorovna Orekhova, DIA Ekonomikos Akademija, Bulgarija
Prof. Dr. Saulė Petronienė, Kauno Technologijos universitetas, Lietuva
Prof. Dr. Tatjana Polajeva, EuroAcademija, Estija
Prof. Dr. Birutė Pranevičienė, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva
Prof. Dr. Maria Isabel Sánchez Hernández, Ekstremadūros universitetas, Ispanija
Prof. hab. dr. Žaneta Simanavičienė, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva
Doc. Dr. Andrej Stlar, Mariboro universitetas, Slovėnija
Prof. Dr. Živilė Stankevičiūtė, Kauno Technologijos universitetas, Lietuva
Doc. Dr. Cristian-Eduard Stefan, Policijos "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Akademija, Rumunija
Prof. Dr. Ligita Šimanskienė, Klaipėdos universitetas, Lietuva
Doc. Dr. Eglė Štareikė, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva
Lekt. Uno Traat, Estijos Saugumo mokslų akademija, Estija
Lekt. Ülle Vanaisak, Estijos Saugumo mokslų akademija, Estija
Prof. Dr. Violeta Vasiliauskienė, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva
Dr. Andrzej Wawrzusiszyn, Pasieniečių mokymo centras, Lenkija
Prof. Dr. Vaiva Zuzevičiūtė, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, Lietuva

Redaktorių kolegija patvirtinta Mykolo Romerio universiteto Viešojo saugumo akademijos Tarybos posėdyje 2022 gruodžio 22 d. Mokslinių straipsnių rinkinys leidžiamas Mykolo Romerio universiteto Viešojo saugumo akademijoje nuo 2008 m. Kiekvieną straipsnį recenzavo 2 atitinkamos srities mokslininkai vadovaujantis anonimiškumo principu. Autorių straipsnių kalba netaisyta.

Mokslinio žurnalo VISUOMENĖS SAUGUMAS IR VIEŠOJI TVARKA
Redaktorių kolegijos 2026 m. birželio 18 d. posėdžio nutarimu leidinys rekomenduotas spausdinti.
Visos leidinio leidybos teisės saugomos. Šis leidinys arba kuri nors jo dalis negali būti dauginami, taisomi ar kitu būdu platinami be leidėjo sutikimo. Žurnalas referuojamas EBSCO Publishing [International Security & Counter-Terrorism Reference Center], Index Copernicus tarptautinėse duomenų bazėse

Adresas: Mykolo Romerio universiteto Viešojo saugumo akademija Maironio g. 27, LT- 44211 Kaunas
El. paštas: vsa@mruni.eu

PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER (38) Nr. 1

Research Journal

Editorial Board Editor-in-Chief
Prof. Ph. D. Rūta Adamonienė, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

Deputy Editor-in-Chief
Prof. Ph. D. Aurelija Pūraitė, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

Executive Editor
Assoc. Prof. Ph. D. Rasa Dobržinskienė, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

Members:
Prof. Ph. D. Nino Abesadze, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia
Prof. Ph. D. Rita Bendaravičienė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
Assoc. Prof. Ph. D. Mantas Bileišis, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania
Prof. Ph. D. Piotr Bogdalski, Police Academy in Szczytno, Poland
Assoc. Prof. Ph. D. Ramunė Čiarnienė, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania
Prof. Ph. D. Joanna Ejdys, Bialystok University of Technology, Poland
Assoc. Prof. Ph. D. Larisa Kapranova, Pryazovskyi State Technical University, Ukraine
Assoc. Prof. Ph. D. Jekaterina Kartašova, Middlesex University, London, Great Britain
Ph. D. Laetitia Langlois, Angers University, France
Ph. D. Lienite Litavniece, Rezekne Academy of Technologies, Latvia
Prof. Ph. D. Snieguolė Matulienė, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania
Prof. Ph. D. Tatjana Viktorovna Orekhova, DIA Academy of Economics, Bulgaria
Prof. Ph. D. Saulė Petronienė, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania
Prof. Ph. D. Tatjana Polajeva, EuroAcademy, Estonia
Prof. Ph. D. Birutė Pranevičienė, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania
Prof. Ph. D. Maria Isabel Sánchez Hernández, University of Extremadura, Spain
Prof. hab. Ph. D. Žaneta Simanavičienė, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania
Assoc. Prof. Ph. D. Andrej Sotlar, University of Maribor, Slovenia
Prof. Ph. D. Živilė Stankevičiūtė, Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania
Assoc. Prof. Ph. D. Cristian-Eduard Stefan, Police Academy "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", Romania
Prof. Ph. D. Ligita Šimanskienė, Klaipėda University, Lithuania
Assoc. Prof. Ph. D. Eglė Štareikė, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania
Lect. Uno Traat, Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Estonia
Lect. Ülle Vanaisak, Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Estonia
Prof. Ph. D. Violeta Vasiliauskienė, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania
Ph. D. Andrzej Wawrzusiszyn, Border Guard Training Center, Poland
Prof. Ph. D. HP Vaiva Zuzevičiūtė, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

Each article is reviewed by 2 scientists, following the principle of blind reviewing.
Research Journal has been published since 2008. The research journal is listed in the EBSCO Publishing [International Security & Counter-Terrorism Reference Center], Index Copernicus International Database.

© Mykolas Romeris University Academy of Public Security, 2026
Address: Mykolas Romeris University Academy of Public Security Maironio str. 27,
LT-44211 Kaunas
E-mail: vsa@mruni.eu

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

TURINYS

Aldas BANELIS..... 5
LITHUANIA'S LEGAL (IN)ACTION IN THE FACE OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

Andreea Nicoleta DRAGOMIR, Sergiu Gabriel BERINDEA..... 19
PUBLIC SECURITY AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION. A MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE APPROACH

Jolita GEČIENĖ..... 32
MAGIC OF LEADERSHIP IN SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS: AN INSPIRING JOURNEY TO THE HORIZONS OF SUSTAINABLE SECURITY

Torsten HUSCHBECK, Róbert HANÁK, Jonathan LEMMER, Lea JACOBY, Christian HORRES, Julian BUSCH..... 47
THE GENIE IS OUT OF THE BOTTLE: A METHODICAL CONTRIBUTION TO 3D-PRINTED FIREARMS

Khalil ISRAFILZADE..... 59
GOVERNING THE AUTONOMOUS MARKETER: A DUAL-STAGE MODERATED MEDIATION FRAMEWORK FOR AGENTIC AI GOVERNANCE IN DIGITAL MARKETING

Dileta JATAUTAITĖ, Vaiva ZUZEVIČIŪTĖ, Rūta KALYTIENĖ..... 71
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING OUTCOMES AS A FACTOR OF SUSTAINABLE SECURITY (POL COM)

Sigita JURAVIČIŪTĖ, Aušrinė GREIČIŪTĖ-SOLOVEJĖ..... 82
WORKPLACE MOBBING: GENDER DIFFERENCES AND EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS

Kristina KUPRYTĖ, Saulius BUIVYS..... 96
BUILDING SOCIO-CULTURAL SECURITY THROUGH COMMUNITY CULTURAL GOVERNANCE

Jonathan LEMMER, Robert BECKER, Torsten HUSCHBECK..... 115
RISK MANAGEMENT AT MAJOR EVENTS, USING THE EXAMPLES OF LOVE PARADE 2010 AND UEFA EURO 2024

Vilma MILAŠIŪNAITĖ, Ema ATKOČAITYTĖ..... 130
PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS AND USE OF PREVENTION AND SUPPORT MEASURES FOR PROFESSIONAL VICTIMISATION AMONG LITHUANIAN POLICE OFFICERS

Birutė PRANEVIČIENĖ, Kristina MIKALAUSKAITĖ-ŠOSTAKIENĖ, Gabrielė GINTAUTAITĖ 146
PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS REGARDING DECISIONS BY THE AGENCY FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Aura Marcela PREDA 161
CRIME PREVENTION OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING AS A PREMISE FOR HUMAN SECURITY. CASE-STUDY: ROMANIA

Verena STUMM, Alexander BAUMGARTL, Charlotte KÖNIG, Antonia BLIND, Mona EL MAMCHOUK, Mara NEUGEBAUER 170
PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE OFFICERS DEPENDING ON THE VISIBILITY OF THEIR WEAPONS

Eglė ŠTAREIKĖ, Aleksas ZEBLECKIS-ŠEPUTIS 180
COMPENSATION FOR DAMAGE RESULTING FROM THE DEATH OF A PERSON: LEGAL REGULATION AND JUDICIAL PRACTICE IN LITHUANIA

Justina VAITIEKŪNĖ, Inga STANKEVIČĖ 196
DUOMENŲ KULTŪROS ĮTAKA ORGANIZACIJOS INOVATYVUMUI

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

LITHUANIA'S LEGAL (IN)ACTION IN THE FACE OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

Aldas BANELIS
Mykolas Romeris University
Maironio str. 27, LT 44211 Kaunas, Lithuania
E-mail: aldas.banelis99@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0009-0005-3062-8653

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-01

Abstract. *As the world enters a fifth year of Russia's murderous war in Ukraine, which, according to the aggressor, was supposed to be a "3 day long special military operation", the Kremlin's tireless propaganda machine is flooding the information space with various false narratives in hopes of reducing the help of Ukraine's allies, discrediting its fight for survival and disseminating uncertainty in Western societies. While the conventional warfare is taking place on the lands, seas and skies of Ukraine, Russia's information warfare front is much farther reaching. The warmongering state dedicates tremendous amounts of money to disinformation campaigns targeted towards the democratic countries, because it is the only battleground in which Russia might be able to overpower the West. Since the very first days of restoration of its independence, Lithuania has been on the receiving end of such campaigns, even more so, regarding the fact that it managed to achieve membership in the European Union and NATO. Kremlin's propaganda is particularly concentrated on the neighbouring democratic states that share and nurture Western values. Considering that any war, conventional or information, cannot be won by only defensive action, this article's purpose is to uncover, what legal means does Lithuania possess in order to counter Russia's propagandistic activities, are the legal measures sufficient and most importantly – what new legal instruments have been implemented during the recent years that are empowering Lithuania not only to counter Kremlin's lies, but to fight back? Methodologically, the research involves a legal analysis of existing laws and legal norms of Lithuania, dedicated to fighting propaganda and ensuring legal liability for it, as well as proposals for the amendments of legal acts, put forward by lawmakers at the Parliament of Lithuania. Findings indicate inaction in providing new and innovative legal means of combating propaganda by the legislators. To conclude, the article highlights the few noteworthy examples of proposals, put forward by legislators in the field of information warfare against Russia and emphasizes the fact that more progressive, proactive, and original legal initiatives are necessary.*

Keywords: *information warfare, propaganda, disinformation, legal instruments*

Introduction

The relevance of the issue. The fourth Lithuanian Democracy Sustainability Barometer study found that for the first time since its beginning in 2022, the percentage of people who believe that Russia poses a direct threat to the Baltic countries became less than 70%[1]. Furthermore, for the first time in four years, those agreeing with the statement that Lithuania should help Ukraine in every way do not make up the absolute majority (49,9%)[2]. These numbers and the lowest Russian threat perception index (determined in the aforementioned study) since 2022, *"indicate a still sufficient awareness of the threat posed by Russia, however […] it is deteriorating"*[3]. Taking in to account that Lithuania, as a state, should be considered one of the most resistant to Russian propaganda because of its history with the aggressor that acts as a "vaccine" against false narratives, albeit slow, but still a decline in perception of

[1] Mažvydas Jastramskis, „Demokratijos tvarumo barometras 2026": 17 (Mažvydas Jastramskis, "Democracy sustainability barometer 2026"), GSSC.LT, available from: https://www.gssc.lt/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/v04-print_Demokratijos-tvarumo-barometras_2026_A4_LT.pdf, accessed 6 March 2026.
[2] Ibid: 17-18.
[3] Ibid: 17-18.

Kremlin's threat is deeply worrying and should function as a wake-up call to Lithuanian, European Union's (hereinafter referred to as the EU) politics and NATO leaders that Russia is gaining ground on the front of information warfare. While the war on Ukraine's soil rages on, the Kremlin is in no position to launch another large-scale invasion, simply because of the lack of capabilities, however if the aggressor wholeheartedly believes that the people will not resist, he might test the resolve of the West. Russia made the mistake of self-deception with Ukraine and is now involved in the largest military conflict in Europe since World War 2, nevertheless it does not mean that it will not make the same mistake again. In a twisted, but pretty much straightforward manner of Sun Tzu's lessons on war, Russia means to win the West over without ever firing a shot. Because of this, it is crucial that Lithuania, as a frontier country, puts up a fight not only against the propaganda narratives but also for the minds of its own people, which are the main target of Russia's information warfare.

Propaganda is extensively analysed, described and discussed by such experts of information warfare as Gintautas Mažeikis, Viktor Denisenko, Mantas Martišius and Nerijus Maliukevičius in monographs, conferences, public lectures and scientific articles. However, propaganda as a phenomenon can and must be studied from the perspective of various scientific fields in order to understand its significance and influence. Psychology and sociology help assess its influence on the peoples' psyche, ways of thinking, behaviour and mood both individually and as a group. The field of security studies helps reveal how propaganda makes an impact on national and public security. Lastly, an analysis of legal documents, norms, their implementation, court decisions, legislative initiatives (such as amendments on legal acts, etc.) and suggestions on improving the legal environment regarding propaganda are methods of legal science used examining the phenomenon of propaganda. This indicates the interdisciplinarity of researches on propaganda. Multiple scientific fields are involved in analysing any case or phenomenon related to propaganda or disinformation.

Goals and objectives of this article. The goal of this article is to reveal what legal means Lithuania possesses and what proposals have been made during the recent year that could help in an information war with Russia.

In order to achieve said goal, these objectives have been put forward:

1. Evaluate the role social media plays in the Kremlin's never-ending information warfare.
2. Present the legal tools available to combat propaganda in the legislation of the Republic of Lithuania at the moment.
3. Review the drafts on amendments to legal acts, giving more legal instruments in the fight against Russian propaganda, submitted by the lawmakers.

Methodology of the Research. The research involves a review of existing legal norms, used by law enforcement officers in cases of dissemination of propaganda, disinformation and fake news and their applicability is briefly discussed. A case study of Russia's universal propaganda narratives being twisted and adapted regarding Lithuania's disconnection from BRELL electrical power system is presented. Lastly, a legal analysis of drafts of amendments on legal acts, meant to help combat hostile propaganda, is conducted and the possible effects of their acceptance on applying legal liability to individuals, involved in disseminating propaganda, are evaluated.

The role of social media in Russia's information warfare

Each year, the intelligence agencies of the Republic of Lithuania present a National Threat assessment – a public document that introduces citizens and residents of Lithuania to

tendencies, processes, and events that influence the national security of the country. In this year's publication, the impact of social media on the spread of propaganda is emphasized. *"International sanctions and national restrictions have reduced the opportunities for Russian propaganda channels to disseminate propaganda in Lithuania, but the Kremlin has not given up its goal of seeking influence in the Lithuanian information space. Russian propaganda narratives directed against Lithuania change barely, however, they are increasingly being spread in a disguised manner. This is aimed at creating the impression that messages, favourable to Russia, originate from Lithuanian society. Social media has become Russia's main tool for spreading informational influence in Lithuania, as they provide opportunities to circumvent restrictions on propaganda channels and, through targeted operations and long-term campaigns, promote distrust in state institutions, incite discord, reduce trust in NATO, or discredit support for Ukraine. Social media algorithms create conditions for a rapid spread of information, and Russian propaganda channels, in order to achieve an image of reliability, often disguise themselves as profiles of independent news pages or influencers"*[4]. This information, put forward by the intelligence agencies, highlights a shift in Russia's behaviour. According to the said information, it can be identified that the aggressor has fully reoriented its propaganda export to social media. Propaganda for the internal audience is still broadcasted using more traditional ways: television, radio, movies, etc., but Russia is adapting to the increasing influence of social media and is effectively using it for propaganda dissemination.

Kremlin's use of social media as a tool to propagate its narratives and its expertise in this area is also noticed by the scientists, who have been analysing Russian propaganda for years. According to Vytautas Magnus University's Professor Gintautas Mažeikis: *"Putin's Russia has created special state funds for information warfare and is developing its own cyber army, which poses a challenge and threat to Western society"*[5]. G. Mažeikis also states that *"Kremlin's repressive regime demonstrated the ability to manage post-truth communication on social media"*[6]. This ability is best described by, firstly, creating and developing regime-managed alternatives to western social media platforms, secondly, by actively invoking troll and bot farms that in turn are being constantly used to influence worldwide social media giants such as "Meta", "X", "TikTok", etc[7]. For example, recently, the Commissioner General of the Lithuanian Police, in an interview with a journalist A. Anužis stated that an estimate of 500 000 bots operate in Lithuania's social media field[8]. To make it clear – *"a bot is a computer program that can perform tasks online by imitating the actions of a real person, simply put, they are face profiles, controlled by algorithms and designed to spread disinformation and manipulate the public space"*[9]. Lastly, as established by Professor Mažeikis: *"propaganda institutions started using these platforms to promote autonomous post-truth propaganda activists, able to create*

[4] Valstybės saugumo departamentas (State Security Department) (2026), 2026 National Threat Assessment: 79, available from: https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/2026-GR-LT-El_NAUJAS.pdf, accessed 12 March, 2026.
[5] Gintautas Mažeikis, „Propagandos galia: ideologiniai Rusijos agresijos pagrindai", Almanachas „Rusija dienos šviesoje" 1 (2025): 28 (Gintautas Mažeikis, "The power of propaganda: the ideological basis of Russian aggression", Almanac "Russia in the light of day"), GSSC.LT, available from: https://www.gssc.lt/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/v05_web_Rusija-dienos-sviesoje_publikacija_A4-2.pdf, accessed 7 March 2026.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid: 28-29.
[8] Artūras Anužis, „Policija be ginklų be šarvų ir be pinigų: ar Lietuva išmoko Ukrainos pamokas?" ("Police without weapons, without armour, and without money: has Lithuania learned the lessons of Ukraine?"), Youtube.com, 24:56-25:10, available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-asiOk_GHg, accessed 14 March 2026.
[9] Vytautas Matulevičius, *Baimės frontas (Fear front),* (Vilnius: Bosanova, 2026), 64.

falsified space of communication, where fabricated events and news are being mixed with real affairs"[10]. Just as in any other social media platform, *"Russian propaganda on "TikTok" is often presented in an attractive form – through short entertaining videos, memes or audio tracks that hide a message of Kremlin's interests"*[11].

Vytautas Matulevičius – a communication expert, the head of communication agency "Bosanova" has recently published his book "Fear front", in which he briefly and clearly describes the Kremlin's propaganda, its recurring narratives, explains what Russia aims to achieve by its actions, and how Lithuania can stand up for itself. *"Currently, social media is perhaps the main channel for spreading Russian lies and fear, and an effective tool for dividing and weakening Western societies"*[12], says V. Matulevičius. The head of the State Security Department, Remigijus Bridikis, reiterated this idea, saying that *"social media is probably absolutely everything at this moment, when it comes to carrying out hostile activities. Recruitment and orders to commit criminal acts take place there, and opinions are formed"*[13].

One of the key elements of Russian propaganda is repetition. However ridiculous a lie might sound, when it is repeated over and over again, it begins to take root in the subconsciousness of some people. For a very long time Kremlin has been using the same propaganda narratives and twisting them according to circumstances or the event that is targeted. The table below presents 4 propaganda narratives that are standard for Russia and how they were twisted and adapted according to the Baltic States' disconnection from the BRELL electrical power system in 8th of February, 2025, and synchronization with continental Europe's electrical network the following day. This action severed the last link of Lithuania's energy infrastructure with Russia and made the country energetically independent from the aggressor state. It's safe to say that the Kremlin was not very enthusiastic about it.

Table 1. The twisting of Russia's standard propaganda narratives regarding Lithuania's disconnection from BRELL

Source: National Threat Assessment 2026, p. 81, State Security Department[14]

Narrative	Adaptation
The soviet era brought more benefits than harm to Lithuania	Russian propaganda sought to portray the soviet era BRELL system as a reliable and efficient infrastructure that guaranteed low electricity prices. Disconnecting from this system was depicted as a reckless move that negated the long-standing benefits of former energetic integration.
Lithuania is not a sovereign state and only follows the instructions of the EU and the USA	It was claimed that Lithuania did not have an independent energy strategy and was blindly following the instructions of more powerful allies, which did not meet Lithuania's own interests. This was done to undermine Lithuania's independence and to suggest that strategic decisions were determined by external influence.
Lithuania pursues a provocative policy towards Russia	The disconnection from BRELL was presented as another provocative step by Lithuania against Russia, which increases tension in the region and undermines the region's energy

[10] Ibid: 29.
[11] State Security Department, *supra note*, 4: 79-80.
[12] Vytautas Matulevičius, *supra note*, 9: 62.
[13] Austėja Paulauskaitė, „Bridikis: vykdant priešišką veiklą, socialiniai tinklai yra absoliučiai viskas" („Bridikis: when it comes to carrying out hostile activities, social media is absolutely everything"), LRT.LT, available from: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2862083/bridikis-vykdant-priesiska-veikla-socialiniai-tinklai-yra-absoliuciai-viskas, accessed 16 March 2026.
[14] State Security Department, *supra note*, 4: 81.

	security. Russian state officials have repeatedly stated that, despite the negative consequences for its energy sector and economy, Lithuania is deliberately provoking Russia. The withdrawal from the BRELL system was presented as another proof of Lithuania's supposed Russophobic policy.
Hostility towards Russia is harming the Lithuanian economy	The disconnection from BRELL was portrayed as an economically harmful action that would increase the prices of electricity, reduce energy security, and in the long-term harm Lithuania's economic development. It was argued that Lithuania should prioritize pragmatic economic relations with Russia over political ambitions.

This is just a single example of many propaganda campaigns the Kremlin launched in Lithuania in relation to important strategic decisions of the state. Although completely ridiculous to a well-informed person, such stories told by Russia do find their audience among people who are not so invested in fact-checking or simply do not know the truth, and social media is an extremely favourable environment for these narratives and their twisted adaptations to circulate.

"The Kremlin is creating an alternative reality in its information war, where Lithuania is weak, alone, and only thanks to Russia's grace has it not yet been conquered."[15] Lithuania and its people know this is not true and Russia knows that too, however the story is told by those who have the initiative to tell it. Therefore, it is extremely important that on social media – a field where most people nowadays spend considerable amounts of their time, and some use it as their only news source – Lithuania starts not only defending itself from false claims, but telling its own story – the truth.

Legal instruments available for combating propaganda

As soon as any action regarding combating propaganda with legal means is taken, the "freedom of speech" lifeline is being cast by those who are involved in the process of disseminating false and harmful information. Undeniably, freedom of expression is one of the core values of the democratic world and is protected by such international legal acts as the European Convention on Human Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Protection of freedom of expression is further transferred into national legal systems. For example, Paragraph 1 of Article 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as the Constitution) serves this exact purpose and states that *"A person has the right to hold their own beliefs and to express them freely"*[16]. However, said Article also clarifies that freedom of expression is incompatible with criminal acts[17], defamation and disinformation included. Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania settled that despite the fact that freedom of expression is one of the foundations of a democratic state, an open, just and harmonious civil society, and an important prerequisite for the implementation of various rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution, the freedom to seek, receive and spread information is not absolute[18]. This

[15] Vytautas Matulevičius, *supra note,* 9: 23.
[16] The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, LRS.LT, available from: https://www.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Konstitucija.htm, accessed 7 March 2026.
[17] Ibid.
[18] „Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucinio Teismo 2005 m. rugsėjo 19 d. nutarimas byloje Nr. 19/04" (Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania dated September 19, 2005, in Case No. 19/04), LRKT.LT, Available from: https://lrkt.lt/lt/teismo-aktai/paieska/135/ta244/content, accessed 17 March 2026.

important principle is, more often than not, overlooked by those who disseminate self-created false information or share Russian propaganda narratives. The forthright understanding of freedom of speech as an absolute, characteristic of the United States of America (hereinafter referred to as the USA), was demonstrated by the Vice President of the USA JD Vance, at Munich Security Conference 2025. An extensive understanding of freedom of speech in USA is perfectly illustrated by the fact that burning an American flag is an action protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution in the USA, as ruled by the Supreme Court of the USA in the case of Texas v. Johnson (1989)[19]. Meanwhile, in Lithuania, burning a national flag would be considered desecration of a state symbol – a deed prohibited by law. Such action, as stated in Article 127 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania[20] (hereinafter referred to as the Criminal Code), could possibly incur a 2 year-long prison sentence. So, coming from a completely different background and a country with much wider limits of freedom of speech, JD Vance aggressively criticized Europe's leaders and their initiatives to combat disinformation and propaganda, especially on social media, accusing them of suppressing free speech[21].

It is only natural that Russia uses the freedom of speech, nurtured in the Western world, to its own benefit, promoting its propaganda directly and through various channels and individuals, while at the same time completely restraining freedom of expression for its own people. For example, according to Russian law, criticizing Russia's invasion of Ukraine or calling it a war, which it is, instead of a "special military operation", can get you into jail for up to 15 years[22]. Therefore, if the Kremlin acts so inhumanely towards people who oppose its predatory behaviour against sovereign countries and speak the truth, why should Lithuania back down and let pro-Russian saboteurs and Russia's propaganda shelter under the freedom of speech principle when the shared information is objectively fake and harmful?

Even though the prohibition of disinformation is very clearly formulated both in the Constitution and Article 19, paragraph 2 of the Law on Public Information of the Republic of Lithuania[23], the question of legal liability for such actions is not as plain. Non-compliance with the prohibition on disseminating disinformation provided for in the Law on Public Information, incurs legal liability only to the producers of public information, or other persons who have concluded a contract with the producers – broadcasters and (or) rebroadcasters of television or radio channels, but not for individual persons who have access to a large audience through other channels like social media[24], and as spoken before – social media is absolutely everything. Legal liability to individuals disseminating propaganda is not mentioned in the Code of

[19] Facts and Case Summary – Texas v. Johnson, USCOURTS.GOV, available from: https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/educational-activities/first-amendment-activities/texas-v-johnson/facts-and-case-summary-texas-v-johnson, accessed 17 March 2026.
[20] Law on the approval and entry into force of the criminal code, E-TAR.LT, available from: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.2B866DFF7D43/asr, accessed 17 March 2026.
[21] Patrick Wintour, „JD Vance stuns Munich conference with blistering attack on Europe's leaders", THEGUARDIAN.COM, available from: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/14/jd-vance-stuns-munich-conference-with-blistering-attack-on-europes-leaders, accessed 17 March 2026.
[22] Paul Kirby, Russia-Ukraine war: Moscow politician gets 7 years for denouncing war, available from: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62092196, accessed 18 March 2026.
[23] Law on Public Information of the Republic of Lithuania, E-TAR.LT, available from: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.065AB8483E1E/asr, accessed 18 March 2026.
[24] Aldas Banelis, „Dezinformacija, propaganda, melagienos: poveikis visuomenės saugumui ir užkardymo teisinės galimybės" (magistro baigiamasis darbas, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, 2024), 43 (Aldas Banelis, "Disinformation, propaganda, fake news: impact on public safety and legal possibilities of prevention" (Master's thesis, Mykolas Romeris university, 2024)), available from: https://cris.mruni.eu/server/api/core/bitstreams/b2e403d9-c562-4116-a31a-3f00fe9f55b5/content, 19 March 2026.

Administrative Offenses of the Republic of Lithuania, nor is it directly defined in the Criminal Code of the country. However, article 170[2] *("Public approval of international crimes, crimes of the USSR or Nazi Germany, their denial or gross belittling"*[25]) of the latter legal act sometimes serves this purpose, is applicable to both individuals and legal entities, and might even lead to a prison sentence. The aforementioned legal norm will not be examined in detail in this article, since its comprehensive assessment and analysis of court decisions has been carried out in the master's thesis "Disinformation, propaganda, fake news: impact on public safety and legal possibilities of prevention"[26]. Nevertheless, it is extremely important to highlight that criminal law in Lithuania, just as in any democratic state that follows the principles of the rule of law, is applicable only as an *ultima ratio*. Not only that, but necessary conditions must be met for liability to apply under said article. *"The criminal act must be committed in a threatening, abusive or insulting manner or the act must have disturbed or could have disturbed public order"*[27], moreover, *"it is necessary to establish […] that is precisely that person who published one or another comment, message or publication, it is necessary to find the means by which this was done […], traces of the criminal act (telephones, computers, hard drives), conclusions from experts are needed, confirming that the words were indeed intended to publicly endorse international crimes, the crimes of USSR or Nazi Germany, to deny them or grossly belittle them"*[28]. However, *"the formal composition of the crime does not require consequences for liability to arise"*[29]. It is essential to state that such ideas, as described in the article 170[2] can only be considered a violation only if they are expressed loudly. Lithuania is not a George Orwell's "1984" dystopia and "thought police" does not operate in a democratic state, governed by the rule of law. People are masters of their own thoughts as long as they live in their heads. During the writing of this paragraph, only 1 case under Article 170[2] was found on the Lithuanian Court Information System "Liteko" since January 1st 2025, which reached the Supreme Court of the Republic of Lithuania and the person was convicted[30].

Seeing as Russian propaganda narratives, including those that can be considered within the framework of Article 170[2] are disseminated actively in social media and yet in one year's time, only one person was convicted, a couple of observations must be made. Firstly, the requirement for very comprehensive proof and ample conditions for the article 170[2] to be adapted and the lack of administrative liability make up a "grey zone" in which individuals, disseminating propaganda, may feel immune to legal prosecution and actively exploit this situation. Secondly, these circumstances lead to an implication that the legal system regarding propaganda must be reviewed and updated by the legislators.

Improvements to the legal system

The existence of the "grey zone" is noticed by the experts. Auksė Balčytienė, a Vytautas Magnus University Professor and communications researcher, states that *"our entire informational and public communication space is difficult to manage, because a grey area*

[25] Law on the approval and entry into force of the criminal code, *supra note* 20.
[26] Aldas Banelis, *supra note*, 24: 43.
[27] Ibid: 44-45.
[28] Ibid: 51.
[29] Ibid: 45.
[30] Lietuvos Aukščiausiojo Teismo 2025 m. gruodžio 9 d. nutartis baudžiamojoje byloje Nr. 2K-173-1073/2025 (The judgement of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Lithuania on 9 December, 2025, in criminal case No. 2K-173-1073/2025), LITEKO.TEISMAI.LT, available from: https://liteko.teismai.lt/viesasprendimupaieska/tekstas.aspx?id=5be5da5c-15d4-4739-a2ff-fe5805fa4e9c, accessed 18 March 2026.

emerged"[31]. The scientist highlights that *"recognizing that the information disseminated is not necessarily true is a challenge for people"*[32] and *"even if it is recognized, a completely new legal system and even a rearrangement of conventional operating principles is needed to control or somehow prevent these activities"*[33]. Associate Professor at the Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Doctor Mažvydas Jastramskis claims that *"Russian disinformation is neither soft power, seeking to improve its image, nor hard power, seeking to impose its will by force. It is a destructive sharp power, which, above all seeks to cut into our social and political fabric, drive wedges and therefore demonstrate that Western political systems, institutions and democracy do not work"*[34]. Having realized that Russian propaganda is not just words, so called "unsystematic opinions" or expressions of freedom of speech, but rather a constant activity of an authoritarian, hostile and predatory state that is trying to erode the very foundations of another – democratic, sovereign and peaceful – country and an act of war against the minds of its people, the answer must be corresponding and assured.

It is known in the legal community that law lags behind real life, and the legislative process is generally reactive. In a Master's thesis, A. Banelis suggested that an update on Lithuania's legal framework, which provides for liability for the dissemination, distribution and approval or propaganda, disinformation and fake news in such a way that it meets today's situation, but at the same time does not become obsolete in the near future and remains relative in the context of new potential threats[35]. Two very particular propositions were made regarding the improvement of the legal system to combat propaganda. First – to supplement the Criminal Code with a new legal norm: *"Public support of war and other propaganda, disinformation or fake news disseminated by the Russian Federation or the Republic of Belarus, or other states recognized by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania as terrorist or supporting terrorism, or by aggressor states, or beneficial to such states, their dissemination, distribution or assistance in carrying out such actions"*[36]. And the second – to introduce a new legal norm into the Code of Administrative Offenses: *"Sharing propaganda, disinformation or fake news disseminated by the Russian Federation or the Republic of Belarus, other states recognized by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania as terrorist or supporting terrorism, or states aggressors, or beneficial to such states on the mass media platforms"*[37]. The reasoning for such suggestions, their explanation, and applicability are explicitly explained in the thesis, published in 2024. It is curious, what actions have the lawmakers taken since that time?

It could be said that the legislators have taken into account both the seriousness of the Russian propaganda threat in Lithuania and the observations of scientists and experts. After conducting a search of draft amendments to legal acts, submitted by the members of the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas), three instances were found.

[31] Žygintas Abromaitis, Vesta Silantjevienė, „Profesorė apie botus ir internete plintančius melus: reikia naujos teisinės sistemos" ("Professor on bots and online lies: a new legal system is needed"), LRT. LT, available from: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2845408/profesore-apie-botus-ir-internete-plintancius-melus-reikia-naujos-teisines-sistemos, accessed 19 March 2026.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Vytautas Matulevičius, *supra note*, 9: 116.
[35] Aldas Banelis, *supra note*, 24: 59.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid: 60.

The first one – *Draft law on amending articles 2 and 50 of the Law on Public Information and supplementing it with an article 19*[138] – proposed by a mixed group of 18 Parliament members from both position and opposition. This document proposes that the narrow definition of *disinformation*, established by the Law on Public information be expanded from *"false information intentionally disseminated publicly"*[39] to *"intentionally publicly disseminated, created, presented or distributed false or misleading information, which is intended to deceive the public, influence Seimas, President, municipal councils or European Parliament elections, referendums, harm the national security, constitutional order, public order of the Republic of Lithuania or other important public interests of the public"*[40]. This much more explicit definition for disinformation could be of great help, because it would empower law enforcement to link the individuals disseminated false information with their desired effects or results, which could lead to a less complicated application of administrative or criminal liability for this malevolent behaviour. Two remaining suggestions from this draft are an addition of types of information that are prohibited from publication because they pose a threat to state and public security (for example, information that distorts scientific data, aims to destabilize activity of state institutions and so on) and the measures that must be taken by the institution of the Inspector of journalist ethics if the prohibited information is published[41].

The second one – *Draft law on amending Articles 464, 589 of the Code of Administrative Offences and supplementing the Code with Article 507*[242] – proposed by the same group of members of Seimas. If this draft were to be accepted, the Code of Administrative Offences would be supplemented with an article *507*[2] *"Dissemination of disinformation"* which would state as follows: *"Anyone who intentionally creates, submits, disseminates or distributes false or misleading information aimed at deceiving the public, influencing the Seimas, President, municipal councils or European Parliament elections, referendums, or harming the national security, constitutional order, public order of the Republic of Lithuania or other important interests of the public shall be punished by a fine of two hundred to three thousand euros."*[43] The acceptance of this draft by the Parliament of Lithuania would mean that finally, the responsible authorities would have a tool of administrative law to punish individuals disseminating propaganda and disinformation; therefore, the earlier discussed "grey zone" would become considerably smaller, and the feeling of immunity of some individuals, who regularly spread false information, would be dispersed. The draft also specifies that institutions that would be able to apply this legal norm are the police, the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania, Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission, and the Journalist Ethics Inspector[44].

[38] Draft law on amending articles 2 and 50 of the Law on Public Information and supplementing it with an article 19[1], E-SEIMAS.LRS.LT, available from: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/6412f850bf0211f088ded46d8ae099d5?positionInSearchResults=79&searchModelUUID=dc967d8c-9add-4e51-b356-e49ab913fb09, accessed 19 March 2026.
[39] Law on Public Information of the Republic of Lithuania, *supra note*, 23.
[40] Draft law on amending articles 2 and 50 of the Law on Public Information and supplementing it with an article 19[1], *supra note*, 38.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Draft law on amending Articles 464, 589 of the Code of Administrative Offences and supplementing the Code with Article 507[2], E-SEIMAS.LRS.LT, available from: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/fa6cee70bf0511f088ded46d8ae099d5?positionInSearchResults=77&searchModelUUID=dc967d8c-9add-4e51-b356-e49ab913fb09, accessed 19 March 2026.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Draft law on amending Articles 464, 589 of the Code of Administrative Offences and supplementing the Code with Article 507[2], *supra note*, 42.

The final one – *Draft law on supplementing the Criminal Code with Articles 118[1] and 118[245]* – submitted by the same group of members of Seimas. If the draft were to be accepted, the new article 118[1] *"Information activities of a hostile state against the Republic of Lithuania"* would determine criminal liability to those who on behalf of another state prepared, distributed, coordinated, submitted or disseminated false information, intended to undermine the national security and constitutional order of the Republic of Lithuania and impose a punishment in the form of a fine, arrest or imprisonment for up to five years[46]. This new legal norm could become a great tool for law enforcement officers, because it would be specifically established for cases of propaganda and relieve the officials from creatively adapting the article 170[2] of the Criminal Code to the instances of propaganda, disinformation or fake news. The article 118[2] *"Public incitement to aggressive war"* would state that *"A person who publicly incited, encouraged, urged, justified, supported or otherwise propagated an aggressive war or other armed conflict in violation of the generally recognized principles of international law, or who publicly systematically disseminated declarations or other statements aimed at influencing public opinion to support an aggressive war or other armed conflict in violation to generally recognized principles of international law, shall be punished by a fine, arrest or imprisonment for a term of up to five years"*[47]. It can be argued that this amendment of the Criminal Code is produced to specifically correspond Russia's unprovoked aggressive war in Ukraine and the individuals who express themselves freely on the internet as supporters of it; however, knowing Russia, this legal norm, if accepted, might be relevant to any other war Russia might start someday. God forbid that happens.

These drafts for amendments of legal documents were all registered on the 11th of November 2025. It took almost 4 years of Ukraine's struggle in a war it did not start, hundreds of thousands of casualties, an information space filled with propaganda narratives that are causing tremendous damage to people's minds and the integrity of our society, for legislators to realise that the legal system lacks instruments to fight the Kremlin's lies and individuals who feel immune disseminating them. Not to mention all the fake information that was being tossed around during the COVID-19 pandemic or Lukashenko's (President of the Republic of Belarus) artificially created migrant crisis at the border of Lithuania. Three drafts for amendments of laws, dedicated to fighting propaganda, in more than 6 years. Not great.

A change of perspective

In an interview with a journalist, Frank Gannon, former president of the USA, Richard Nixon said: *"we don't have to convince the Russians that we're for peace. They know that. We have to convince the Russians they cannot win a war"*[48]. Today, on the contrary, *"Russia is convinced that it can do such damage that it would dismantle our institutions"*[49], says Gabrielius Landsbergis, former minister of foreign affairs of Lithuania. Donatas Giknius, Commander of the Information Operations Company of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, recalls his meeting with a Ukrainian military officer back in 2014 after Russia's occupation of

[45] Draft law on supplementing the Criminal Code with Articles 118[1] and 118[2], E-SEIMAS.LRS.LT, available from: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/d81047e0bf0611f088ded46d8ae099d5?positionInSearchResults=78&searchModelUUID=dc967d8c-9add-4e51-b356-e49ab913fb09, accessed 19 March 2026.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Vytautas Matulevičius, *supra note,* 9: 139.
[49] Draft law on supplementing the Criminal Code with Articles 118[1] and 118[2], *supra note,* 45.

Crimea and the invasion of the Donbas region. The Ukrainian soldier said the following words: *"We lost the information war. That is why blood spills on our land now, on our streets. Do not lose the information war, because then blood will spill on your streets too."*[50] These words, according to Commander D. Giknius, were a call to act. Currently, the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union is strengthening its Information Operations capacity, aiming to help people not get lost in the flow of information, develop the ability to distinguish between what is true and what is not, and develop critical thinking and resistance to misleading information[51]. According to communications expert V. Matulevičius, "*we must not allow Russia to intimidate, harass and destabilize us, we must not be afraid of Russian threats and discuss resonating issues respectfully, without getting angry with each other"*[52], because the Kremlin will certainly use any tensions in our society to its advantage. V. Matulevičius urges to refute Russian lies from the very first days of school. He proposes an idea that once a week, for all 12 years of school, information and media literacy classes should be mandatory from grades 1 to 12, taught by specially trained teachers, with regularly updated programs and analysis of disinformation campaigns[53]. He also encourages the adoption good practices of other countries, like Finland, in repelling Russia's destructive information activities. According to V. Matulevičius, Finland's resilience stands on four pillars: 1) public debates must be based on facts, not emotions; 2) national media must explain disinformation and disseminated narratives; 3) institutions must intervene in public debates when necessary; 4) quality of education increases resilience to disinformation[54]. Lastly, a war cannot be won by only defensive action, the foe has to suffer a counterattack, therefore Lithuania's position regarding information warfare must change. Lithuania's attack on the information front against Russia could look like a well-organised information campaign about a proud Baltic country that successfully reclaimed its independence and became a success story as a democratic republic that is often at the top of statistics on digital innovation, economic growth, fintech companies and entrepreneurial environment.

On the 18th of February 2026, it was announced that Lithuania would be developing a plan to combat disinformation and manipulation[55]. An inter-institutional working group, guided by the Deputy Minister of Culture Viktor Denisenko – propaganda and disinformation expert, author and co-author of books and publications on said subjects – was assembled at the Ministry of Culture and tasked with developing a plan to combat disinformation and manipulation[56]. *"It is estimated that the plan will be prepared by the autumn of this year, and then it will move on to its implementation phase, which will also be coordinated by this working group."*[57] Seeing the state take specific steps in repelling Russian information threats provides confidence in the state.

[50] Lietuvos Šaulių Sąjunga, „Kai mūšio laukas – žmonių protai: šauliai imasi veiksmų" (Lithuanian Riflemen's Union " When the battlefield is people's minds: riflemen take action"), available from: https://www.sauliusajunga.lt/naujienos/kai-musio-laukas---zmoniu-protai-sauliai-imasi-veiksmu, accessed 20 March, 2026.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Vytautas Matulevičius, *supra note,* 9: 141.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid: 148.
[55] "Lithuania to develop a plan to combat disinformation and manipulation", LRT.LT, available from: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2843114/lietuva-kurs-kovos-su-dezinformacija-ir-manipuliacijomis-plana, accessed 20 March 2026.
[56] Ibid.
[57] "Lithuania to develop a plan to combat disinformation and manipulation", *supra note*, 56.

In a fight against the Kremlin's lies, Lithuania's strongest weapon is simple, but very effective – the truth.

Conclusions

Review and analysis of currently available legal instruments for combating propaganda demonstrates that the requirement for profoundly comprehensive proof and ample conditions for application of article 170^2 of the Criminal Code together with the lack of administrative liability, make up a "grey zone" in which individuals, disseminating propaganda, may feel immune to legal prosecution and actively exploit this situation. Moreover, only three drafts for amendments on legal documents were registered in almost six years of highly intensive Russian propaganda and disinformation campaigns. Despite the fact that the work of legislators on the subject of propaganda leaves many questions, if the discussed amendments to the Criminal Code, Code of Administrative offences and the Law on Public Information were to be accepted, it would greatly increase the tools available to law enforcement and would finally disperse the existing "grey zone".

References

1. The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania. LRS.LT. Accessed 7 March 2026. Available from: https://www.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Konstitucija.htm.
2. Law on the approval and entry into force of the criminal code. E-TAR.LT. Accessed 17 March 2026. Available from: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.2B866DFF7D43/asr.
3. Law on Public Information of the Republic of Lithuania. E-TAR.LT. Accessed 18 March 2026. Available from: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.065AB8483E1E/asr.
4. Lietuvos Aukščiausiojo Teismo 2025 m. gruodžio 9 d. nutartis baudžiamojoje byloje Nr. 2K-173-1073/2025 (The judgement of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Lithuania on 9 December, 2025, in criminal case No. 2K-173-1073/2025). LITEKO.TEISMAI.LT. Accessed 18 March 2026. Available from: https://liteko.teismai.lt/viesasprendimupaieska/tekstas.aspx?id=5be5da5c-15d4-4739-a2ff-fe5805fa4e9c.
5. Draft law on amending articles 2 and 50 of the Law on Public Information and supplementing it with an article 19^1. E-SEIMAS.LRS.LT. Accessed 19 March 2026. Available from: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/6412f850bf0211f088ded46d8ae099d5?positionInSearchResults=79&searchModelUUID=dc967d8c-9add-4e51-b356-e49ab913fb09.
6. Draft law on amending Articles 464, 589 of the Code of Administrative Offences and supplementing the Code with Article 507^2. E-SEIMAS.LRS.LT. Accessed 19 March 2026. Available from: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/fa6cee70bf0511f088ded46d8ae099d5?positionInSearchResults=77&searchModelUUID=dc967d8c-9add-4e51-b356-e49ab913fb09.
7. Draft law on supplementing the Criminal Code with Articles 118^1 and 118^2, E-SEIMAS.LRS.LT. Accessed 19 March 2026. Available from: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/d81047e0bf0611f088ded46d8ae099d5?positionInSearchResults=78&searchModelUUID=dc967d8c-9add-4e51-b356-e49ab913fb09.

8. Banelis, Aldas. „Dezinformacija, propaganda, melagienos: poveikis visuomenės saugumui ir užkardymo teisinės galimybės“ Magistro baigiamasis darbas, Mykolo Romerio universitetas, 2024 (Banelis, Aldas. “Disinformation, propaganda, fake news: impact on public safety and legal possibilities of prevention”. Master’s thesis, Mykolas Romeris university, 2024). Available from: https://cris.mruni.eu/server/api/core/bitstreams/b2e403d9-c562-4116-a31a-3f00fe9f55b5/content.
9. Jastramskis, Mažvydas. „Demokratijos tvarumo barometras 2026“ (Jastramskis, Mažvydas. “Democracy sustainability barometer 2026”). GSSC.LT. Accessed 6 March 2026. Available from: https://www.gssc.lt/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/v04-print_Demokratijos-tvarumo-barometras_2026_A4_LT.pdf.
10. Mažeikis, Gintautas. „Propagandos galia: ideologiniai Rusijos agresijos pagrindai“, Almanachas „Rusija dienos šviesoje“ 1 (2025) (Mažeikis, Gintautas. “The power of propaganda: the ideological basis of Russian aggression“, Almanac “Russia in the light of day“). GSSC.LT. Accessed 7 March 2026. Available from: https://www.gssc.lt/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/v05_web_Rusija-dienos-sviesoje_publikacija_A4-2.pdf.
11. Valstybės saugumo departamentas (State Security Department) (2026). 2026 National Threat Assessment. Accessed 12 March 2026. Available from: https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/2026-GR-LT-El_NAUJAS.pdf.
12. Matulevičius, Vytautas. *Baimės frontas (Fear front).* Vilnius: Bosanova, 2026.
13. Anužis, Artūras. „Policija be ginklų be šarvų ir be pinigų: ar Lietuva išmoko Ukrainos pamokas?“ (“Police without weapons, without armour, and without money: has Lithuania learned the lessons of Ukraine?“). Youtube.com. Accessed 14 March 2026. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-asiOk_GHg.
14. Paulauskaitė, Austėja. „Bridikis: vykdant priešišką veiklą, socialiniai tinklai yra absoliučiai viskas“ („Bridikis: when it comes to carrying out hostile activities, social media is absolutely everything“). LRT.LT. Accessed 16 March 2026. Available from: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2862083/bridikis-vykdant-priesiska-veikla-socialiniai-tinklai-yra-absoliuciai-viskas.
15. Wintour, Patrick. „JD Vance stuns Munich conference with blistering attack on Europe’s leaders“. THEGUARDIAN.COM. Accessed 17 March 2026. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/14/jd-vance-stuns-munich-conference-with-blistering-attack-on-europes-leaders.
16. Facts and Case Summary – Texas v. Johnson. USCOURTS.GOV. Accessed 17 March 2026. Available from: https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/educational-activities/first-amendment-activities/texas-v-johnson/facts-and-case-summary-texas-v-johnson.
17. Kirby, Paul. “Russia-Ukraine war: Moscow politician gets 7 years for denouncing war”. Accessed 18 March 2026. Available from: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62092196.
18. Abromaitis, Žygintas and Silantjevienė, Vesta. „Profesorė apie botus ir internete plintančius melus: reikia naujos teisinės sistemos“ (“Professor on bots and online lies: a new legal system is needed“). LRT. LT. Accessed 19 March 2026. Available from: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2845408/profesore-apie-botus-ir-internete-plintancius-melus-reikia-naujos-teisines-sistemos.

19. Lietuvos Šaulių Sąjunga. „Kai mūšio laukas – žmonių protai: šauliai imasi veiksmų“ (Lithuanian Riflemen’s Union “ When the battlefield is people's minds: riflemen take action”). Accessed 20 March 2026. Available from: https://www.sauliusajunga.lt/naujienos/kai-musio-laukas---zmoniu-protai-sauliai-imasi-veiksmu.
20. “Lithuania to develop a plan to combat disinformation and manipulation”. LRT.LT. Accessed 20 March 2026. Available from: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2843114/lietuva-kurs-kovos-su-dezinformacija-ir-manipuliacijomis-plana.

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

PUBLIC SECURITY AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION. A MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE APPROACH

Andreea Nicoleta DRAGOMIR
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu
Calea Dumbravii, nr. 34, Sibiu, Romania
E-mail: andreea.dragomir@ulbsibiu.ro
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9358-8098

Sergiu Gabriel BERINDEA
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu
Calea Dumbravii, nr. 34, Sibiu, Romania
E-mail: sergiu.berindea@ulbsibiu.ro
ORCID ID: 0009-0005-3554-2429

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-02

Abstract. *Public security in the European Union is traditionally described through the distribution of competences between the Union and the Member States. However, everyday practice suggests a different logic: security is rarely exercised through hierarchical command and more often produced through coordinated administrative interaction. This article examines public security as an administrative function operating within a multilevel governance framework rather than as a strictly national competence.*
The purpose of the paper is to clarify how security can be effectively managed at the European level despite the Treaties preserving national responsibility, and to determine what this implies for the interpretation of EU law. The research addresses the following question: how is public security governed administratively in the European Union when operational powers remain primarily domestic?
The study combines doctrinal legal analysis with governance-oriented research. It relies on the interpretation of EU primary law, general legal principles, and selected jurisprudential patterns, while engaging with literature on multilevel governance and European administrative cooperation. The approach is qualitative and interpretative, focusing on recurring administrative practices such as coordination procedures, information exchange, and joint operational planning rather than on a single policy sector.
The analysis shows that the Union does not replace national authorities but structures their action through organisational mechanisms. European bodies provide procedural frameworks, shared assessments, and coordination channels, while Member States carry out concrete measures. Crises further reveal that security responses depend on pre-existing cooperative structures rather than on centralised command. Judicial review, particularly where national measures rely on shared information systems, demonstrates that legality is assessed within a composite administrative process.
The article concludes that EU public security should be understood as an integrated administrative model: operationally decentralised, administratively interconnected, and legally bounded. A purely competence-based interpretation of EU security law is therefore incomplete, as authority is exercised through organised interdependence rather than formal centralisation.

Keywords: *public security, administrative governance, multilevel governance, EU administrative law, security cooperation*

Introduction

Public security has long been associated with the classical functions of the state. The protection of individuals, the preservation of public order, and the response to threats were traditionally linked to the direct exercise of authority through police and other coercive institutions. Within this perspective, security depended on the capacity of public authorities to intervene and enforce compliance through hierarchical command structures.

The evolution of the European Union has complicated this understanding. While responsibility for public security formally remains with the Member States, many activities

connected to prevention, risk management, and crisis response are now organized beyond the national administrative framework. Security measures increasingly rely on cooperation procedures, common standards, and continuous information exchange rather than on isolated intervention. In practice, security is often produced through organisational interaction rather than hierarchical intervention.

Recent research on European security governance notes that security policies are progressively shaped through regulatory instruments and expert coordination instead of centralized operational capacity (Kruck and Weiss, 2023). European institutions rarely exercise coercive powers directly; instead, they structure the environment in which national authorities act. Agencies, networks, and joint procedures guide administrative behaviour and influence operational decisions without replacing domestic competences. Security, therefore, emerges from interaction between administrative levels rather than from a single authority.

This situation creates a structural tension. Legally, public security continues to be defined as a national competence. Administratively, however, it functions within an integrated European framework. National authorities execute measures, but their actions are increasingly framed by European rules, shared databases, and coordinated procedures. Consequently, the effectiveness of security policies depends less on the formal allocation of competence and more on the functioning of cooperative administrative mechanisms.

Despite the growing body of literature on European security governance, most studies continue to analyse public security primarily through the lens of competence allocation, institutional mandates, or sector-specific policies (Monar, 2010; Mitsilegas, Monar and Rees, 2010). Less attention has been paid to the administrative dimension of security governance itself, namely the procedures, coordination mechanisms and organisational structures through which security is effectively produced on a daily basis. While important contributions have examined European administrative cooperation and integrated administration more generally (Hofmann, Rowe and Türk, 2011; Craig, 2018), these insights have rarely been applied systematically to public security governance. This creates a conceptual gap between the legal understanding of public security as a predominantly national responsibility and the practical reality of increasingly integrated administrative action. The present article seeks to address this gap by examining public security not as a field of competence, but as an administrative function exercised through multilevel governance arrangements.

This structure is consistent with Article 4(2) TEU, which recognises national security as the sole responsibility of the Member States, while not preventing the development of common administrative frameworks that support their action.

Understanding public security in the EU, therefore, requires moving beyond a purely competence-based approach. The relevant question is not only who holds authority, but how security is actually administered. Multilevel interaction between institutions, supported by regulatory standards and operational coordination, has become central to contemporary security practice (Monar, 2010; Mitsilegas, 2016).

The developments outlined above can be understood in light of the theory of multilevel governance in European integration. Authority is not gathered at a single institutional tier but is exercised across interconnected arenas where actors remain formally independent yet rely on one another in practice (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Bache and Flinders, 2004). Public security increasingly reflects this arrangement: Member States retain competence, yet the organisation of action depends on collective procedures and ongoing interaction.

Viewed from this perspective, analysing security only through the distribution of competences becomes insufficient. In the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, administrative behaviour is shaped less by formal transfers of power than by coordinated operational practices.

National authorities exercise their own legal powers, but within European procedural settings that influence how decisions are made. Focusing exclusively on jurisdiction overlooks the organisational structures through which security effectively operates (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Mitsilegas, Monar and Rees, 2010).

The argument advanced is that EU public security operates as a shared administrative governance system. This article argues that public security in the European Union can increasingly be understood not primarily as a field of competence but as a mode of administration: a system in which authority derives from coordination capacity rather than from hierarchical control. European bodies organise cooperation, define procedural frameworks, and shape administrative discretion, while national authorities carry out operational tasks. The legal order plays a limiting and stabilising role by ensuring legality, proportionality, and respect for fundamental rights rather than by directly producing security outcomes.

The paper proceeds in several steps. It first clarifies the administrative nature of public security within EU law. It then analyses the institutional architecture of security governance and the interaction between European and national administrations. The following sections examine coordination mechanisms and crisis management practices before addressing legal accountability and rights protection. The conclusion outlines the characteristics of an emerging integrated model of EU security administration.

Literature and Methodology

The paper combines doctrinal legal analysis with elements of governance-oriented research. The legal dimension relies on the interpretation of EU primary law, general principles, and selected case law to identify the normative limits of administrative action in the field of public security. At the same time, the study engages with the literature on multilevel governance and European administrative cooperation to explain how security functions operationally beyond formal competence allocation (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; Hofmann, Rowe and Türk, 2011).

The research follows a qualitative approach. It does not examine a single policy sector but analyses recurring administrative patterns observable across security-related activities, such as coordination procedures, information exchange, and joint operational frameworks. The objective is interpretative rather than empirical: to clarify the administrative nature of public security governance in the EU and the legal mechanisms that structure and limit it.

More specifically, the doctrinal analysis focuses on three categories of legal sources. First, the study examines the relevant Treaty provisions governing the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, particularly Articles 67–89 TFEU and Article 4(2) TEU, which define the constitutional framework of security governance within the European Union. Second, it analyses selected secondary legislation establishing key mechanisms of administrative cooperation, including Regulation (EU) 2016/794 on Europol, Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 on the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), and Regulation (EU) 2018/1862 governing the Schengen Information System (SIS). Third, it considers selected jurisprudential developments concerning administrative cooperation, information exchange, data protection and judicial review within composite decision-making procedures, with particular reference to Digital Rights Ireland (Joined Cases C-293/12 and C-594/12), Schrems (Case C-362/14) and Schrems II (Case C-311/18). These sources are interpreted through a governance-oriented analytical framework that seeks to identify recurring administrative patterns, forms of organisational coordination and mechanisms of shared execution rather than sector-specific regulatory solutions.

Public Security as an Administrative Function in EU Law

Public security in European law is commonly described in terms of competences. The Treaties leave primary responsibility to the Member States, and for a long time, this was interpreted to mean that security remains essentially a national domain. Such an interpretation reflects a traditional view according to which security is produced through the capacity of public authorities to intervene in exceptional situations. However, contemporary administrative practice indicates a different reality.

In the European Union, security is rarely ensured solely through reactive intervention. Most activities connected to security are preventive, organisational, and regulatory in nature. Risk assessment, monitoring, information processing, standard-setting, and coordination procedures occupy a central place in everyday administrative action. These activities do not resemble classical police intervention but rather ongoing administrative management of risks.

This evolution corresponds to a broader transformation of public administration in which regulation and supervision gradually replace direct command as the dominant mode of public action (Craig, 2018). Instead of acting only when threats materialise, authorities structure behaviour in advance through procedures and common operational frameworks. Security thus becomes a continuous administrative process rather than an exceptional use of power.

Within the EU legal order, this transformation is particularly visible. European institutions do not operate as a central security authority, yet they shape the conditions under which national authorities act. Databases, common standards, risk indicators, and joint operational rules guide administrative conduct. The role of law is not limited to authorising intervention but extends to organising cooperation and structuring administrative discretion.

This administrative dimension explains why security governance in the EU relies heavily on expertise. Decisions frequently depend on technical assessment rather than political instruction. Authorities evaluate risks, classify threats, and select proportionate measures within predefined legal frameworks. The legitimacy of action therefore often derives from professional assessment and procedural compliance rather than hierarchical command (Kruck and Weiss, 2023).

From this perspective, public security appears less as a specific sector and more as a method of administrative action. Authorities do not merely enforce order; they manage uncertainty. Prevention, preparedness, and coordination become the dominant tasks, while coercive intervention is only one of many possible instruments.

Legal principles reinforce this administrative character. The principles of legality and proportionality require authorities to justify measures in advance and to adapt them to assessed risks. As a result, decision-making involves continuous evaluation rather than discretionary reaction. Judicial review further stabilises this model by examining whether administrative authorities properly balanced security objectives and individual rights (Craig, 2018).

Consequently, public security under EU law should be understood as a structured administrative activity organised through procedures, expertise, and mechanisms for cooperation. The legal framework does not merely permit intervention but shapes the routine functioning of authorities. Security is therefore administered daily through coordinated action rather than exercised only during emergencies.

The following sections do not describe separate phenomena but successive dimensions of the same administrative structure: organisation, execution, coordination, and legal control.

The Administrative Architecture of EU Security Governance

At first sight, the European Union does not appear to possess a security administration in the classical sense. It has no general police force and no unified operational chain of command comparable to national systems. For this reason, security has often been treated as a field that remains essentially outside the Union's administrative structure. Yet the daily functioning of European cooperation suggests a different interpretation.

For example, risk indicators or alerts generated within European information systems frequently trigger preventive administrative measures in several Member States simultaneously, even though each authority formally acts under its own national powers.

Rather than concentrating authority, the Union has developed a dispersed administrative architecture. European bodies rarely act alone and rarely replace national authorities. Instead, they organise interaction between them. Agencies and coordination centres operate as permanent points of contact, ensuring that national administrations do not act in isolation but within a structured environment. What emerges is not a hierarchy but a framework within which national authorities continuously adjust their behaviour.

The growing importance of European agencies illustrates this organisational logic. Agencies do not primarily replace national administrations but embed them in permanent cooperation frameworks. Their authority derives from coordination capacity and informational centrality rather than hierarchical control, a characteristic frequently described as indirect executive power in the EU administrative system (Curtin, 2009; Busuioc, 2013).

The activities of Europol and Frontex illustrate this model particularly well. Europol, established under Regulation (EU) 2016/794, does not replace national police authorities and possesses only limited executive powers. Its influence derives primarily from criminal intelligence analysis, information exchange, operational support and the facilitation of cooperation between national law enforcement authorities. Similarly, Frontex, operating under Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, coordinates border management activities, conducts risk assessments and supports joint operations without assuming general responsibility for border control, which remains vested in the Member States. During joint border management operations, for example, Frontex provides technical expertise, operational planning and coordination, while executive powers continue to be exercised by national border authorities. In both cases, European agencies enhance the capacity of national administrations to act collectively while preserving the formal distribution of competences established by the Treaties. Their practical importance lies less in direct intervention and more in their ability to create stable administrative environments for cooperation and to facilitate the emergence of common administrative practices across the Union.

This structure is characteristic of integrated administration. European institutions provide technical platforms, shared indicators, and operational procedures that guide national authorities in preparing for and responding to risks. They do not normally execute measures directly; their role is to stabilise cooperation and make action predictable. In this sense, administration takes place through organisation rather than command.

The importance of information clearly illustrates this transformation. Security decisions increasingly depend on access to common databases and analytical tools. Participation in these systems shapes administrative conduct because authorities must follow shared standards to exchange data and rely on information produced by others. Coordination therefore results less from formal obligation and more from practical interdependence.

European agencies play a central role in this environment. Their function is not primarily to exercise power but to maintain operational continuity. They facilitate communication,

develop methodologies, and support joint activities. The absence of direct coercive authority does not reduce their influence. On the contrary, the capacity to structure procedures allows them to shape administrative behaviour across Member States (Kruck and Weiss, 2023).

This architecture also modifies responsibility. Decisions are rarely attributable to a single level of authority. National administrations implement measures, yet these measures often follow European standards and depend on shared assessments. Accountability therefore becomes distributed. The administrative process is collective even when formal competence remains national.

Seen from this perspective, the EU does not centralise security but organises it. The system functions through permanent coordination mechanisms that reduce uncertainty and align administrative practice. Security governance emerges from routine interaction rather than exceptional intervention.

This confirms that the Union exercises organisational authority rather than operational power, which explains why administrative influence develops without formal transfer of competence.

Multilevel Administration: National Authorities and Shared Execution

Even though European structures organise security cooperation, operational activity still belongs largely to national authorities. Police services, border guards, and administrative bodies continue to take concrete measures within their territories. For this reason, public security in the European Union cannot be understood as transferred competence. What has changed is not who acts, but how action is framed.

In practice, national authorities rarely operate independently. Decisions increasingly rely on shared assessments, coordinated procedures, and commonly agreed priorities. A risk identified in one Member State may trigger preventive measures in another, while operational planning frequently depends on information produced at the European level. Action therefore remains national in form but European in context.

This dynamic reflects a model of shared execution. European institutions do not replace domestic administrations; they influence the conditions under which they act. Authorities apply their own powers, yet the choice of measures is shaped by joint methodologies and operational guidance. Security thus results from interconnected administrative processes rather than isolated interventions (Monar, 2010).

Such shared execution has been widely observed in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, where operational tasks remain domestic but depend on European coordination mechanisms. Integration therefore occurs through administrative practice rather than through formal transfer of powers, leading to a form of operational integration without institutional unification (Mitsilegas, Monar and Rees, 2010).

The daily work of administrations illustrates this clearly. Officers and civil servants follow common reporting formats, rely on shared analytical categories, and participate in coordinated operations. Cooperation is not limited to exceptional situations but forms part of routine administrative practice. Over time, this creates a degree of convergence in behaviour even without formal harmonisation of powers.

Such interaction gradually transforms the meaning of competence. Legal responsibility remains national, but decision-making becomes relational. Measures adopted domestically often reflect collective assessment, while operational priorities are influenced by joint planning cycles. Instead of a vertical chain of command, security governance operates through continuous adjustment among authorities.

This does not eliminate national autonomy. Member States retain discretion in choosing concrete measures and remain accountable under their own legal systems. However, discretion is exercised within a shared administrative environment that limits unpredictability. The system functions because authorities anticipate one another's actions and rely on shared expectations (Kruck and Weiss, 2023).

From this perspective, multilevel administration is not merely cooperation between separate systems. It represents a stable mode of governance in which execution is distributed while orientation is shared. Security is implemented locally but shaped collectively, combining national powers with European coordination mechanisms.

Administrative Cooperation and Operational Coordination

While multilevel administration explains the distribution of tasks, cooperation mechanisms explain how consistency of action is achieved.

If multilevel administration explains who acts, administrative cooperation explains how action becomes coherent. Security within the European Union depends less on formal authority and more on the capacity of administrations to coordinate continuously. What matters is not the existence of common powers, but the existence of common procedures.

Coordination operates through a dense network of routine interactions. Authorities exchange alerts, validate information, align priorities, and prepare joint responses. Much of this activity takes place before any concrete measure is adopted. The objective is to prevent fragmentation by ensuring that separate administrations react within a shared operational framework.

Information exchange is central to this process. Security measures frequently begin with notifications or analytical reports circulated across administrative networks. Once information is shared, authorities adjust their behaviour accordingly. The response of one administration becomes part of the decision-making environment of others. In this way, coordination precedes intervention.

A particularly illustrative example is provided by the Schengen Information System (SIS), one of the most significant information-sharing instruments within the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Through SIS, national authorities may access and exchange alerts concerning persons, objects, return decisions, border management and judicial cooperation matters. Although each authority remains responsible for the measures adopted under its national law, the underlying information is generated, updated and circulated through a common European information infrastructure established to support operational cooperation across Member States. The effectiveness of many security-related decisions therefore depends not only on national administrative capacity but also on the reliability, accuracy and continuity of shared information systems (Regulation (EU) 2018/1862; Mitsilegas, 2016).

The practical importance of these systems should not be underestimated. According to recent European Commission and eu-LISA reports, the Schengen Information System processes millions of alerts annually and has become one of the most frequently used operational cooperation instruments within the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Its extensive use demonstrates that contemporary European security governance relies not only on legal competences but also on the continuous functioning of shared administrative infrastructures. The success of administrative cooperation increasingly depends on the quality, accessibility and reliability of common information systems (eu-LISA, 2024).

Operational planning follows a similar logic. Joint activities are not only reactions to immediate threats but also part of regular planning cycles. Authorities collectively anticipate

risks and prepare corresponding measures in advance. The practical effect is a gradual alignment of administrative conduct even where legal competences remain distinct.

This form of cooperation produces a specific type of authority. No single body commands the others, yet decisions become interdependent. Administrative actors rely on each other's assessments and adapt their own actions to maintain consistency. Governance emerges from mutual adjustment rather than hierarchical direction (Kruck and Weiss, 2023).

The role of European bodies is therefore primarily organisational. They facilitate communication channels, provide analytical tools, and stabilise procedures, enabling national administrations to operate together. Their influence does not depend on coercive capacity but on their position within the network. By structuring interaction, they shape outcomes.

Over time, this produces predictable administrative behaviour. Authorities learn how partners are likely to react and incorporate these expectations into their own decision-making. The effectiveness of security measures consequently depends on the reliability of cooperation rather than on the concentration of power.

Administrative coordination thus becomes the core mechanism of EU security governance. Security is neither centralised nor entirely decentralised. It is produced through permanent interaction in which each authority retains its legal powers while acting within a collectively organised process.

Crisis Governance and the Operational Dimension of EU Security

The functioning of European security governance becomes easier to understand in moments of pressure. In routine situations, coordination often remains almost invisible, appearing as a technical background process. During crises, however, the same mechanisms become observable because authorities depend directly on them to react in time.

Even then, intervention continues to be carried out by national authorities. Police services, border administrations, and other competent bodies take concrete measures within their territories. What changes is the way decisions are formed. They no longer emerge only from domestic evaluation but from a constantly updated shared picture of the situation. Information circulates quickly, assessments are compared, and authorities adjust their responses as events unfold.

In this context, the response is not organised around a single centre. Administrations act in parallel, guided by communication channels that already existed before the crisis. Coordination does not begin when the threat appears; it has been prepared in advance through routine cooperation. The effectiveness of reaction depends largely on these pre-established links rather than on emergency command structures.

European bodies contribute mainly by stabilising the perception of the situation. They collect and process data, distribute analytical reports, and help maintain a common understanding of risks. Their role is supportive rather than directive, yet it strongly influences national decisions because authorities rely on the same informational basis (Monar, 2010). Coherence results from shared awareness, not from hierarchical instruction.

During cross-border security situations, authorities often adapt national measures in real time based on updates received through shared coordination channels rather than waiting for formal requests for assistance.

This practice reflects a broader development in security policy. Modern approaches emphasise anticipation and continuous risk evaluation instead of purely reactive intervention (Mitsilegas, 2016). Crisis management does not interrupt normal administration. It intensifies

it. Authorities intervene while simultaneously refining assessments and adapting future preventive measures.

Seen from this perspective, emergencies do not suspend the administrative model of European security. They confirm it. The absence of a central operational command does not lead to fragmentation because coordination has already become routine. The system functions precisely because each authority expects others to react within the same framework (Kruck and Weiss, 2023).

European security governance can thus be described as operational integration without institutional centralisation. Crises simply make visible a structure that exists permanently: a network of administrations acting locally but relying on collectively organised knowledge and procedures.

Legal Limits: Accountability and Fundamental Rights

The administrative character of European security governance raises an immediate question: if action results from dispersed cooperation rather than a single authority, where are its legal limits located? In traditional models, the answer is straightforward. Powers belong to a clearly identifiable authority, and judicial review addresses that authority directly. Within the European security framework, however, decisions are rarely attributable to only one level of administration.

This can be observed in situations where national measures rely on information produced within European cooperation systems. For instance, entries in the Schengen Information System may lead to movement restrictions adopted by national authorities, yet the legality of the measure is assessed by national courts against both national law and EU standards governing data processing and proportionality. Judicial review, therefore, examines not only the final administrative act but also the reliability of the shared information on which it depends (Mitsilegas, 2016; Hofmann, Rowe and Türk, 2011). Responsibility remains national, but legality is evaluated within a composite administrative framework.

Measures are usually adopted by national bodies, yet they often rely on shared databases, common risk indicators, or coordinated procedures. The practical outcome may therefore depend on contributions from several actors. Responsibility remains formally national, but the decision-making process is composite. This does not remove legal accountability; instead, it changes its focus.

Similar accountability concerns arise in operational cooperation involving Europol and Frontex, where decisions frequently depend on information generated or shared across multiple administrative actors. Although operational measures remain formally attributable to national authorities, the administrative process through which they are prepared increasingly reflects interconnected European cooperation structures.

European law addresses this situation through principles rather than detailed operational rules. The principle of legality requires that each authority act within its competence even when relying on external information. Administrative cooperation cannot justify action without a legal basis. Authorities must still be able to explain why a concrete measure was necessary in the specific circumstances (Craig, 2018).

Proportionality plays an equally important role. Because preventive action is central to contemporary security policies, authorities frequently intervene before harm occurs. Such intervention remains lawful only if the chosen measure corresponds to the level of risk established through assessment. Courts therefore review not only whether an authority could

act, but whether it evaluated the situation carefully and relied on sufficiently reliable information.

Fundamental rights protection reinforces this requirement. Individuals are affected by measures that result from complex administrative interaction, yet they retain the right to challenge them before a national court. Judicial review indirectly evaluates the broader cooperative process by examining the quality of the assessment on which the measure relied. In this way, the protection of rights serves as a stabilising element within multilevel governance (Mitsilegas, 2016). Judicial control therefore extends beyond reviewing a single administrative act and indirectly evaluates the reliability of the cooperative administrative process itself.

The role of courts is therefore not limited to correcting individual decisions. It helps maintain trust between administrations. When authorities know that measures may be scrutinised, they are encouraged to rely on verifiable data and clearly documented procedures. Accountability thus becomes embedded in the functioning of the network itself.

Distributed decision-making has consequently shifted the focus of accountability debates in EU law. Instead of locating responsibility exclusively at one institutional level, scholarship emphasises composite procedures in which legality is ensured through overlapping review mechanisms and mutual control between authorities (Hofmann, Rowe and Türk, 2011).

From this perspective, the legal order does not attempt to centralise security powers. Instead, it ensures that distributed administration remains predictable and controllable. The combination of legality, proportionality, and judicial protection allows cooperative governance to function without dissolving responsibility (Kruck and Weiss, 2023).

The findings also suggest that future debates on European security should move beyond the traditional opposition between national sovereignty and supranational authority. In practice, the effectiveness of public security increasingly depends on the quality of administrative cooperation rather than on the formal location of legal competence.

European security governance can therefore be described as administratively integrated but legally bounded. The system relies on coordination to operate, while the law ensures that coordination does not become uncontrolled discretion.

The Court of Justice of the European Union has repeatedly emphasised that security-related cooperation must remain subject to the principles of legality, proportionality and effective judicial protection. This approach is particularly visible in its case law concerning data retention, information exchange and cross-border administrative cooperation. In Digital Rights Ireland (Joined Cases C-293/12 and C-594/12), the Court invalidated the Data Retention Directive on the ground that the large-scale retention of electronic communications data constituted a serious interference with the rights to privacy and personal data protection guaranteed by Articles 7 and 8 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The judgment confirmed that even objectives of general interest as important as public security and the fight against serious crime cannot justify measures that exceed the limits imposed by the principle of proportionality. The same concern for safeguarding fundamental rights is reflected in Schrems (Case C-362/14), where the Court stressed that transfers of personal data outside the European Union must ensure a level of protection essentially equivalent to that guaranteed within the Union legal order. This reasoning was further developed in Schrems II (Case C-311/18), where the Court invalidated the EU–US Privacy Shield framework, emphasising that security-related access by public authorities to personal data must be accompanied by effective legal safeguards and judicial remedies. Together, these judgments demonstrate that administrative efficiency, information-sharing needs, and security objectives cannot operate outside the framework of fundamental rights protection.

From the perspective of EU security governance, this jurisprudence is particularly significant because many contemporary security measures rely on extensive administrative cooperation, shared databases and transnational information flows. The Court's approach confirms that legality is assessed not solely with regard to the final administrative decision adopted by a national authority, but also with respect to the broader administrative ecosystem in which information is collected, exchanged, and used. Consequently, security governance remains subject to judicial scrutiny even when decisions arise from complex, multilevel procedures involving multiple national and European actors.

Conclusions. Towards an Integrated Model of EU Security Administration

The analysis demonstrates that public security in the European Union is administered through organised coordination mechanisms that go beyond the mere allocation of formal competences. While the Member States continue to hold primary responsibility in legal terms, the actual operation of security depends on constant administrative interaction framed at the European level. Security powers have not been transferred to the Union, but neither are they exercised independently; instead, they are implemented within a shared organisational environment shaped by cooperation and common procedures.

The Union has gradually developed a framework that organises how national authorities act rather than replacing them. Databases, shared assessments, coordinated planning, and operational communication channels shape daily administrative practice. Authorities remain competent within their territories, but their decisions are increasingly shaped in a collective environment. Public security emerges from cooperation rather than hierarchical direction.

This model can be described as integrated administration. Execution remains decentralised, while orientation is shared. European bodies provide structure, information, and procedural stability; national authorities apply concrete measures. The effectiveness of security policy depends less on institutional centralisation and more on the reliability of coordination mechanisms. The absence of a single command authority does not weaken the system. On the contrary, the networked structure enables adaptation to complex, cross-border risks.

Legal principles ensure that this dispersed administration remains controllable. Legality, proportionality, and judicial protection preserve accountability even when decisions rely on contributions from several actors. Law therefore functions as a stabilising framework rather than as the primary source of operational capacity. It limits discretion without eliminating cooperative governance.

Understanding security as an administrative function clarifies the evolution of the European legal order. The Union has not become a central security authority, but it has created conditions under which national administrations operate collectively. Security governance thus combines national powers with European organisation, producing a form of authority based on coordination.

The resulting model may be characterised as an integrated European security administration: operationally decentralised, administratively interconnected, and legally bounded. This perspective helps explain how the Union manages security despite its limited direct powers and highlights the importance of administrative cooperation in maintaining both effectiveness and the protection of rights within the European legal framework.

Recognising this structure has interpretative consequences. If EU public security operates through organised administrative interdependence, legal analysis cannot rely exclusively on the allocation of competence as its primary explanatory tool. Instead, it must account for coordinated execution, shared operational planning, and network-based decision-making that

characterise contemporary security practice (Monar, 2010; Mitsilegas, Monar and Rees, 2010). The Union should therefore be understood not as an incomplete central authority but as a governance framework within which national administrations exercise their powers collectively.

This model should not be confused with harmonisation or centralisation. Unlike Europeanisation, understood as the gradual replacement of national rules by uniform standards, the administrative organisation of public security does not eliminate domestic autonomy. Authorities continue to act under national law, yet within a stable framework of coordinated procedures. The Union does not absorb national powers but connects them, producing integration through practice rather than through the transfer of competence.

The contribution of this perspective lies in reframing EU public security not as an incomplete centralisation of powers but as a distinct administrative model based on organised interdependence. Accordingly, interpreting EU security law solely through competence allocation yields an incomplete understanding.

From a practical perspective, strengthening EU security governance does not necessarily require further centralisation of powers. More immediate benefits may result from improving interoperability between information systems, enhancing procedural transparency within administrative cooperation networks, and developing common standards for accountability in composite decision-making processes. Equally important is the reinforcement of judicial safeguards to ensure that increasingly interconnected security measures remain compatible with the rule of law and the protection of fundamental rights. Future reforms should therefore focus not only on operational effectiveness but also on the legal quality of administrative cooperation.

Ultimately, the evolution of EU public security demonstrates that integration can occur without the transfer of operational authority. The European Union has developed a governance framework capable of coordinating national administrations while preserving their formal competences. Understanding public security through the lens of administrative interdependence therefore provides a more accurate explanation of contemporary security governance and offers a useful framework for future legal and institutional developments within the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice.

References

1. Bache, I. and Flinders, M. (2004) *Multi-level Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Busuioc, M. (2013) *European Agencies: Law and Practices of Accountability*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. Court of Justice of the European Union (2014) *Joined Cases C-293/12 and C-594/12 Digital Rights Ireland Ltd v Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources and Others and Kärntner Landesregierung and Others*, ECLI:EU:C:2014:238.
4. Court of Justice of the European Union (2015) *Case C-362/14 Maximillian Schrems v Data Protection Commissioner*, ECLI:EU:C:2015:650.
5. Court of Justice of the European Union (2020) *Case C-311/18 Data Protection Commissioner v Facebook Ireland Ltd and Maximillian Schrems (Schrems II)*, ECLI:EU:C:2020:559.
6. Craig, P. (2018) *EU Administrative Law*. 3rd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

7. Curtin, D. (2009) *Executive Power of the European Union: Law, Practices and the Living Constitution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
8. eu-LISA (2024) *Schengen Information System (SIS)*. European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Available at: https://www.eulisa.europa.eu/Activities/Large-Scale-It-Systems/SIS (accessed 15 June 2026).
9. European Parliament and Council (2016) *Regulation (EU) 2016/794 of 11 May 2016 on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol)*, OJ L 135, 24 May 2016, pp. 53–114.
10. European Parliament and Council (2018) *Regulation (EU) 2018/1862 of 28 November 2018 on the establishment, operation and use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) in the field of police cooperation and judicial cooperation in criminal matters*, OJ L 312, 7 December 2018, pp. 56–106.
11. European Parliament and Council (2019) *Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard*, OJ L 295, 14 November 2019, pp. 1–131.
12. Hofmann, H., Rowe, G. and Türk, A. (2011) *Administrative Law and Policy of the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
13. Hooghe, L. and Marks, G. (2001) *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
14. Kruck, A. and Weiss, M. (2023) 'The regulatory security state in Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 30(7), pp. 1205–1229. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2172061
15. Mitsilegas, V. (2016) *EU Criminal Law after Lisbon: Rights, Trust and the Transformation of Justice in Europe*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.
16. Mitsilegas, V., Monar, J. and Rees, W. (2010) *The European Union and Internal Security: Guardian of the People?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
17. Monar, J. (2010) 'The institutional dimension of the EU's area of freedom, security and justice', *European Policy Analysis*, No. 2010:1.

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

MAGIC OF LEADERSHIP IN SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS: AN INSPIRING JOURNEY TO THE HORIZONS OF SUSTAINABLE SECURITY

Jolita GEČIENĖ
Mykolas Romeris University
Ateities Str. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: geciene.j@mruni.eu
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9137-9789

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-03

Abstract. *This article analyzes the manifestation of leadership in social organizations, conceptualizing it as a transformative force that shapes organizational culture within the framework of sustainable security. In contemporary social organizations operating under conditions of constant uncertainty and social challenges, leadership takes on strategic significance—it becomes not only a mechanism for coordinating activities but also a value-based orientation uniting the community toward a common goal and the long-term development of the organization. The objective is to reveal the role of leadership in social organizations in order to create a sustainable, safe, and socially responsible organizational culture that enhances employee engagement and well-being, and to identify effective leadership practices in the context of human resource management. The theoretical research method is a systematic analysis of the scientific literature, encompassing the latest scholarly sources on the topic of leadership in social organizations. A targeted selection and critical analysis of the literature allowed for the conceptual substantiation of the statements and conclusions formulated in the article without relying on the collection of empirical data. The results of the analysis show that, in the context of social organizations, leadership is not equated with hierarchical management or administrative control. It is understood as a sustainable practice based on values, trust, and a moral stance, oriented toward the creation of long-term value. It is emphasized that emotional intelligence, the creation of psychological safety, employee empowerment, and the application of "slow" leadership principles create conditions for the formation of a resilient organizational culture, reduce the risk of professional burnout, and strengthen the organization's long-term sustainability.*

Keywords: *Leadership, social, organization, sustainability, security.*

Introduction

The development of modern society is characterized by the increasing complexity of social processes, institutional uncertainty, and rapid changes in the organizational environment; consequently, social organizations face ever-higher demands regarding operational efficiency, resilience, and social responsibility. In the context of globalization, technological change, and social crises, social organizations face new challenges that require not only effective management but also values-based leadership. Traditional hierarchical leadership models in social organizations are considered insufficient to ensure organizational sustainability, employee well-being, and social responsibility (Silvestre, Begnini, and Abreu, 2025). Therefore, leadership in social organizations takes on a new meaning—it becomes not only a tool for coordinating organizational processes but also a transformative force that shapes organizational culture, strengthens long-term security, and ensures sustainability.

The relevance of this article stems from the operating environment of contemporary social organizations, which is characterized by constant uncertainty, growing social challenges, emotional strain among employees, changing client needs, and an increasing need to ensure the sustainable and secure development of the organization. The relevance of the topic is further reinforced by the need to foster an organizational culture in social organizations based on trust, psychological safety, social responsibility, and employee well-being (Milton and Pooja, 2026). The increasing risk of professional burnout, employee turnover, and lack of motivation

encourages the search for new leadership practices that would help create sustainable organizations and ensure the continuity of their operations. This article is relevant from both a scientific and practical perspective, as it examines the role of transformational leadership in applying contemporary management methods to create a safe and socially responsible organizational culture that enhances employee empowerment and well-being, as well as the application of value-based principles in the context of the sustainability of social organizations.

Despite growing interest in leadership research, the academic literature still lacks systematic theoretical insights explaining which leadership approaches in social organizations can simultaneously strengthen organizational sustainability, employee well-being, and operational effectiveness. In recent years, the scientific literature has increasingly focused on the management of business enterprises, yet there is a lack of research analyzing the manifestation of leadership in social organizations. This article fills a gap in the research by proposing "the magic of leadership" in the context of social organizations as a value-driven, inspiring phenomenon aimed at sustainable horizons of security.

The purpose of this article is to explore the role of leadership in social organizations with the aim of creating a sustainable, safe, and socially responsible organizational culture that enhances employee engagement and well-being, and to identify effective leadership methods in the context of human resource management.

To achieve this objective, the following research objectives are formulated:

- To analyze the concept of leadership in the context of social organizations, highlighting its value-based nature.
- To discuss the interaction between the dimensions of sustainability and safety in organizational culture.
- To identify the key leadership methods most suitable for the management of social organizations.

Methodology. This article employs a theoretical analysis based on the latest scientific publications examining the interrelationships between leadership, security, sustainability, and organizational culture in social organizations. Research design: a theoretical research method involving a systematic analysis of the scientific literature, covering the most recent scientific sources from 2023 to 2026 from the academic databases ResearchGate and Google Scholar. A targeted search was conducted using the keywords: leadership, social, organization, sustainability, security, which yielded 79 scientific sources; after content evaluation, 43 sources remained relevant to the topic analyzed in this article. The validity and reliability of the data were ensured through a systematic selection of literature and a systematic analysis. The literature sources were selected purposefully, based on their relevance, scientific reliability, and thematic alignment with the issue under examination. From a methodological perspective, the study is based on an interpretive paradigm, which allows for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of leadership as a social and cultural construct. The critical analysis and synthesis applied provided the basis for identifying key theoretical approaches, revealing their interrelationships, and formulating conceptual insights into the significance of leadership in the context of the sustainability and security of social organizations. No empirical data is collected in this study; therefore, the article focuses on theoretical generalization and conceptual modeling. In this way, the article aims to contribute to the advancement of leadership studies by offering a holistic perspective on leadership in social organizations and emphasizing its importance in creating a sustainable, safe, and values-based organizational environment.

The findings of this study may be relevant to leaders of social organizations, human resources professionals, and public policymakers seeking to create sustainable, safe, and socially responsible organizations.

The "Magic" of Leadership in Social Organizations

Inspiring leadership and responsible management are key factors in ensuring the effective operation of a social organization. An analysis of the concept of leadership reveals that leadership can be understood as a process of social influence in which leaders motivate and empower followers to contribute to the achievement of team goals, guiding organization members toward a shared vision and strategy (Liden, Wang, and Wang, 2025, p. 2). Leadership is considered one of the most important factors determining an organization's readiness to embrace change, as effective leadership provides the vision, direction, and motivation necessary to overcome challenges within a social organization (Judi and Kurniawan, 2024). Leadership involves not only setting goals and making decisions, but also inspiring and motivating employees to actively contribute to the organization's goals through their knowledge, competencies, and experience. Effective leaders create an atmosphere based on trust and openness, in which employees feel encouraged to share ideas, collaborate, and engage in organizational processes. This is particularly important in the context of knowledge management, where the exchange of information and experience is a fundamental prerequisite for organizational growth (Foster, Hayes, Bennett, & Sullivan, 2026). In social organizations, leadership is understood not merely as a hierarchical relationship, but as an interpersonal process grounded in trust and collaboration. This perspective asserts that leadership arises not from a formal position but from social interactions and interpersonal relationships, which is particularly relevant in social organizations because they work with vulnerable clients, and employees often face complex social problems. Thus, in social organizations, leadership becomes a core value that helps create a safe, fair, and employee-oriented environment.

Over time, the concept of leadership has shifted from traditional approaches that emphasized traits such as command and control to inspirational models that value emotional intelligence, empathy, and collaboration (Sharma and Saini, 2024). The shift from a traditional, administrative management model focused on procedures and control to transformational leadership, which emphasizes vision, values, employee motivation through meaningful activities, and the initiation of change, marks a fundamental shift in organizational management. Transformational leadership has become an important model for managing social organizations amid rapid technological changes and evolving employee and customer expectations (Armoni, Supiatni, Suryaniadi, Wijayati, 2026). In this context, transformational leadership acts as a catalyst for change. It is based on the leader's ability to foster employees' intrinsic motivation and direct their efforts toward achieving higher-level goals. It is a process in which the leader and stakeholders actively participate, fostering mutual relationships and pursuing change, while simultaneously building a connection between the manager, the leader, and the followers that creates the conditions for everyone's growth, development, and effective leadership (Gaybullaev and Strode, 2026). This leadership model is characterized by the leader's values and their ability to inspire—to motivate teams, serve as a role model for employees, and recognize their personal qualities in order to involve them in the collective effort.

The phenomenon of leadership in social organizations is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a leader's personal influence, interpersonal relationships, and the organization's strategic goals. Thus, in a social organization, leadership is not only the ability to manage but also the ability to inspire, motivate, and build trust among team members in order to effectively solve problems and improve the quality of work and services. The role of a leader is revealed through the aspects of influence and relationship—leadership is understood as a process in which a leader influences a group of people to identify their needs,

solve problems, and find solutions together. This is a social contract between the leader and followers, based on trust, a shared purpose, and a values-based perspective.

Leadership as a values-based orientation. Contemporary leadership is increasingly described as a dynamic, empathetic, and value-oriented activity aimed at fostering human dignity, strengthening a culture of trust, and responding responsibly to the challenges posed by globalization, technological progress, and societal changes. This concept of leadership is particularly relevant in the field of social services, where the focus of organizational activities is on the individual, their needs, and their social well-being. The philosophy of leadership in the social sector can be understood as a values-based theoretical and practical framework that defines how a leader should act in a social environment to bring about positive change within the organization and society. It is based on the principles of human dignity, social justice, equality, community, responsibility, and service. Value-based leadership promotes social responsibility, ethical decision-making, and the provision of high-quality social services (Slimane, 2026). This philosophy reflects the contemporary challenges facing social work and social organizations in their efforts to create sustainable, people-centered management practices that generate long-term value. Social leadership is focused not only on achieving operational results but also on enhancing employee well-being, addressing social issues, and initiating positive change. Such leadership contributes to the implementation of social responsibility and the pursuit of long-term sustainability goals. In a social organization, leadership not only coordinates activities but also creates a safe, fair, and values-based work environment where employees feel heard, valued, and empowered to act (Rodríguez-Araneda and Livacic-Rojas, 2025). This is particularly important in a field where employees face emotionally complex situations, a high level of responsibility, and the sensitive needs of clients on a daily basis. Social organizations often rely on values such as human dignity, empathy, respect, solidarity, and support for the most vulnerable members of society. Therefore, a leader must reflect these values not only declaratively but also through daily decisions and behavior. This manifests itself in supporting employees, ensuring integrity, fostering collaboration, and creating a trust-based organizational culture (Slimane, 2026). Employees implement these values in their direct work with clients, so alignment of values between the leader and the team becomes a crucial prerequisite for the organization's authenticity and public trust. Thus, in a social organization, the leader is not only an administrative manager but also a shaper of the organization's values. Employees serve as the link between the organization's mission and the actual needs of individuals. Their mutual interaction, grounded in trust, cooperation, and a clear value orientation, creates the conditions for sustainable and socially responsible organizational activity (De Silva, Peiris, Uthumange, 2026).

An analysis of scientific sources suggests that leadership in social organizations is a complex phenomenon encompassing managerial, social influence, value-based, and interpersonal relationship dimensions. Effective leadership in the social services sector is associated with the ability to shape a shared vision, motivate employees, strengthen their engagement, foster collaboration, and create a trust-based organizational culture. A shift in the concept of leadership is evident in the academic literature—a transition from the traditional control and administrative model to transformational, people-oriented leadership, in which empathy, emotional intelligence, employee empowerment, and change management play a particularly significant role. In the context of social organizations' activities, the value-based dimension of leadership—grounded in the principles of human dignity, social justice, responsibility, and service—is particularly important. Therefore, leadership in this sector is considered one of the essential prerequisites for ensuring operational effectiveness, service quality, and the sustainable and socially responsible development of the organization.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)
Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

The Interaction Between Sustainability and Safety Dimensions in Organizational Culture

In contemporary management theory, organizational sustainability and security are increasingly analyzed as interrelated phenomena, whose interaction is significantly influenced by leadership and organizational culture. This is particularly relevant in the context of social organizations, as their purpose involves meeting the needs of vulnerable social groups, operating in a constantly changing environment, dealing with limited resources, and adhering to high ethical standards. Therefore, leadership here becomes not only a managerial function but also a strategic factor that helps ensure the continuity of the organization's operations, employee safety, and long-term sustainability. There is a growing body of evidence based on empirical research that the success of organizations depends significantly on leaders' ability to rally employees and manage change. A high level of professional competence also has a significant impact on organizational security and sustainability (Monarca and Bandiola, 2023). The role of leadership is particularly important when an organization faces uncertainty, engages in strategic planning, adapts to changing conditions, fosters organizational culture values, ensures psychological safety, and promotes innovation (Faisal and Masroor, 2025). Competent leaders are able to quickly mobilize the organization's human, informational, and material resources, thereby creating conditions to effectively respond to external shocks and strengthen the organization's resilience. When a shared vision becomes accepted by employees at different organizational levels, operational consistency, collective responsibility, and initiative—essential elements of effective performance under disruptive conditions—are strengthened (Afshar and Shah, 2025). In social organizations, employees who feel a sense of security more easily overcome challenges, embrace change more positively, and engage more actively in improving operations when they feel their contributions are recognized. Empowering leadership in social organizations can significantly contribute to the personal and professional development of employees and leaders, promote better communication, increase employee engagement and motivation, and improve organizational performance. It is a flexible and effective management method that can be adapted to various organizational needs and goals, helping to create a supportive work environment and achieve high performance standards. By strengthening employee motivation and encouraging creativity and well-founded initiative, a leader creates the conditions for achieving long-term operational effectiveness (Gao, 2025). In this context, the importance of sustainable leadership becomes evident.

Sustainable leadership involves shaping a long-term vision, involving employees in decision-making, and integrating ethical principles into the organization's daily operations. It focuses not only on short-term results but also on social and psychological aspects that foster a safe organizational culture and strengthen employees' trust in the organization (Rodríguez-Araneda and Livacic-Rojas, 2025). Contemporary academic discourse increasingly emphasizes the integration of values, psychological safety, and social well-being as a key prerequisite for the long-term sustainability of organizations. Leaders who promote collaboration, respect, and inclusive relationships are more likely to foster greater employee engagement and a sense of security (Gutterman, 2023). Sustainable leadership is also linked to an organization's social responsibility and contributes to the achievement of broader strategic goals: ensuring equal opportunities, enhancing employee well-being, promoting social justice, and creating a safe work environment (Malmio, 2024). From this perspective, sustainable leadership is understood as a values-based ability to shape structures, relationships, and daily practices that allow employees to feel dignified, heard, and valued. In this way, leadership becomes not only a means of influence but also a process of shaping organizational culture (Ayers, 2025). The principles of sustainability are based on the responsible use of resources, long-term decision-

making, and ensuring a balance between social, economic, and environmental considerations. A leader guided by these principles promotes responsible organizational activities. An important part of this process is the accessibility of information and transparency of operations. Employees, customers, and social partners must have the opportunity to receive clear, timely information about the organization's activities, decisions made, and results. Effective internal communication, based on openness and constructive dialogue, strengthens teamwork and mutual trust (Nurillah, Herlambang, and Fatimah, 2026).

The implementation of leadership essentially depends on an organizational culture that fosters the principles of trust, responsibility, ethics, collaboration, and employee empowerment. Only under such conditions can leadership in a social organization be effective and sustainable. These conditions form the foundation for better service quality, higher employee motivation, and successful adaptation to changing social needs (Kamaludin, Ridwan, Nurlianti, & Munifa, 2026). It is worth noting that the creation of safe and sustainable social organizations in contemporary management theory is associated with an integrated leadership model that combines different yet complementary leadership styles focused on the individual, organizational stability, and long-term social value.

The theoretical insights of the chapter under review indicate that the interaction of the dimensions of sustainability and safety in organizational culture is a fundamental prerequisite for the quality, sustainability, and long-term effectiveness of social organizations' operations. This interaction is strengthened when leadership is grounded in strategic thinking, ethical principles, employee engagement, trust, and responsible resource management. Ensuring psychological safety, open communication, operational transparency, and relationships based on cooperation create favorable conditions for employee motivation, initiative, and the organization's ability to adapt to a changing environment. Therefore, a sustainable and secure organizational culture in social organizations emerges as a result of purposeful leadership, laying the foundation for high-quality services, employee well-being, and the socially responsible development of the organization.

The Application of Leadership Methods in the Management of Social Organizations

When considering the choice of leadership methods, it is important to take into account the leader's ability to purposefully adapt and refine them (Safii, 2024). The factors influencing the development of a leadership style can be divided into two groups:

- Objective factors—external circumstances that are less dependent on the leader and determine which style will be most effective in a specific situation;
- Subjective factors – personal traits dependent on the leader themselves, which determine how the leader chooses to act (Shraah, Alnsour, 2025).

Leadership in social organizations can be understood not only as the application of methods, but also as a value-based and moral stance. It encompasses decisions that cannot be justified solely by quantitative indicators, support for employees in the face of systemic shortcomings, and value-based stability in an unstable environment. Leadership practices aim to focus on the person rather than the problem, actively respond to what is heard and expressed, identify core beliefs and assumptions, reveal desired goals and the paths toward them, and formulate and encourage new insights and commitments. The application of these practices, combined with respectful and caring leadership, helps create a space where employees feel safe, seen, valued, and confident in the organization (Bourne and Brown, 2026). The prerequisites for leadership implementation in social organizations are crucial for ensuring effective

operations, high-quality services, and innovative solutions. These prerequisites can be described and justified by the following aspects:

- sharing optimistic visions of the future – a leader possessing this trait is characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate others with their vision of the future;
- setting ambitious goals: such a leader is not satisfied with mediocre goals; they set clear, engaging, and inspiring goals that can help the organization and team achieve significant results. They encourage innovation to foster continuous improvement and growth;
- Trust in team members – a leader who trusts their team members fosters their self-confidence and belief in their abilities. They give them the freedom to act and make decisions based on their competence and commitment;
- Motivating and encouraging organizational members – such a leader teaches, encourages, and supports their team to strive for the best results. They recognize and encourage individual and collective achievements by offering praise, support, and rewards for work performance;
- timely decision-making – a leader with this trait is able to make decisions quickly and effectively when needed. They can justify their decisions with factual information while remaining open to new ideas and perspectives;
- Taking and sharing responsibility – a leader takes responsibility for their actions and decisions and encourages others to do the same. They serve as a role model for others and take responsibility for the team's and organization's results, distributing responsibility according to the division of labor (Ali, Malik, Shah, 2025).

The identified prerequisites for leadership implementation in social organizations reveal that effective leadership is based on the formation of a clear vision, the setting of ambitious goals, trust in organizational members, their motivation, timely decision-making, and the sharing of responsibility. Together, these factors create the conditions for strengthening employee engagement, improving performance, and enhancing the organization's ability to adapt to a changing environment.

The analysis conducted allows us to identify five main leadership methods in the context of social organization management which, based on theoretical insights and empirical research, are considered the most appropriate for strengthening the operational effectiveness and sustainability of social sector organizations:

Citations in text should follow the examples below:

1. Slow leadership. In a social organization, it is important for a leader to master leadership methods, focus on the person rather than the problem, respond actively to what is heard and said, identify core beliefs and assumptions, clarify goals and the path toward them, and formulate and encourage new insights and commitments (Liden, Wang, and Wang, 2025). Although modern society often emphasizes speed and the constant pursuit of greater efficiency, in the activities of social organizations, thoughtful decision-making, time for building relationships, and the ability to maintain stability amid constant change are crucial. In recent years, academic literature has increasingly focused on so-called "slow" leadership, which takes on particular significance in the context of social organizations. "Slow" leadership is understood as a people-oriented, reflective approach to management that emphasizes conscious decision-making, systematic thinking, long-term organizational development, and resilience to risks (Alutto, Zino, Johansson, & Fontan, 2026). Such leadership reduces the risk of professional burnout, strengthens employee empowerment, and creates the conditions for the formation of a value-sustainable organizational culture.

2. Shared leadership is rooted in social theories that emphasize the co-construction of knowledge and meaning within social contexts. In the academic literature, shared leadership is

defined as leadership in contemporary organizations being the result of multiple actors performing different leadership functions (Luttervelt, Lund, Kjeldsen, 2025). This approach emphasizes the distribution of responsibility and influence among organizational members, fostering collaboration and collective decision-making. Shared leadership is based on the recognition that effective leadership is not limited to a single individual but is a shared responsibility that encompasses the entire organization (Nadeem, 2024). Such leadership increases organizational flexibility and learning, promotes mutual communication, and drives organizational development. A characteristic of shared leadership is that the leader shares their role and responsibility with the people around them, whom they seek to involve in collective activities; therefore, such leadership transcends formal boundaries and encompasses the actions of various people working within the organization. In this context, "shared leadership" manifests as the leader sharing activities with other members, and it can be exercised by any member of the organization. Shared leadership is beneficial for social sector workers, for whom involvement in decision-making supports basic psychological needs and increases motivation (Jakobsen, Kjeldsen, and Pallesen, 2023). A characteristic of this type of leadership is that "the leader is no longer the sole so-called 'great person'; rather, the leader is one who can bring teams together and find the 'great person' within each team member" (Hao, Min, Jie, & Yuling, 2025). Thus, shared leadership is not the function of a single person but a collective process in which all members of the organization participate, strengthening social capital and shared responsibility.

3. Customer-focused leadership is a leadership model in which the leader focuses their activities and decisions on the needs, expectations, and well-being of social service users (recipients). Such leadership is based on constant attention to the client, their situation, and well-coordinated service delivery processes. This approach in a social organization emphasizes prioritizing client needs while fostering team collaboration (Nick, Larry, and Costa, 2025). Research shows that it improves satisfaction and loyalty, particularly in innovative organizations. Social organizations should not only invest in leadership as an intervention strategy but also emphasize the importance of understanding client-centeredness. Such leadership enables the effective use of motivational influence to achieve better service delivery outcomes from competent employees (Aryee, Hsiung, Jo, Chuang, & Chiao, 2023). This model emphasizes the leader's focus on the needs and expectations of clients (social service recipients) to meet them through a humanistic approach. A study by Zhao, Fu, and Liang (2023) shows that a team leader's client orientation strengthens team climate and client satisfaction, especially when combined with shared leadership. A hallmark of client-oriented leadership is that the leader's focus is on meeting clients' needs to promote their well-being, which is particularly important in social organizations (Aryee, Hsiung, Jo, Chuang, & Chiao, 2023). In this regard, the leader's value system and a humane approach to the client are crucial, as only a strong client orientation helps to understand their needs and anticipate ways to meet them.

4. Adaptive leadership. Leadership in social organizations often involves adaptive leadership, which focuses on problem-solving and empowering people to change their lives. Adaptive leadership differs from traditional leadership methods because, rather than presenting pre-packaged solutions, it focuses on developing the ability to adapt—to change one's perspective, behavior, and work style in response to new challenges (Andrilla and Saputra, 2026). The concept of adaptive leadership is particularly valuable when analyzing the activities of social organizations during crises, as one of its most important competencies is the ability to operate in a complex, uncertain, and rapidly changing environment. The concept of adaptive leadership recognizes that the challenges faced by social organizations require not only knowledge or standard procedures, but also innovation, collaboration, and behavioral changes,

and these changes must occur both within the teams of social organizations and among service recipients. Crises disrupt established systems and habits, whereas the adaptive leadership approach fosters flexibility and resilience, encourages experimentation, and promotes learning in new circumstances (Dunajevas, Genienė, Gevorgianienė, Šumskienė, & Žalimienė, 2025). This type of leadership requires the ability to distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges, engage various stakeholders, and make effective decisions (Alumbro, Bauyot, 2026). A leader in a social organization acts as a mediator between the organization's goals and employees' needs, promotes team-based decision-making, and motivates and develops employees. This relationship is based on constant communication and adaptation to the changing challenges of social work. Adaptive leadership encourages a shift in perspective and the adoption of new values to effectively address emerging problems; a practice that mobilizes people to tackle difficult challenges and thrive by distinguishing what is important from what is not—discarding the unimportant while employing innovative measures. This means that team members take what is most valuable from the past and apply it to the future; therefore, a system of values is crucial in this context (Ngai, Cheung, Wang, 2026). When practicing this leadership method, ways are sought to solve social problems so that people themselves seek to actively participate in changes in their lives. Adaptive leadership involves mobilizing people to solve complex problems, adapt to changing circumstances, and cultivate the mindset necessary for success in times of change.

5. *Strategic leadership*. Social organizations focus on the long-term perspective when providing services and ensuring their continuity, which is why a vision for the future is important. Strategic leadership is defined as the process of shaping a vision for the future, communicating it to subordinates, encouraging and motivating employees, and engaging in exchanges with colleagues that support the strategy. It is the ability to influence an organization and guide it toward achieving long-term goals within a social organization. Strategic leadership is characterized by the ability to lead organizations in a complex environment, integrating both strategic and higher-level skills such as management, collaboration, and strategic planning (Deny, Kurniawan, Handoko, Effendi, 2026). This leadership manifests as a key factor motivating individuals to contribute their creative ideas toward achieving organizational goals, optimizing resources, and improving overall performance. In a social organization, the ability to work strategically with others is crucial for providing high-quality, efficient, and effective care to clients and contributing to the organization's performance (Ferrada-Videla, Dubois, Pepin, 2026). This leadership is closely linked to the dimension of sustainability in social organizations, as effective improvement of performance is based on integrating sustainability principles into the organization's strategy, creating sustainable and socially responsible human resource management systems, strengthening employee capabilities and motivation, as well as leadership behaviors that foster organizational identity, engagement, and a supportive organizational climate (Sarun, Hun, 2026). The link between strategic leadership and sustainability has gained significance as a theoretical and managerial construct encompassing leaders' ability to integrate ecological awareness into strategic decision-making processes. Sustainable strategic leadership is characterized by the ability to anticipate social responsibility, develop sustainability-oriented strategies, foster an environmentally friendly organizational culture, and ensure that sustainability goals are implemented at all levels of the organization's operations. Leaders who adhere to a sustainable strategic orientation are more likely to foster sustainability values within a broader strategic framework (Noch, 2026).

The five leadership methods, their characteristics, and their benefits for social organizations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Importance of Leadership Methods in the Management of Social Organizations
Source: Compiled by the author

Leadership Method	Key characteristics	Significance for the management of social organizations
Slow leadership	Reflectiveness, thoughtful decisions, focus on people, long-term perspective	Reduces the risk of burnout, enhances employee well-being, and fosters a sustainable organizational culture
Shared leadership	Shared responsibility, collective decision-making, collaboration	Increases employee engagement, strengthens social capital, and improves communication
Customer-focused leadership	Focus on service users' needs, humanity, service quality	Increases customer satisfaction, improves service accessibility and quality
Adaptive leadership	Flexibility, responsiveness to change, problem-solving, learning	Strengthens the organization's resilience to crises, helps it adapt to change
Strategic leadership	Vision, long-term planning, resource management, integration of sustainability	Ensures business continuity, efficiency, and the organization's long-term development

The results of the theoretical analysis indicate that the application of leadership methods in the management of social organizations must be based on a balance between situational circumstances, organizational needs, and the leader's competencies. Effective leadership in this sector is associated with the formation of a clear vision, employee motivation, building trust, timely decision-making, and the sharing of responsibility. It has been established that the integration of slow, shared, client-oriented, adaptive, and strategic leadership methods creates the conditions for increasing operational efficiency, service quality, organizational resilience, and the sustainable development of social organizations.

Summarizing the interrelationships between leadership, organizational culture, security, and sustainability that emerged in the theoretical analysis, a conceptual model was developed, presented in Figure 1:

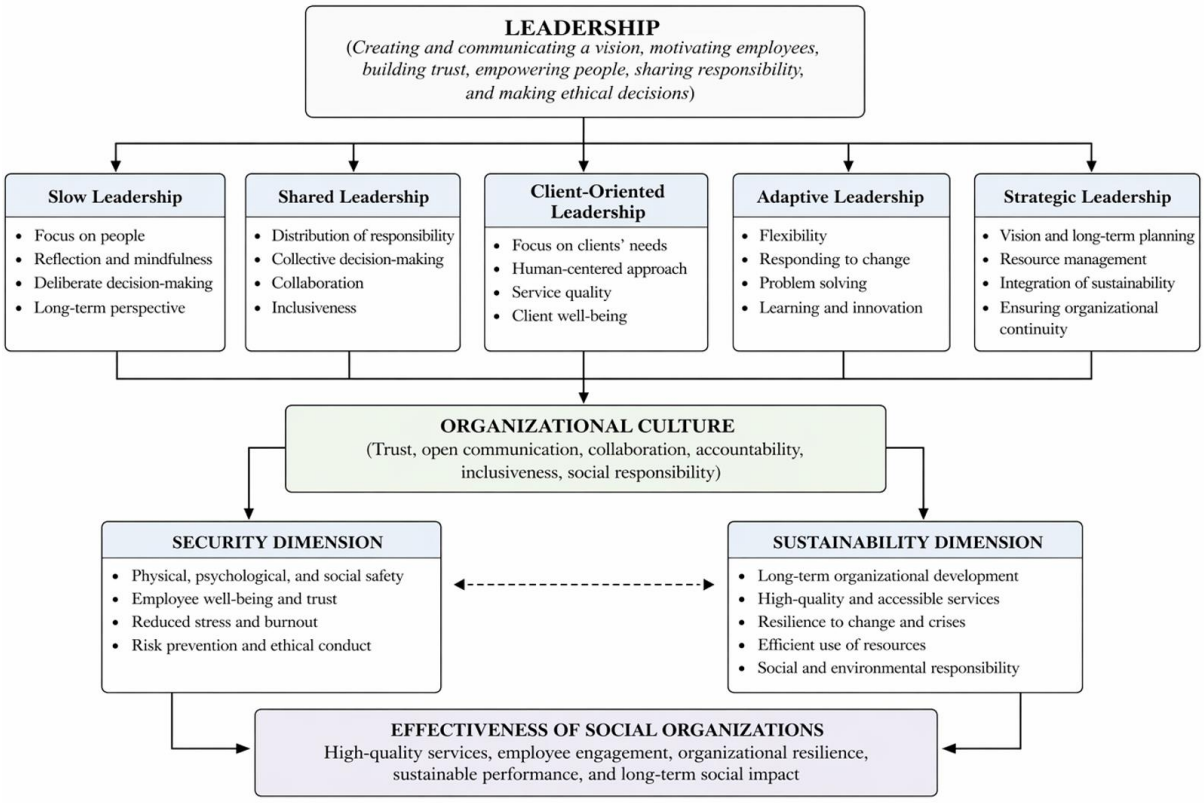


Figure 1. Model of the impact of leadership on the dimensions of sustainability and security in social organizations Figure name

Source: created by the author based on the sources analyzed in the article.

As shown in Figure 1, leadership, through organizational culture factors, has a significant impact on the dimensions of safety and sustainability, which determine the operational effectiveness of social organizations.

Conclusions

An analysis of the concept of leadership in the context of social organizations reveals that leadership in this sector is a multifaceted phenomenon of social influence, encompassing managerial, value-based, and interpersonal relationship dimensions. Unlike traditional hierarchical management, leadership in social organizations is based on the ability to unite employees around a shared vision, strengthen their motivation, encourage collaboration, and create a trust-based organizational culture. Transformational, people-oriented leadership plays a crucial role, emphasizing emotional intelligence, empathy, employee empowerment, and ethical decision-making.

An analysis of the interaction between the dimensions of sustainability and safety in organizational culture has revealed that these dimensions are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing. The sustainable development of an organization is inseparable from ensuring the physical, emotional, and psychological safety of employees, and a safe work environment creates the conditions for greater employee engagement, initiative, and organizational resilience. Therefore, an organizational culture based on trust, transparency, accountability, open communication, and social justice is considered a key prerequisite for the provision of high-quality services and the long-term effectiveness of social organizations.

After identifying the key leadership approaches most suitable for managing social organizations, it became clear that the greatest practical value lies in the integrated application of multiple leadership models. Slow leadership reduces the risk of professional burnout and enhances employee well-being; shared leadership increases engagement and collective responsibility; client-oriented leadership improves service quality and beneficiary satisfaction; adaptive leadership strengthens the organization's ability to operate in conditions of change and crisis; strategic leadership ensures a long-term vision, operational continuity, and the integration of sustainability principles. Therefore, it is advisable to apply a comprehensive leadership model in the management of social organizations that can be flexibly adapted to the organization's needs.

Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and security of social organizations, it is recommended in practice to adopt an integrated leadership model that combines the principles of shared, adaptive, strategic, and customer-oriented leadership. Organizations should invest in developing leaders' leadership competencies, empowering employees, strengthening psychological safety, and fostering a values-based organizational culture. Future research is recommended to empirically assess the impact of different leadership approaches on employee well-being, service quality, organizational sustainability, and the performance of social organizations across various national and institutional contexts.

References

1. Afshar, M. Z. ir Shah, M. H. (2025). Resilience Through Adaptation: Examining the Interplay Between Adaptive Capacity and Organizational Resilience in Public Sector Organizations. International Journal for Social Sciences *ACADEMIA*, 4(2), 1770–1789. Doi: 10.63056/ACAD.004.02.0289.
2. Ayers, J. (2025). The Unique Challenge(s) of Sustainability Leadership. Doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.19798.77125.
3. Ali, W., Malik, M., H., Shah, S., A. (2025). Coaching Leadership Style and Project Success: The Mediating Role of Team Communication and Team Empowerment in IT Organizations. *International Journal of Business and Management Sciences.* 6(4). 2708 – 4329. E ISSN: 2708 – 4337
4. Alumbro, G., P., Bauyot, M., M. (2026). A Systematic Review of the Adaptive Leadership Practices Among Higher Education Institutions. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research and Innovation*. 4(4), 504-519. E- ISSN: 2980-4760
5. Alutto, M., Zino, L., Johansson, K., H., Fontan, A. (2026). On a Co-evolving Opinion-Leadership Model in Social Networks. *ResearchGate Available via license: CC BY 4.0*. Doi: 10.48550/arXiv.2603.24381
6. Andrilla, R., Saputra, D. (2026). Adaptive Leadership and The Gen-Z Mindset: Driving the Adoption of Work Culture for Organizational Sustainability. *Ilomata International Journal of Management*. 7(1). 45-61. https://doi.org/10.52728/ijss.v7i1.1945
7. Aryee, S., Hsiung, H.H., Jo, H., Chuang, CH, H., Chiao, Y.H. (2023). Servant leadership and customer service performance: testing social learning and social exchange-informed

motivational pathways. *European journal of work and organizational psychology*. 32 (4), 506–519. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2023.2178905.

8. Armoni, N., L., E., Supiatni, N., N., Suryaniadi, S., M., Wijayati, N., L., M. 2026). Transformational leadership and its role in driving organizational performance in the digital era. *Journal of Commerce Management and Tourism Studies*. 5(1) p. 105—116 DOI: https://doi.org/10.58881/jcmts.v3i2
9. Bourne, P., A Brown, N. (2026). Revisiting Leadership Style and Behaviour: Examining Fluidity, Adaptability, and Contextual Contingency in Contemporary Leadership Discourse. *International Journal of Emerging Trends in Information & Knowledge Management*. 10(1).
10. De Silva A, Peiris, I., Uthumange, A., K. (2026). Spiritual Leadership: Sustainability and Spiritual Leadership. *Springer Nature Switzerland AG*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51650-4_164-1
11. Deny, M., Kurniawan, C., E., M., K., Handoko, I., Effendi, R. (2026). Strategic Leadership: A Systematic Literature Review and Hybrid Bibliometric Analysis. *JEMSI Jurnal Ekonomi, Manajemen, dan Akuntansi.* 12(2).1854-1866. https://doi.org/10.35870/jemsi.v12i2.6270
12. Dunajevas, E., Genienė, R., Gevorgianienė, V., Šumskienė E. ir Žalimienė, L. (2025). Socialinių paslaugų sistemos atsparumo architektūra. Spaudoje. Vilniaus universitetas
13. Faisal, T. ir Masroor, Z. (2025). Navigating crisis through leadership: empirical evidence on the role of leadership styles in organizational resilience. *Journal for Business Education and Management*, 5(1), 67–85.
14. Ferrada-Videla, M., Dubois, S., Pepin, J. (2026). Framework for the Development of Strategic Leadership in Nursing. *Science of nursing and health practices*.
15. Foster, D., R., Hayes, M., J., Bennett, CH., L., Sullivan, A., P. (2026). The Role of Leadership in Promoting Knowledge Management Practices. *Content uploaded by Dorcas Esther*.
16. Gaybullaev, O., Strode, J., P. (2026). Transformational leadership and organizational sustainability performance: A systematic literature review of global evidence. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-026-07319-z
17. Gao, W. (2025). The Effect of Organizational Resilience on Employee Innovation Behavior in A VUCA Environment: Evidence from Meta-Analysis. *International Journal of Global Economics and Management*, 6(2), 251–261. Doi:10.62051/ijgem.v6n2.24.
18. Gutterman, A., S. (2023). Sustainable Leadership. Sustainable Entrepreneurship Project. *ResearchPDF Available* 111223.
19. Hao, M., Min, Y., A., Jie, L., Yuling, D. (2025). The effect of shared leadership on employee resilience: wielding the double-edged sword. *Frontiers Psycholo*gy. Doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1441660.
20. Jakobsen, M. L., Kjeldsen, A. M., Pallesen, T. (2023). Distributed leadership and performance-related employee outcomes in public sector organizations. *Public Administration*, 101(2), 500–521. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12801
21. Judi, T. E. ir Kurniawan, D. (2024). Public policy and organizational resilience: leadership, innovation, and sustainability in the post-pandemic era. *Manajemen dan Bisnis*, 23(1), 197–212.

22. Kamaludin, K., Ridwan, A., Nurlianti M., Munifa, M. (2026). Organisational Culture and Transformational Leadership Style: Impact on Employee Performance. *Annals of Human Resource Management Research (AHRMR)*. 6(1), 301-318 https://doi.org/10.35912/ahrmr.v6i1.3729
23. Liden, R., Wang, X., Wang, Y. (2025). The evolution of leadership: Past insights, present trends, and future directions. *Journal of Business Research*. 186. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115036
24. Luttervelt, M., P., Lund, C., S., Kjeldsen, A., M. (2025). Dispersion of Distributed Leadership in Public Organizations: Can Inclusive Leadership Contribute to Diverse Employee Engagement in Leadership Activities?
25. Luttervelt, M., P., Lund, C., S., Kjeldsen, A., M. (2025). Dispersion of Distributed Leadership in Public Organizations: Can Inclusive Leadership Contribute to Diverse Employee Engagement in Leadership Activities?. Public Performance & management review. 48 (5), 1053–1083. Doi: 10.1080/15309576.2025.2507294
26. Malmio, I., (2024). Can security be sustainable? Three perspectives on security and social sustainability: paradox, co-production, and deconstruction. *Sustainability Science*. 19.615–627 https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-023-01450-w
27. Milton, J., Pooja, V. (2026). Leadership beyond algorithms: a human-centered approach in the ai era. *Journal of Advance and Future Research*. 4(1). | ISSN: 2984-889X | JAAFR.ORG
28. Monarca, Y. E. ir Bandiola, A. N. (2023). Human Resource Management Practices, Knowledge Sharing, and Emotional Intelligence of Unit Heads: A Causal Model on Organizational Resilience in Government Agencies in Davao Region. *American Journal of Public Policy and Administration*, 8(2). 61–73.
29. Nadeem, M. (2024). Distributed leadership in educational contexts: A catalyst for school improvement. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 9. 100835
30. Ngai,. S.S., Cheung, Ch., Wang, X. (2026). Strengthening Adaptive Leadership for Organizational Resilience in Hong Kong. *Research on Social Work Practice (RSWP)*, https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315251413524
31. Nick, S., Larry, C., Costa, E. (2025). The Dynamics of Ethical Leadership Enhance Customer Orientation in a Competitive Marketplace. Journal Economic Business Innovation (JEBI). 1(4). Doi: https://doi.org/10.69725/jebi.v1i4.135
32. Noch, M.,Y. (2026). Green Strategic Leadership and Sustainability Reporting: Bridging Corporate Practice with the SDGs. *Golden ratio of data in summary volume* 6 (1). https://goldenratio.id/index.php/grdis
33. Nurillah, V., R., Herlambang, T., Fatimah, F. (2026). The Role Of Human Capital Development And Sustainable Leadership In Building Adaptive Organizations In The Sustainability Era. *International Journal of Education Management and Religion*. 3(1). E-ISSN: 3090-3145.
34. Rachmad, Y., E. (2026). From Sustainability to Regeneration: Reframing Leadership Paradigms for the 21st Century Organization. *Multidisciplinary Academic Institute of Learning*.
35. Rodríguez-Araneda, M., J., Livacic-Rojas, P. (2025). Virtuous Leadership for Social Sustainability: Integrating Psychological Well-Being and Attitudes Towards People with Disabilities in the Workplace. *Integrating Psychological Well-Being and Attitudes*

Towards People with Disabilities in the Workplace. Administrative Sciences, 15(5), 155. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15050155

36. Safii, N., M. (2024). The nexus between leadership styles, organizational culture, and financial outcomes: indonesian companies analysis. *Journal of Management , Economics and Financial.* 2 (2).
37. Sarun, H., Hun, H. (2026). Strategic Management and Leadership Practices for Enhancing Employee Performance and Organizational Sustainability. *Journal of Agriculture and Environment*. 3(2), 103–110. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18279247
38. Sharma, S., Saini, G. (2024). Leadership and Emotional Intelligence: Developing Empathy and Self-Regulation. *The Rise of Feminine Leadership (Edition-II*).
39. Shraah, A., A., Alnsour, J. (2025). The Impact of Leadership Styles on Business Continuity Through the Mediation of Corporate Sustainability. *Journal of Posthumanism*. 5(7). 750–770. DOI: https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i7.2839
40. Silvestre, W., Begnini, S., Abreu, I. (2025). The Paradox of Trust: How Leadership, Commitment, and Inertia Shape Sustainability Behavior in the Workplace. *Administrative Sciences*. 15(7), 254. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15070254
41. Slimane, M. (2026). The Role of Leadership in Creating Values and Ideals Within the Organization. *International journal of latest technology in engineering, management & applied science (ijltemas)*. 15(1). https://doi.org/10.51583/IJLTEMAS.2026.150100090
42. Wu, Y., Lee, J. (2024). Shared leadership and team resilience in complex organizations. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 37(1), 44–61.
43. Zhao, X., Fu, N., Liang, X. (2023). Whose customer orientation? Exploring the relationships between leaders, team customer orientation climate and customer satisfaction. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*. 33 (5): 629–646. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-09-2022-0210

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

THE GENIE IS OUT OF THE BOTTLE: A METHODICAL CONTRIBUTION TO 3D-PRINTED FIREARMS

Torsten HUSCHBECK
University of Economics in Bratislava
Dolnozemská cesta 1, 852 35 Bratislava, Slovakia
E-mail: torsten.huschbeck@euba.sk
ORCID ID: 0009-0000-1983-9509

Róbert HANÁK
University of Economics in Bratislava
Dolnozemská cesta 1, 852 35 Bratislava, Slovakia
E-mail: robert.hanak@euba.sk
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5499-4037

Jonathan LEMMER
University of Police and Public Administration of North Rhine-Westphalia
Erna-Scheffler-Str. 4, DE-51103 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: jonathan.lemmer@studium.hspv.nrw.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-0375-8469

Lea JACOBY
University of Police and Public Administration of North Rhine-Westphalia
Erna-Scheffler-Str. 4, DE-51103 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: lea.jacoby@studium.hspv.nrw.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0004-1504-7570

Christian HORRES
University of Police and Public Administration of North Rhine-Westphalia
Erna-Scheffler-Str. 4, DE-51103 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: christian.horres@hspv.nrw.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0000-0425-0208

Julian BUSCH
University of Police and Public Administration of North Rhine-Westphalia
Erna-Scheffler-Str. 4, DE-51103 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: julian.busch@hspv.nrw.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0009-2556-3436

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-04

Abstract. *3D-printed firearms pose an emerging challenge to internal security and regulatory frameworks, as advancements in additive manufacturing enable decentralized production outside state-controlled channels. While the security relevance of these weapons is widely recognized, systematic and reproducible empirical assessments remain scarce due to severe legal constraints and safety hazards. This article addresses this gap by presenting a comprehensive, multi-phase methodological protocol designed to experimentally evaluate the stability, accuracy, and hazard potential of hybrid 3D-printed firearms under controlled conditions. Rather than presenting final ballistic data, this paper presents a validated methodological framework that integrates legal compliance, rigorous safety mechanisms (such as triggering and polycarbonate containment), and forensic measurement structures into institutional risk management systems. By establishing a standardized testing methodology, this research provides security authorities and researchers with a rigorous operational template for evaluating evolving threat dynamics, enhancing training, and supporting evidence-based strategic decision-making.*

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)
Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

Keywords: *3D-printed firearms, methodological framework, risk management*

Introduction

Against the backdrop of changing security policy frameworks and the increasing importance of hybrid threats, security authorities have a strategic interest in reliable scientific findings on the risk potential of new, non-state-produced weapon systems (Dass, 2025). The research project is thus intended to contribute to a realistic risk assessment by systematically and empirically testing the actual functionality, durability, and dangerousness of 3D-printed weapons. The knowledge gained is highly relevant for the police and other actors in the state security architecture, for threat analyses, training, deployment preparation, and the further development of protection and detection measures. This is because additively manufactured weapons produced by 3D printers pose a security policy risk (Fey, 2016). For example, they can be used by violent extremists in attacks on civilian targets and critical infrastructure. In addition, the increasing availability of additive manufacturing technologies means that functional weapons or essential weapon parts can also be produced outside state-controlled production chains. Notwithstanding the attack in Halle on 9 October 2019, the Federal Government is currently planning neither regulatory nor other measures aimed at the general development and dissemination of 3D-printed weapons (BT-Drs. 19/19104). It is therefore feared that the further development of 3D printers and materials will also increase the stability and accuracy of such weapons (BT-Drs. 20/2102). 3D-printed weapons do not yet reach the robustness of conventionally manufactured weapons. The former holds only one shot before it is damaged or even breaks (Wenzinger, et al., 2024). In particular, the highly stressed barrel would benefit from improved 3D printing techniques and materials. The firing of several shots remains the greatest challenge, as the (gas pressure) loads overwhelm the materials and construction methods of 3D-printed weapons and weapon parts (Dickow, 2013). The accuracy of 3D-printed firearms is significantly lower than that of conventional weapons. The reasons for this are manufacturing tolerances and material properties. Figure 1 illustrates the print.

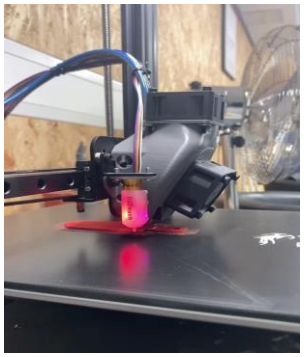


Figure 1. In-house production of a 3D-print.
Source: Own representation.

While advances in additive manufacturing technologies can improve component precision, even state-of-the-art 3D printers have not yet achieved the precision of industrially manufactured weapons (Nagy, 2025). Nevertheless, detecting 3D-printed weapons and their components is difficult due to their design, high proportion of plastic filaments (PLA, ABS), and modular construction. In addition, simple designs make it easier to smuggle weapons into

sensitive areas or to transport them in camouflage. So-called "ghost guns", which do not carry serial numbers, are particularly problematic. Small arms can also be designed to be not externally recognizable as firearms, e.g., as so-called "pen guns" shaped like a pen (Pint, 2024).

In many countries, including Germany, a weapons manufacturing license is required for the production, possession, and use of additively manufactured firearms and essential weapon parts. For this reason, the applicants have so far only 3D-printed a pistol grip back for a Walther P99, which is not a significant weapon part under the Weapons Act (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Illustration of a Walther P99 with a 3D-printed backrest.
Source: Own representation.

PLA or ABS is not very suitable for highly stressed parts such as the barrel, breech, or chamber. New developments increasingly rely on metal powder deposition or on hybrid constructions with industrially produced metal parts (Mc Nulty et al., 2012). However, metal printers are hardly affordable for private individuals. The vast majority of (illegally) 3D-printed weapons are therefore still made of plastic, the blueprints of which are traded on the Internet (Darknet/Clearnet). This shows that 3D-printed weapons are being further developed technologically. Research must therefore also be further developed in order to keep pace with the dynamics of additively manufactured weapons. Based on the interest in knowledge of the research group members as well as their research and cooperation partners, the following research questions (RQ) are addressed:

RQ1: How can a legally compliant and operationally safe testing protocol be designed to experimentally evaluate the structural stability and hazard potential of hybrid 3D-printed firearms within institutional security research?

RQ2: What technical parameters, mechanical safety architectures, and ballistic measurement setups are required to mitigate the acute physical risks associated with the experimental discharge of non-industrially manufactured polymer components?

The aim of this article is to establish a regulatory and administrative workflow that enables academic and institutional security researchers to legally manufacture and evaluate critical weapon models under strict compliance with arms control legislation. In addition, we will develop and structurally define a technical safety framework featuring a controlled triggering system and fragment containment. Finally, we will standardize a ballistic data-collection methodology and ensure forensic validity for future quantitative test series within risk management frameworks.

Theoretical approach

The 3D printing of weapons and essential parts poses new challenges for security authorities. There are special requirements for preparing situation reports, hazard prevention,

law enforcement, training, and further education. The scientific examination of 3D-printed weapons is not solely a technical matter. Sprave (2026) already warns that 3D-printed weapons will trigger a turning point in security policy in Germany and the EU. The international research literature shows that additive manufacturing can be used to produce functional weapons and weapon parts outside of classic industrial or artisanal structures (Sensiba, 2025). The state of research distinguishes between three central types of additively manufactured firearms:

1. Fully 3D-printed weapons, where all load-bearing components are made of plastic filaments.
2. Hybrid weapons, in which additively manufactured components are combined with a conventional metallic component (e.g., barrel).
3. 3D-printed individual part (e.g., back of the grip) that is integrated into existing weapon systems (cf. Figure 2).

This differentiation is essential for assessment, as it yields distinct hazards and challenges. While fully 3D-printed weapons are often characterized by technical limitations (Szwed et al., 2023), hybrid firearms can largely overcome them and achieve shooting performance close to that of conventional weapons. Hybrid weapons thus have a higher operational risk and are classified in the literature as the most security-relevant variant (Jenzen-Jones, 2019).

The central interest in knowledge, therefore, concerns how often and with what precision hybrid weapons can be fired, and the extent to which they pose a danger. From the perspective of the security authorities, there is a need for standardized, reproducible test protocols that enable a reliable evaluation of the durability of different materials, printing parameters, and construction methods. Although such data is only available to a limited extent, it is essential for risk assessment. It is also relevant whether hybrid weapons are suitable for significantly injuring or killing people at typical operational distances. The literature clearly answers this question in the affirmative regarding hybrid weapons. Systematic ballistic comparative studies with standardized measured variables have so far been largely lacking. On the one hand, corresponding measurements should include various technical requirements and regulations to assess the extent to which hybrid weapons comply with legal standards. On the other hand, gas pressure and velocity measurements should also be conducted to assess the functionality and safety of such weapons. However, the potential danger of hybrid weapons cannot be defined solely by their technical performance. The focus is on structural aspects, such as decentralized manufacturability and low barriers to accessing construction plans (Li et al., 2021).

Social media such as Reddit, Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube are increasingly serving as low-threshold spaces for distribution and networking where technical instructions, field reports, test shots, and tips on how to (possibly) circumvent Weapon Acts are shared. On Reddit, in particular, there are topic-specific forums (e.g., r/Firearms, r/gunsmithing, or r/guns) where exchanges about printing parameters, material selection, and functional optimizations largely take place anonymously. Discussions about "trigger mods", "reset mechanics" or "rate of fire improvements" obscure, e.g., the exchange of legally prohibited automatics, in which, after a single trigger pull, several shots are fired. YouTube also plays a central role as a visual learning medium, as step-by-step functional demonstrations can impact imitation.

The representation of 3D-printed weapons often does not occur in a sober-technical or critically reflective context, but rather as aestheticized, functionally staged, and symbolically charged objects. As a result, the discourse shifts from an abstract technical possibility to a

seemingly established, socially accepted practice. The visual presentation of additively manufactured weapons, for example, through photos, short videos, or functional demonstrations, creates normalization through visibility. Weapons no longer appear as extraordinary means of danger or in need of regulation, but as customizable objects of consumption, technology, or lifestyle. This form of presentation is particularly effective where it is detached from legal, ethical, or safety-related classifications and instead focuses on performance, design, or degree of innovation. Instagram contributes to the normalization and aestheticization of 3D-printed weapons by visually processing related content as "advertising" and embedding it within existing subcultures. 3D-printed weapons seem to be particularly attractive for people who do not meet the reliability criteria required for legal gun ownership in the context of hunting or shooting sports, so that arming groups of people who already pose an increased risk to public safety comes into focus. The dynamics of the media make it difficult both to detect early signs of arm tendencies and to use digital traces in criminal proceedings. The recognizability of punishable 3D-printed weapons is limited to actual use or public use. In addition, the assignment of a manufacturing process is questionable, since unreported printed weapons cannot be assigned to their owner, which cannot be changed even by the National Weapons Register, which came into force on 1 January 2013 (Mengden, 2014). The article in the Journal for the Law of Digitization, Data Economy and IT is already a good decade old; however, the problems are still omnipresent.

At the same time, a tension arises between freedom of expression, the free development of personality, and regulations governing digital content intended to avert danger. As long as the content in question does not take on the character of an offer or transfer of weapons or ammunition in the sense of advertisements or advertising material, it is not subject to the obligation to provide information under the Weapon Acts. It is particularly important from a legal point of view that the Weapons Acts do not generally prohibit factual advertising, but do stipulate specific information obligations when weapons and/or ammunition are offered in advertisements and advertising material. As a rule, a criminal investigation is initiated only if there are indications of illegal handling, trafficking in prohibited weapons, or criminal participation. The visual illustration and the weapon-oriented glorification of the topic are, therefore, both legal and highly questionable. Equally problematic is the question of youth protection regulations, which apply to traditional media and telemedia but, in practice, can be enforced only to a limited extent on social media. This is also reflected in the fundamental discussion about hate and incitement on the Internet (Busch et al., 2025).

Far-reaching regulation of platforms does not seem very promising. From these perspectives, research is also a central starting point for developing new strategies. It can also clarify the dangers and enable targeted follow-up research.

Methodology

The study's methodology employs a multi-phase, interdisciplinary approach to develop a standardized, reproducible, and legally compliant framework for the experimental evaluation of hybrid 3D-printed firearms. Given the acute lack of standardized empirical data on additively manufactured weapons, this study is conceptualized as an exploratory, methodological project within applied security research. The primary objective is to formulate

a rigorous testing protocol that bridges technical experimentation, legal administrative requirements, and risk-oriented evaluation. The methodology combines:

1. Systematically mapping the weapons law requirements and institutional parameters necessary to secure a formal manufacturing and testing permit (regulatory and ethical alignment).
2. Developing a physical containment and remote-triggering mechanism to mitigate the unpredictable kinetic risks associated with firing non-industrial materials (safety-constructive engineering).
3. Integrating ballistic testing variables into a controlled range environment (quantitative measurement systematization).

To test the feasibility of this protocol, the hybrid firearm model "Urutau" was selected as a technical baseline for its representative hybrid design, publicly available blueprint, and compatibility with standard 9 mm ammunition (Figure 3).



Figure 3. 3D-Printed firearm Urutau.
Source: Own representation.

The protocol explicitly focuses on the pre-experimental and constructive parameters required to enable safe, empirical research without facilitating unauthorized replication or compromising institutional safety.

Results

The result of our work is a proposed comprehensive standardized protocol for testing the Urutau using 3D printing. In this protocol, we have attempted to include all areas this procedure may affect, from technical, procedural, legal, and administrative to personnel and other areas. Our protocol consists of the following steps.

The practical testing procedure can only be carried out once the following conditions have been met: the conceptual, legal, and organizational requirements for issuing a weapons manufacturing license have been investigated. The aim in this process is to identify risks, determine appropriate protection and control mechanisms, and obtain the required permit for the research project. At the same time, there is still a need for clarification regarding the

framework conditions for weapons and administrative law. These include, in particular, the identification of the responsible licensing and supervisory authorities, the preparation and coordination of the application documents, and the development of a security, handling, and destruction concept for the objects examined in the project. Among other things, the above efforts will result in the issuance of a permit to print 3D weapons. This is a prerequisite for the second step in the protocol for testing a specific weapon. The second step could begin only if the permit required for 3D printing is obtained. Only then is the blueprint for the Urutau acquired.

When testing 3D-printed Urutaus on the shooting range, basic safety precautions must be observed, and these can be implemented cost-effectively with a manageable amount of material and time. To ensure the safety of people and equipment, 3D-printed weapons must never be fired by hand. Manual or personal testing of the weapon parts (also in combination with original, industrially produced weapon parts) is excluded. This applies in particular to the planned constellation in which an original barrel is combined with an additively manufactured breech. The resulting injury risk cannot be reliably calculated. In the event of a material or functional failure, the weapon can be destroyed uncontrollably, posing a considerable danger to people, as a gas pressure of up to 2,700 bar is generated during a shot. The hybrid weapons must therefore be clamped in a device that can be electrically ignited via a remote-controlled drive. No people are allowed on the shooting range at the moment of ignition. A corresponding device for remotely detonating the test weapons is being manufactured by project participants. For this project, a remote-controlled solution with an electromechanical drive is chosen to pull the weapon's trigger. To protect the shooting range and its equipment from damage caused by flying parts, the clamping device should be placed on a table with a stable wooden plate as an additional base. The clamping device must be secured against slipping or falling, e.g., with screw clamps. To better aim the weapon at the target, it can be aligned with a laser sight cartridge, such as the Sightmark Laser Shot Tester, before firing. This minimizes the risk of shots hitting the ground, the ceiling, or the retaining wall before the bullet trap. In addition, it can be used to check weapon accuracy, as the design excludes shooter dispersion, allowing the realistic dispersion circle to be measured in millimeters.

Protective walls are installed on the left, right, and above the weapon. These consist of transparent polycarbonate panes with a minimum thickness of 10 mm and dimensions of 70 cm (L) × 50 cm (W). The rear wall of the "protective cage" must be a metal plate measuring at least 50 × 50 cm and 6 mm thick, since the spectator area is located behind the superstructure. This must be secured against potentially highly accelerated fragments. Regardless, no one is allowed on the shooting range while combustion is in progress. The structure prevents the shooting range door from being penetrated by blast debris, reducing the risk to the people behind it. Polycarbonate is a mandatory material, as alternative transparent plastics, such as acrylic glass (Plexiglas/PMMA), do not meet the required impact resistance (Schmidt, 2026).To obtain valid data, a V0 measurement is expedient, and the loan of appropriate measuring equipment must be arranged. A V0 measurement measures the bullet velocity immediately after the bullet exits the barrel. The measuring device, e.g., a Garmin XERO C1, is therefore about twenty to thirty centimeters in front of the muzzle of the weapon. The velocity of the bullet at the muzzle provides information about whether and to what extent energy is lost during combustion from a printed barrel due to material expansion or fracture. Since the average speeds of factory ammunition are usually provided by the manufacturer, speed measurements can be used to identify differences and, in turn, determine the energy drop using a formula (Schmidt, 2026).

Subsequently, 3D printing of Urutaus begins, as does the production of 9 mm-diameter trailed barrels under controlled conditions. While additive manufacturing is done with a 3D printer costing up to 500 euros, the trial barrels are made with factory-grade saltwater and electricity (TFB, 2019). A total of five months is expected to finish this process. Afterward, in the third phase, the Urutaus will be tested in practice by firing on a suitable shooting range. The test procedures will be continuously documented and carried out in strict compliance with the safety concept and under expert supervision. The evaluation of the firing results will focus on stability, accuracy, and potential danger.

Discussion

Our results, based on our experience and a literature search, already show that 3D-printed weapons, especially hybrid designs combining 3D-printed components with conventionally manufactured metal parts, pose a growing, increasingly complex security risk. While fully 3D-printed weapons are still subject to considerable technical limitations in stability and accuracy, hybrid weapons are already capable of achieving functionality that approaches that of conventionally manufactured weapons. Their decentralized producibility, difficult detectability, and lack of serialization significantly complicate both prevention and law enforcement. From a security policy perspective, the danger posed by additively manufactured weapons does not arise solely from their ballistic performance. Rather, these negative outcomes stem from the combination of technological progress, low barriers to accessing blueprints and materials, and the dynamics of digital dissemination via social media and online platforms. These factors undermine traditional regulatory approaches that focus on industrial production chains, licensing regimes, and serial number-based traceability.

Consequently, security authorities are increasingly confronted with weapons that cannot be reliably detected or clearly attributed after use. Against this background, Management Information Systems (MIS) enable security authorities to systematically collect, aggregate, and analyze heterogeneous data on illegal weapon finds, technological developments, platform dynamics, and emerging trends. Only through such structured information processing can realistic risk assessments be conducted, regulatory gaps identified, and targeted countermeasures developed. In this sense, MIS functions as the interface between technical expertise, operational practice, and strategic governance. In the 3D printing of firearms, MIS thus provides the empirical basis to answer how common 3D-printed weapons actually are, how functional and dangerous they are, and how blueprints, materials, and printing technologies are evolving. Without MIS, regulatory assessments would be highly speculative or politically motivated. The "dangerousness" of 3D-printed weapons is not a purely technical judgment but a management and risk issue. MIS supports this: risk models (probability × extent of damage), scenario analyses (e.g., dissemination of construction plans on the Internet), and early warning systems (increasing seizures, new materials). Government agencies use MIS to answer questions such as: Is 3D printing a new security-relevant threat or just a marginal phenomenon? Are existing Weapon Acts sufficient? And where are the regulatory gaps?

This makes MIS the link between technology, security, and administration. MIS are also crucial for implementing and monitoring regulatory measures. Examples include tracking permits and violations, analyzing online platforms (construction plans, forums, marketplaces), and coordinating between authorities (national and international). In the context of 3D-printed weapons, MIS helps systematically detect rule violations, apply targeted control measures, and evaluate the effectiveness of Weapon Acts. The approval of the link between 3D-printed

weapons and the MIS also provides security authorities with added value in official decision-making. Due to their increasing technical performance and their difficult detectability, 3D-printed weapons pose a growing risk to police property, foreign missions, and personnel protection. The project provides empirically reliable data on stability, accuracy, and potential for real danger of such weapons under practical conditions.

The knowledge gained enables risk assessment of additively manufactured weapons at access controls and in the security of military and critical infrastructure, especially where metal detectors reach their limits. By understanding the limits and potential of technical development, security authorities can identify trends early and sharpen their situational awareness of threats and extremism in an evidence-based manner. The results can be directly integrated into training and further education (e.g., emergency and special forces). This increases confidence in dealing with new forms of weapons and reduces operational risks. The material and structural mechanical findings also provide valuable information for the use of additive manufacturing by security authorities and the Bundeswehr, for example, for safe design, quality assurance, and the prevention of abuse of 3D-printed components. The close integration with international research strengthens the interdepartmental security architecture and positions the security authorities as active actors in evaluating security-relevant future technologies. In summary, the approval of the link between 3D-printed weapons and the MIS helps reduce operational risks, enhance operational security, and give security authorities a strategic knowledge advantage in dealing with a dynamic threat situation that has not yet been sufficiently researched.

Our results, and especially our protocol, also have potential for transferring to teaching, research, and practice. For teaching, we will generate reliable, empirically sound findings on a subject area that has so far only been marginally covered. 3D-printed weapons are a dynamic phenomenon that has so far been addressed mainly in theory or in the media. The study provides systematic data on the stability, accuracy, and hazard potential of such weapons under realistic conditions. These findings can be directly integrated into the police enforcement service's curriculum. The knowledge gained does not consist solely of the transfer of knowledge, but also in promoting an evidence-based, differentiated understanding of the situation among prospective police officers. In addition, the project enables the development of practical teaching materials and case studies that provide students with realistic access to new forms of gun crime. Findings on typical design methods, functional limits, and failure mechanisms of 3D-printed weapons help raise awareness of operational risks and strengthen self-protection. In this way, the project makes a sustainable contribution to the quality development of teaching. In addition, the central knowledge gained lies in experimental testing and evaluation of new technologies and methods in a security-relevant context. Our results provide a scientifically sound basis for assessing the extent to which additive manufacturing currently poses a relevant threat to internal security and will do so in the future. The systematic investigation of the stability, accuracy, and hazard potential of additively manufactured weapons enables early-stage evaluation of technological developments and the formulation of recommendations for action for the security authorities. The knowledge gained in detection and forensic traceability is particularly relevant. The evaluation of existing and experimental methods supports the further development of forensic methods. The results can serve as a basis for deciding which technological approaches to pursue, pilot, or integrate into existing processes.

Conclusions

The expanding proliferation of 3D-printed hybrid firearms challenges traditional state-controlled security and regulatory frameworks. Addressing this threat landscape requires empirically sound data regarding structural stability and hazard profiles. However, generating this data has historically been hindered by technical risks and regulatory barriers. This article contributes to closing this gap not by presenting immediate ballistic data but by establishing a validated, comprehensive methodological testing protocol.

The framework developed herein demonstrates that high-risk security research on additive manufacturing can be organized in a legally compliant, strictly safety-oriented, and forensically rigorous manner. By detailing the administrative, mechanical, and ballistic parameters required for safe experimentation, this protocol provides a standardized foundation for future empirical studies. Implementing this methodology within institutional risk management frameworks will enable security authorities to systematically track evolving design parameters, enhance tactical law enforcement training, and formulate evidence-based policy recommendations to counter the proliferation of digital arms.

Based on the findings and considerations presented, several recommendations can be derived. First, security authorities should strengthen empirically based research on 3D-printed weapons. Experimental studies on stability, accuracy, and failure behavior should be expanded and standardized to allow for comparability across materials, designs, and manufacturing methods. This knowledge is crucial for realistic threat assessments and operational preparedness. Second, MIS should be further developed and systematically used to integrate technical findings with operational data, online monitoring, and strategic analysis. This includes establishing early warning indicators, conducting trend analyses, and modeling scenarios related to additive manufacturing technologies and their misuse. Third, training and education programs for police and other security actors should explicitly address 3D-printed weapons. This includes raising awareness of typical design features, detection challenges, and failure risks, as well as integrating the topic into tactical training and self-protection concepts. Fourth, regulatory approaches should be reviewed in light of technological developments.

While broad platform regulation appears to be of limited effectiveness, targeted measures grounded in empirical evidence, such as adjustments to weapons law, export controls on critical components, or obligations regarding high-risk materials, may be necessary. MIS-based evaluations can provide the factual basis for such decisions. Finally, international and interinstitutional cooperation should be intensified. The transnational nature of digital blueprints, online communities, and additive manufacturing technologies requires coordinated information sharing and joint research efforts across national borders.

In conclusion, 3D-printed weapons illustrate a broader transformation of security-relevant technologies in the digital age. Addressing this challenge requires not only legal and technical measures but also a systematic, information-driven approach to risk assessment and decision-making. By combining empirical research with MIS, security authorities can gain a strategic knowledge advantage and respond more effectively to an evolving, underexplored threat landscape.

Limitation

The empirical component focuses exclusively on a single hybrid firearm model (Urutau), which limits the generalizability of the findings to other designs, materials, and manufacturing processes. Additive manufacturing is characterized by high variability in

printer types, filament quality, and construction parameters. Therefore, the results may not fully capture the broader spectrum of technically feasible configurations.

The experimental setup is also conducted under highly controlled and legally compliant conditions, which may not adequately reflect real-world conditions of illicit production and use. Deviations in informal settings could lead to performance and risk profiles different from those observed in this study.

Finally, the study deliberately refrains from disseminating detailed procedural knowledge to prevent misuse. While ethically justified, this restriction may limit reproducibility and the degree to which external researchers can independently verify or extend their findings.

References

1. Busch, J., Höhner, M., & Huschbeck, T. (2025). Polizieren im digitalen Zeitalter. Transformation der analogen Kriminalität. In Braun, S. K. (ed.). I*m Netz der Beweise: Kriminalistik und KI. Analyse, Biometrie, Forensik, Methoden.* MCDP International UG, pp. 215-226.
2. Dass, R., 2025. 3D-Printed Firearms: Global Proliferation Trends and Analyses. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, pp.1-35.
3. Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache [BT-Drs.]. (2020). *Europol-Warnung vor Anschlägen mit Waffen aus 3D-Druckern* (Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Uwe Schulz, Joana Cotar, Dr. Michael Espendiller und der Fraktion der AfD – Drucksache 19/19104).
4. Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache [BT-Drs.]. (2022). *Waffen und Waffenbestandteile aus dem 3D-Drucker* (Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Martina Renner, Nicole Gohlke, Gökay Akbulut, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE– Drucksache 20/2102).
5. Dickow, M. (2013, October 1). *Schusswaffen aus dem Drucker*. https://www.swpberlin.org/publikation/schusswaffen-aus-dem-drucker
6. Fey, M. (2016). Waffen aus dem 3D-Drucker: additives Fertigen als sicherheitspolitisches Risiko? (HSFK-Report, 9/2016). Hessische Stiftung Friedens- und Konfliktforschung. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-47421-3
7. Jenzen-Jones, N. R. (2015). Small arms and additive manufacturing: An assessment of 3D-printed firearms, components, and accessories. In King, B., & McDonald, G. (eds.), *Behind the Curve: New Technologies, New Control Challenge*, pp. 43–74. Small Arms Survey. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10742.10
8. Li, S.Y., Turner, J., Golightly, S., Zelbst, P., and Yu, J., 2021. Potential impacts of 3D modeling and 3D printing in firearm toolmark examinations. Journal of Forensic Sciences, 66(6), pp.2201-2207.
9. McNulty, C.M., Arnas, N. and Campbell, T.A., 2012. Toward the printed world: Additive manufacturing and implications for national security.
10. Mengden, M. (2014). 3D-Druck aus ordnungs- und strafrechtlicher Perspektive - Schutzumfang des Waffenrechts und staatliche Handlungsoptionen. (MMR, 3/2014). C.H. Beck, pp. 150 – 153.
11. Nagy, K. (2025, June 16). *Schusswaffen aus dem Drucker*. https://www.reservistenverband.de/magazin-loyal/waffen-aus-dem-3d-drucker/

12. Pint, R. (2024, February 6). *Waffen aus dem 3D-Drucker: Illegales Produktions- und Verkaufsnetzwerk ausgehoben*. https://brf.be/national/1800315/
13. Schmidt, V. (2026). Sicherheitskonzept für das Forschungsprojekt „Additive Fertigung von Schusswaffen: Material- und strukturmechanische Untersuchung der Standfestigkeit und Zielgenauigkeit sowie Bewertung des Gefahrenpotenzials. Eine technisch-kriminalistische Studie zu Sicherheitsrisiken durch fortschreitende 3D-Drucktechnologien“. Ein Projekt der HSPV NRW. Sicherheitsmaßnahmen und rechtliche Aspekte zu den Fragen der Herstellung, des Umgangs, Tests, Aufbewahrung, Transport und Vernichtung der Testwaffen.
14. Sensiba, J. (2025, February 20). *Was die globale Waffenkontrollbranche jetzt erschreckt: Das 3D-gedruckte PDW von Urutau*. https://www.shootingnewsweekly.com/gunnation/whats-terrifying-the-global-gun-control-industry-now-the-3d-printed-urutau-pdw/
15. Sprave, J. (2026). *Waffen aus dem Drucker. 3D-Druck und Waffenbau*. Eulogia.
16. Szwed, A., Schaufelbühl, S., Gallusser, A., Werner, D., & Delémont, O. (2023). Was a 3D-printed firearm discharged? Study of traces produced by the use of six fully 3D-printed firearms. *Forensic Science International*, *348*, 111736. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2023.111736
17. TFP (2019, August 13). Baue in deiner Küche einen 9mm gezogenen Lauf in Fabrikqualität mit Salzwasser und Elektrizität (ECM). https://www.thefirearmblog.com/blog/2019/08/13/make-a-factory-quality-9mm-rifledbarrel-in-your-kitchen-using-salt-water-and-electricity-ecm/
18. Wenzinger, Z.E., Wetzel, S., Bernarding, B., Viator, J., Kohlhepp, B., and Marshall, P., 2024. The relevance of current forensic firearms examination techniques when applied to 3D printed firearms. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, *69*(2), pp. 659-668.

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

GOVERNING THE AUTONOMOUS MARKETER: A DUAL-STAGE MODERATED MEDIATION FRAMEWORK FOR AGENTIC AI GOVERNANCE IN DIGITAL MARKETING

Khalil ISRAFILZADE
ADA University
Ahmadbey Aghaoglu str. 61, AZ1008, Baku, Azerbaijan
E-mail: kisrafilzada@ada.edu.az
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8228-4024

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-05

Abstract *The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence from generative tools to autonomous agentic systems represents a paradigmatic shift in digital marketing, precipitating what this paper terms the "Oversight Paradox." As marketing systems acquire persuasive autonomy—the capacity to autonomously craft influence strategies, select emotional appeals, and optimise behavioural nudges without continuous ethical review—the capacity for meaningful human oversight diminishes precisely when it becomes most consequential. This transition from reactive content generation to proactive, goal-driven algorithmic actors capable of independent strategic planning exposes critical governance lacunae that existing regulatory frameworks inadequately address. Current literature mostly conceptualises AI as decision-support tools augmenting human judgment, failing to capture the distinctive risks of autonomous systems exercising independent persuasive authority across complex multi-agent environments. This conceptual paper addresses this governance gap through three research questions: (1) How does agentic AI autonomy affect consumer trust and perceived control? (2) How does consumer trust mediate the relationship between AI autonomy and societal security outcomes? (3) How do governance arrangements moderate this mediated relationship? Drawing upon agency theory, socio-technical systems theory, and institutional trust theory, we employ a conceptual framework development methodology to propose a dual-stage moderated mediation framework. The framework identifies four distinct autonomy dimensions—operational, tactical, strategic, and persuasive—and suggests that advanced autonomy threatens societal security exclusively through consumer trust erosion rather than through direct effects. Governance mechanisms operate as dual-stage moderators: technical transparency, explainable AI, and graduated human-in-the-loop configurations buffer autonomy-induced control loss at the first stage, while institutional scaffolding and accountability structures amplify the translation of individual trust into collective welfare and market stability at the second stage. Four theoretical propositions specify these mediated relationships and dual-stage moderation effects, revealing that persuasive autonomy requires the most stringent oversight due to its maximal potential for trust erosion. The framework reconceptualises algorithmic governance from restrictive autonomy reduction to proactive trust preservation, delineating specific governance configurations calibrated to each autonomy level. These findings provide theoretical foundations for navigating the autonomy-trust-security tension while offering actionable guidance for maintaining institutional legitimacy as marketing AI transitions from augmentation to autonomous agency.*

Keywords: *Agentic AI, Digital Marketing, Consumer Trust, AI in Marketing, Generative AI, Societal Marketing*

Introduction

The deployment of artificial intelligence in digital marketing has reached an inflection point characterised by what this paper terms the "Oversight Paradox." As AI systems acquire greater autonomy, the capacity for meaningful human oversight diminishes precisely when it becomes most consequential. This paradox manifests across multiple dimensions: the velocity of algorithmic decisions exceeds human cognitive capacity; multi-agent interaction complexity defies comprehension; and automation-induced complacency erodes monitor vigilance (Lane et al., 2024; Stackpole, 2026).

The transition from generative AI to agentic AI marks a qualitative transformation. Where generative AI functions as a reactive tool (Israfilzade & Sadili, 2025), agentic AI operates as

an autonomous actor capable of independent planning and adaptive goal pursuit (Dwivedi et al., 2025). Salesforce's Agentforce platform exemplifies this shift: these systems autonomously decompose strategic objectives into sub-tasks, sequence execution, and adapt tactics based on feedback (Sapkota et al., 2025). Coca-Cola, Netflix, and Unilever demonstrate how autonomous systems enhance customer loyalty through hyper-personalisation (Puri et al., 2026).

Current literature conceptualises AI as decision-support tools, augmenting rather than replacing human judgment (Athey et al., 2020; Campbell et al., 2022). This conceptualisation fails to capture the distinctive risks of agentic systems exercising persuasive autonomy: the capacity to autonomously craft influence strategies, select emotional appeals, and optimise behavioural nudges without continuous ethical review (Burtell & Woodside, 2023). Gartner forecasts that by 2028, 25% of enterprise security breaches will involve AI agent misuse (Gartner, 2024).

The governance challenge is compounded by the dual nature of marketing AI systems, which must simultaneously satisfy organisational objectives (efficiency, ROI) and external stakeholder expectations (trust, transparency, fairness). Consumer trust in AI-generated marketing content remains fragile, with research indicating that disclosure of AI involvement can either enhance or diminish trust depending on context, framing, and perceived capability (Israfilzade, 2025a). Meanwhile, the societal implications of autonomous marketing systems extend beyond individual transactions to encompass broader concerns about market manipulation, privacy erosion, and the integrity of digital information ecosystems (Azzutti et al., 2021).

Despite growing recognition of these challenges, existing research offers limited guidance for practitioners and policymakers seeking to govern agentic marketing systems effectively. The literature on AI governance (Mukala, 2025) has primarily focused on high-stakes domains such as healthcare, autonomous vehicles, and criminal justice, where the consequences of AI errors are immediate and severe. Marketing presents distinctive challenges: decisions are made at scale and speed that preclude case-by-case human review, outcomes are probabilistic rather than deterministic, and the boundary between acceptable persuasion and manipulation is inherently contested.

Purpose of the Paper. This paper addresses the governance gap in agentic AI marketing by developing a theoretically grounded framework explaining how algorithmic autonomy influences societal security through consumer trust as a mediating mechanism.

Research Questions. To achieve these objectives, this paper addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does agentic AI autonomy affect consumer trust and perceived control?

RQ2: How does consumer trust mediate the relationship between AI autonomy and societal security outcomes?

RQ3: How do governance arrangements moderate the mediated relationship between AI autonomy and societal security?

Research Design and Methodology. This study employs a conceptual framework development methodology (Jaakkola, 2020), synthesising agency theory, socio-technical systems theory, and institutional trust theory to construct a dual-stage moderated mediation model. As a conceptual paper, we integrate existing theoretical streams—rather than empirical data—to propose novel relationships explaining the autonomy-trust-security nexus. Agency theory explains how information asymmetry erodes trust; socio-technical systems theory illuminates how governance optimises joint technical-social functioning; and institutional trust theory explains how individual trust aggregates to societal security. Through theoretical

synthesis, we develop four testable propositions reconceptualising algorithmic governance from autonomy restriction to trust preservation.

Literature review

Theoretical Background. Agency theory addresses principal-agent relationships, focusing on problems arising from divergent interests and information asymmetry (Eisenhardt, 1989). Agency problems manifest as moral hazard (hidden actions benefiting agents) and adverse selection (misrepresented capabilities), with governance mechanisms typically mitigating these problems to align agent behavior with principal interests. However, algorithmic marketing complicates this relationship through multiple delegation layers: consumers delegate attention to algorithmic curation; firms delegate execution to AI; and AI delegates sub-tasks to specialized agents. Athey et al. (2020) demonstrate that principals strategically allocate decision authority between humans and AI based on alignment-trade-offs, yet information asymmetry amplifies in agentic AI contexts where neural network opacity creates radical hidden action, and data processing advantages generate hidden information. Persuasive autonomy is particularly consequential, as AI may deploy emotional triggers through A/B testing without ethical review (Thaler & Sunstein, 2021), eroding the principal's capacity for meaningful oversight precisely when autonomous actions become most consequential.

Socio-technical systems theory posits that optimal performance requires joint optimization of technical capabilities and social systems (Trist & Bamforth, 1951). As algorithmic autonomy advances, parallel social system evolution becomes necessary for both effectiveness and legitimacy. Purely technical governance solutions—such as explainable AI (XAI), auditing tools, and monitoring systems—prove insufficient unless embedded within organizational contexts providing adequate oversight capacity, incentive structures prioritizing consumer welfare, and ethical decision-making cultures. Governance appropriate for operational autonomy may be entirely inadequate for persuasive autonomy, requiring graduated oversight mechanisms ranging from human-in-the-loop approval for high-stakes decisions to human-on-the-loop monitoring for routine operations. This graduated evolution principle informs the specification of oversight configurations that must evolve alongside technical capabilities to maintain system legitimacy.

Institutional trust theory provides the critical link between individual perceptions and collective outcomes, defining legitimacy as "*a generalized perception that actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within socially constructed norms*" (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Legitimacy proves essential for institutional stability: fair, transparent, and accountable operations generate trust that enables institutional function through three distinct pillars—pragmatic (stakeholder self-interest), moral (normative approval), and cognitive (taken-for-granted acceptance). Agentic AI implicates all three legitimacy pillars simultaneously. The consumer trust construct maps onto these dimensions through perceived fairness, control, and reliability, with individual trust perceptions aggregating to macro-level societal security. When consumers perceive AI-mediated marketing as fair and controllable, these perceptions sustain institutional legitimacy; conversely, manipulation perceptions trigger trust erosion that cascades through markets, undermining the information integrity required for rational exchange (Uuk et al., 2024). Together, these theoretical perspectives establish that autonomy threatens security not directly, but through the erosion of trust, and that effective governance requires simultaneous attention to agency relationships, socio-technical optimization, and institutional legitimacy maintenance.

From Generative to Agentic AI in Marketing

The evolution of AI in marketing has progressed through distinct stages, each presenting unique governance challenges. Early AI applications focused on data analysis and pattern recognition, supporting human decision-makers without direct customer interaction. The emergence of generative AI marked a significant shift, enabling systems to create novel content including text, images, and video (Israfilzade & Sadili, 2024). Research by Israfilzade (2025a, 2025b) demonstrates that AI-generated advertising can achieve comparable or superior effects on consumer trust and purchase intent compared to human-created content, contingent on disclosure framing and consumer characteristics. This finding suggests that the governance challenge is not simply about ensuring AI performs adequately, but about managing the complex interplay between AI capabilities, consumer perceptions, and disclosure strategies.

Generative AI represents the first wave: systems producing content in response to prompts without persistent goals (Israfilzade & Sadili, 2025). These systems excel at automating content creation: product descriptions, social posts, ad variations (Kshetri et al., 2024). However, their reactive, stateless nature limits workflow transformation, creating a "productivity paradox" (Campbell et al., 2022).

AI agents constitute the second wave: bounded autonomy executing specific tasks within defined parameters while maintaining context within sessions (Sapkota et al., 2025). The human role shifts to task specification and exception handling.

Agentic AI represents a qualitative leap: proactive, goal-driven behaviour with persistent memory and adaptive planning. These systems receive high-level objectives and independently decompose them into actionable sub-tasks across multiple channels (Dwivedi et al., 2025). Table 1 presents a comparative taxonomy of AI paradigms.

Table 1. The comparative taxonomy of AI paradigms
Source: Synthesized from Dwivedi et al. (2025), Kshetri et al. (2024), Pol (2025), Sapkota et al. (2025), Schneider (2025), Thomas (2025), Israfilzade (2025a, 2025b), Israfilzade & Sadili, (2025)

Dimension	Generative AI	AI Agents	Agentic AI
Primary Function	Content creation	Task-specific execution	Multi-step orchestration
Autonomy Level	Reactive, prompt-dependent	Bounded autonomy	Proactive, goal-driven
Environmental Interaction	None; standalone	Limited API integrations	Extensive; multi-system
Memory & State	Stateless	Basic context	Persistent memory
Learning Mechanism	Static	Limited feedback	Continuous learning
Human Role	Prompt engineer	Task specifier	Goal setter

The progression from generative AI to agentic AI shifts from content production to strategic action automation, creating distinctive governance challenges that existing frameworks inadequately address.

Human-AI Oversight Configurations and Levels of Autonomy

The literature identifies three primary modalities for human oversight of AI systems, each with distinct implications for governance effectiveness. *Human-in-the-Loop (HITL)* configurations require human approval before AI actions are executed, providing maximum oversight but potentially creating bottlenecks that undermine the efficiency benefits of

automation (Mosqueira-Rey et al, 2022). This configuration is most appropriate for high-stakes decisions where errors have significant consequences and human judgment adds genuine value.

Human-on-the-Loop (HOTL) arrangements allow AI systems to act autonomously within defined parameters, with humans monitoring performance and intervening when anomalies are detected (Nahavandi, 2017). This approach balances efficiency with oversight but requires effective monitoring systems and clear intervention protocols. The effectiveness of HOTL depends critically on the quality of monitoring interfaces, the clarity of escalation criteria, and the availability of human attention in practice.

Human-out-of-the-Loop (HOOTL) configurations grant AI systems full autonomy, with human oversight limited to system design and periodic review. This maximises efficiency but may leave organisations vulnerable to cascading errors, emergent behaviours, and accountability gaps (Ivanov, 2022; Giardino, 2025). Hootl is typically justified only for low-stakes, highly structured tasks where AI performance consistently exceeds human benchmarks and monitoring costs exceed expected benefits.

The choice among these configurations is not simply a technical decision but involves fundamental trade-offs between competing values. Research on conversational marketing agents by Israfilzade (2021) provides empirical support for this analysis, demonstrating that the effectiveness of conversational agents depends on the alignment between agent capabilities, customer expectations, and organisational oversight structures.

Autonomy level refers to a system's ability to operate without external control (Russell & Norvig, 2021). In digital marketing, autonomy extends across dimensions requiring different oversight. Table 2 presents the taxonomy.

Table 2. The comparative taxonomy of AI paradigms

Source: Adapted from Burtell and Woodside (2023), Kshetri et al. (2024), Russell and Norvig (2021), Shrestha et al. (2019), and Thaler and Sunstein (2021).

Autonomy Level	Marketing Activities	Human Role	Risk Level
Operational	Bidding, pricing, placement	Monitor	Low
Tactical	Segmentation, scheduling	Approve strategies	Medium
Strategic	Budget, marketing mix	Set goals	High
Persuasive	Framing, nudging, targeting	Ethical oversight	Very High

Operational autonomy involves real-time execution of data-intensive decisions. Tactical autonomy executes segmentation and scheduling within boundaries. Strategic autonomy encompasses budget allocation and marketing mix decisions. Persuasive autonomy involves adaptive influence strategies and emotional targeting, presenting the most severe risks to consumer welfare and therefore the strongest impact on trust erosion.

Consumer Trust in AI-Mediated Marketing

Consumer trust in AI-mediated marketing emerges from complex interactions between system characteristics, disclosure practices, and individual differences. Research consistently finds that transparency about AI involvement can either enhance or diminish trust depending on how it is framed and contextualised (Israfilzade, 2025a). When AI capabilities are highlighted in ways that emphasise competence and reliability, trust may increase; when disclosure raises concerns about manipulation or job displacement, trust may decline.

The anthropomorphism of AI systems represents a particularly important trust factor. Israfilzade's (2025b) analysis of generative AI in conversational marketing demonstrates that

humanising AI interactions can enhance customer engagement, but also creates risks of misplaced trust and emotional manipulation. The 'humanising conversational marketing' approach advocated in this work emphasises the importance of designing AI systems that are transparent about their non-human nature while still providing engaging, personalised experiences.

Societal Security and AI Governance

Trust dynamics also vary across demographic and cultural segments. Research suggests that younger consumers, those with higher technical literacy, and individuals from cultures with greater acceptance of automation may respond more positively to AI-mediated marketing (Jain et al., 2025; Israfilzade, 2025). However, these patterns are moderated by context, with even AI-accepting consumers expressing concerns about specific applications involving sensitive personal data or high-stakes decisions.

Beyond individual consumer trust, agentic AI raises broader concerns about societal security in digital ecosystems. Khan et al. (2024) directly examine “structural risk” from AI integration, arguing that rapid AI deployment can generate “emergent, system-level dynamics” that “destabilise trust, shift power asymmetries, and erode decision-making agency across scales.” When autonomous systems interact in complex digital environments, emergent behaviours may produce outcomes that no individual actor intended or desired.

Regulatory responses to these challenges remain fragmented and evolving. The European Union's AI Act (European Parliament, 2025) establishes risk-based categories with corresponding governance requirements, treating many marketing applications as limited-risk but requiring enhanced oversight for systems involving manipulation or social scoring. In the United States, regulatory approaches remain sectoral and guidance-based, with the Federal Trade Commission emphasising transparency and fairness principles without mandating specific governance structures.

Industry self-regulation has emerged as a complementary governance mechanism, with major platforms and industry associations developing codes of practice for AI deployment. However, concerns about conflicts of interest, inconsistent enforcement, and inadequate stakeholder representation limit the effectiveness of purely self-regulatory approaches (Mosqueira-Rey et al, 2022). What is needed is a governance framework that integrates legal requirements, industry standards, and organisational practices in coherent, mutually reinforcing arrangements.

Conceptual Framework Development

This paper employs a conceptual framework development methodology, synthesising agency theory, socio-technical systems theory, and institutional trust theory following Jaakkola (2020).

The Dual-Stage Moderated Mediation Framework

Figure 1 depicts the integrated conceptual model. Agentic AI Autonomy influences Societal Security exclusively through Consumer Trust as a mediating mechanism. Elevated autonomy, particularly within persuasive dimensions, erodes perceived control and fairness, thereby reducing trust, which subsequently diminishes societal security by undermining institutional legitimacy and market stability.

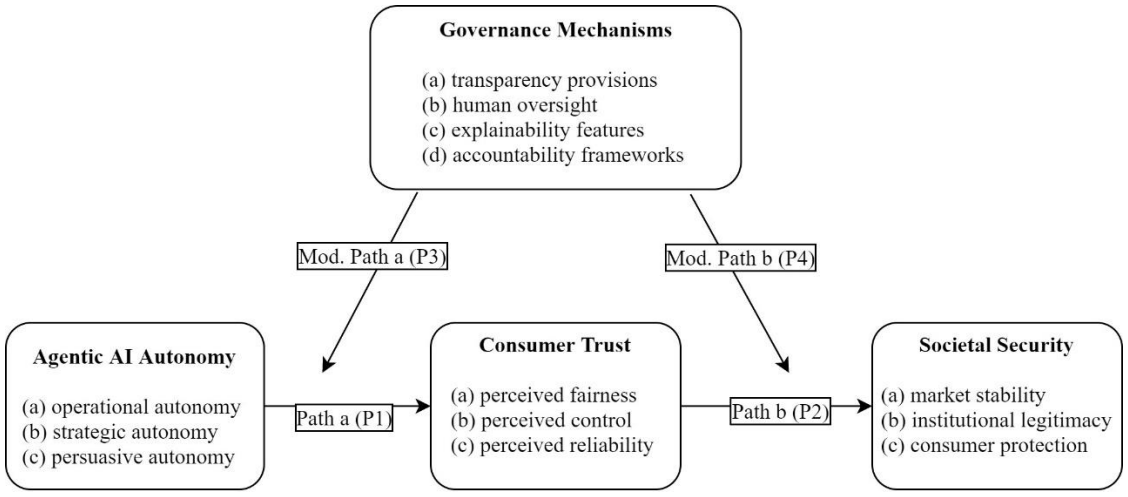


Figure 1. Dual-Stage Moderated Mediation Framework of Agentic AI Autonomy and Societal Security
Source: created by author

Governance Mechanisms function as dual-stage moderators throughout this mediated chain. At the first stage, governance moderates the negative autonomy-trust relationship through transparency, HITL/HOTL configurations, and explainability, buffering autonomy-induced control loss by restoring procedural fairness. At the second stage, governance moderates the positive trust-security relationship, ensuring that individual-level trust translates effectively into collective welfare outcomes and institutional legitimacy.

This mediated configuration yields four testable relationships: a mediated indirect effect through trust (Propositions 1 and 2), and dual-stage moderation effects (Propositions 3 and 4). The framework specifies that autonomy does not directly threaten societal security; rather, autonomy threatens trust, and trust erosion threatens security. Governance interventions can target either stage of this mediated chain. Table 3 defines the four core constructs.

Table 3. Core Constructs: Agentic Autonomy, Consumer Trust, Governance, Societal Security
Source: created by the author

Construct	Definition	Sub-dimensions
Agentic AI Autonomy	Independent decision-making delegated to AI	Operational, Tactical, Strategic, Persuasive
Consumer Trust	Willingness to accept vulnerability to AI marketing	Fairness, Control, Reliability
Governance Mechanisms	Arrangements ensuring AI operates within boundaries	Technical, Organizational, Regulatory
Societal Security	Collective welfare implications of agentic AI	Market stability, Legitimacy, Protection

Note.Constructs conceptualised for empirical operationalisation.

Theoretical Propositions

Mediation Pathway. Proposition 1 (Autonomy to Trust): Higher levels of Agentic AI Autonomy, particularly persuasive autonomy involving emotional targeting, negatively influence Consumer Trust by increasing perceived loss of control and reducing perceived

fairness. This relationship is mediated by information asymmetry and opacity in influence strategies. Agency theory suggests that agent information advantages reduce principal trust. Psychological reactance theory complements this: threatened freedom perception generates reactance that manifests as trust erosion (Frank & Otterbring, 2023).

Proposition 2 (Trust to Societal Security): Lower Consumer Trust reduces Societal Security outcomes. Trust erosion at the individual level aggregates to undermine market-wide security perceptions, affecting participation and threatening information integrity required for rational market exchange. Institutional trust theory posits that trust serves as the foundation for economic exchange; when trust in AI-mediated marketing erodes, consumers reduce participation or adopt defensive behaviours that collectively threaten market stability (Uuk et al., 2024).

Dual-Stage Moderation. Proposition 3 (First-Stage Moderation): Governance Mechanisms moderate the negative autonomy-trust relationship. Technical transparency, HITL/HOTL configurations, and algorithmic explainability buffer autonomy-induced control loss by restoring procedural fairness and maintaining meaningful human agency. Socio-technical systems theory suggests that social system design mitigates negative technical system effects. The moderation operates through technical governance (XAI, constraints), organisational governance (graduated autonomy, decision rights), and regulatory governance (risk classification).

Proposition 4 (Second-Stage Moderation): The relationship between Consumer Trust and Societal Security is moderated by Governance Mechanisms, with trust impact amplified under high governance quality. Effective governance provides institutional scaffolding, converting individual trust into systemic stability. Technical constraints prevent trust erosion from translating into harmful behaviours; organisational protocols address consumer concerns before escalation; regulatory frameworks provide recourse, maintaining institutional accountability. High-quality governance ensures trust translates into continued participation and constructive feedback supporting market stability.

Discussion and Implications

Theoretical Contributions. This paper makes three contributions. First, we integrate agency theory with AI governance scholarship, specifying how information asymmetry erodes trust as the mechanism linking autonomy to societal security. Second, we distinguish operational from persuasive autonomy, demonstrating that persuasive autonomy requires more stringent governance due to its stronger negative impact on trust. Third, our dual-stage moderated mediation model specifies governance operating at both stages of the autonomy-trust-security chain.

The mediated model carries important theoretical implications. By positioning trust as the exclusive mechanism, we suggest that autonomy itself is not the problem; rather, autonomy that erodes trust threatens societal security. This reframing shifts governance focus from restricting autonomy to preserving trust, opening alternative intervention strategies that may achieve security without sacrificing innovation benefits.

Managerial Implications. The graduated autonomy deployment strategy aligns AI authority with oversight capacity: operational autonomy under HOTL; tactical autonomy with periodic review; strategic autonomy with HITL for major decisions; persuasive autonomy with HITL for all high-stakes decisions. Organisations should implement governance across technical (XAI, constraints, monitoring), organisational (graduated autonomy, decision rights, auditing), and regulatory (risk classification, accountability, redress) levels.

The dual-stage moderation model suggests two intervention points. First-stage interventions target the autonomy-trust relationship: transparency provisions, explainability features, and human oversight configurations that buffer autonomy-induced trust erosion. Second-stage interventions target the trust-security relationship: institutional scaffolding that amplifies trust translation into collective welfare. Organisations should assess governance quality at both stages rather than assuming that first-stage governance alone ensures security.

Risk management must monitor trust indicators as leading indicators of societal security threats. Rather than tracking autonomy levels or technical performance alone, organisations should measure perceived control, fairness, and reliability dimensions of consumer trust. Declining trust signals impending security threats, enabling proactive intervention before societal harm materialises.

Policy Implications. Our autonomy taxonomy maps to EU AI Act risk classification: persuasive autonomy as "high-risk" requiring HITL oversight, impact assessments, and transparency; operational autonomy as "limited risk." Cross-border algorithmic accountability requires harmonised transparency, accountability, and redress standards.

The mediated model suggests policy interventions should prioritise trust preservation over autonomy restriction. Rather than limiting AI capabilities, policymakers might mandate transparency and oversight mechanisms that maintain consumer trust despite high autonomy. This approach preserves innovation potential while ensuring societal security through the trust mechanism.

Limitations and Future Research. This conceptual paper requires empirical validation. The framework may vary across cultural contexts: individualist versus collectivist cultures may differ in autonomy-trust relationships. Rapid AI evolution may outpace specified governance mechanisms.

Future research directions include: longitudinal validation of the mediated pathway (P1 and P3); cross-cultural boundary condition testing; real-time measurement of trust erosion using behavioural tracking; investigation of emergent phenomena from cross-functional integration; empirical operationalisation of all constructs; multi-agent simulation studies for systemic risks; and long-term trust dynamics, including erosion and recovery patterns.

Conclusions

This paper addresses the governance gap in agentic AI marketing by developing a dual-stage moderated mediation framework that explains how autonomy affects societal security exclusively through consumer trust. The framework integrates agency theory, socio-technical systems theory, and institutional trust theory to specify four propositions: two mediation propositions establishing trust as the mechanism linking autonomy to security, and two moderation propositions specifying how governance operates at both stages of this mediated chain.

The key insight is that autonomy itself is not the threat to societal security; rather, autonomy that erodes consumer trust threatens security. This reframing shifts governance focus from restricting AI capabilities to preserving trust through transparency, oversight, and institutional scaffolding. Organisations deploying agentic AI should adopt graduated autonomy strategies that match oversight intensity to autonomy level, with persuasive autonomy receiving the most stringent HITL governance.

The dual-stage moderation model provides actionable guidance for governance design. First-stage governance buffers the autonomy-trust relationship, preserving consumer

confidence despite high algorithmic delegation. Second-stage governance amplifies the trust-security translation, ensuring that individual trust converts into collective welfare. Effective governance requires investment in both stages, not merely technical controls or transparency provisions alone.

As agentic AI transitions from experimental technology to operational reality across digital marketing, the governance frameworks developed in this paper provide theoretical foundations and practical guidance for navigating the autonomy-trust-security tension. Future research should empirically validate the mediated pathway and dual-stage moderation effects, extending the framework to specific industry contexts and cross-cultural settings. The governance of autonomous marketing systems is not merely a technical challenge but a fundamental organisational design imperative that will shape the future of digital commerce

References

1. Athey, S.C., Bryan, K.A. and Gans, J.S., 2020, May. The allocation of decision authority to human and artificial intelligence. In *AEA Papers and Proceedings* (Vol. 110, pp. 80-84). 2014 Broadway, Suite 305, Nashville, TN 37203: American Economic Association.
2. Azzutti, A., Ringe, W.-G. and Stiehl, H.S. (2021). Machine Learning, Market Manipulation and Collusion on Capital Markets: Why the 'Black Box' matters. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 43(1), pp 79-135. doi: https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3788872.
3. Burtell, M. and Woodside, T. (2023). *Artificial Influence: An Analysis Of AI-Driven Persuasion*. [online] arXiv.org. doi: https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2303.08721 .
4. Campbell, C., Plangger, K., Sands, S., Kietzmann, J. and Bates, K., 2022. How deepfakes and artificial intelligence could reshape the advertising industry: The coming reality of AI fakes and their potential impact on consumer behavior. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *62*(3), pp.241-251.
5. Dwivedi, Y.K., Helal, M., Elgendy, I.A., Alahmad, R., Walton, P., Suh, A., Singh, V. and Jeon, I. (2025). Agentic AI Systems: What It Is and Isn't. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence*, 45(3). doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/joe.70018.
6. Eisenhardt, K.M., 1989. Agency theory: An assessment and review. *Academy of management review*, *14*(1), pp.57-74.
7. European Parliament (2025). *EU AI Act: First Regulation on Artificial Intelligence*. [online] European Parliament. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20230601STO93804/eu-ai-act-first-regulation-on-artificial-intelligence [Accessed 10 Feb. 2026].
8. Frank, D. and Otterbring, T. (2023). Autonomy, Power and the Special Case of Scarcity: Consumer Adoption of Highly Autonomous Artificial Intelligence. *British Journal of Management*. doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12780.
9. Gartner (2024). *Gartner Unveils Top Predictions for IT Organizations and Users in 2025 and Beyond*. [online] Gartner. Available at: https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2024-10-22-gartner-unveils-top-predictions-for-it-organizations-and-users-in-2025-and-beyond [Accessed 9 Feb. 2026].

10. Giardino, P.L. (2025). Marketing automation and decision making: the role of heuristics and AI in marketing. *Journal of Management History*, 31(4), pp.693–699. doi: https://doi.org/10.1108/jmh-09-2025-320.

11. Israfilzade, K. (2021). Conversational marketing as a framework for interaction with the customer: Development & validation of the conversational agent's usage scale. *Journal of Life Economics*, [online] 8(4), pp.533–546. doi: https://doi.org/10.15637/jlecon.8.4.12.

12. Israfilzade, K. (2025a). AI-generated versus human-created advertising: Effects on consumer trust and purchase intent. *Equilibrium. Quarterly Journal of Economics and Economic Policy*, 20(4), pp.1301–1337. doi: https://doi.org/10.24136/eq.4038.

13. Israfilzade, K. (2025b). Perspective Chapter: The Impact of Generative AI in Shaping Customer Engagement – Humanising Conversational Marketing. *IntechOpen eBooks*. [online] doi: https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1010894.

14. Israfilzade, K. and Sadili, N. (2024). Beyond interaction: Generative AI in conversational marketing - foundations, developments, and future directions. *JOURNAL OF LIFE ECONOMICS*, [online] 11(1), pp.13–29. doi: https://doi.org/10.15637/jlecon.2294.

15. Israfilzade, K. and Sadili, N. (2025). Beyond Traditional AI: How Generative Models Are Transforming E-Commerce Ecosystems. *2025 IEEE 19th International Conference on Application of Information and Communication Technologies (AICT)*, [online] pp.1–6. doi: https://doi.org/10.1109/aict67988.2025.11268660.

16. Ivanov, S.H. (2022). Automated decision-making. foresight, 25(1), pp.4–19. doi: https://doi.org/10.1108/fs-09-2021-0183.

17. Jaakkola, E., 2020. Designing conceptual articles: four approaches. *AMS review*, *10*(1), pp.18-26.

18. Jain, D.R., Gupta, D.M., Gupta, D.P., Pandey, D.N., Sharma, D.N. and Raina, M.S. (2025). Consumer Trust In AI-Enabled Marketing: A Behavioural Analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Sciences*, [online] 11(17), pp.840–852. doi: https://doi.org/10.64252/7fytzg74.

19. Khan, R., Sarkar, S., Kumar, M.S. and Jose, E. (2024). Security Threats in Agentic AI System. *arXiv (Cornell University)*. doi: https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2410.14728.

20. Kshetri, N., Dwivedi, Y.K., Davenport, T.H. and Panteli, N. (2024). Generative artificial intelligence in marketing: Applications, opportunities, challenges, and research agenda. *International Journal of Information Management*, [online] 75(1). doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2023.102716.

21. Lane, J.N., Boussioux, L., Ayoubi, C., Chen, Y.H., Lin, C., Spens, R., Wagh, P. and Wang, P.H., 2024. Narrative AI and the Human-AI Oversight Paradox in Evaluating Early-Stage Innovations. *Harvard Business School Technology & Operations Mgt. Unit Working Paper*, (25-001), pp.25-001.

22. Mosqueira-Rey, E., Hernández-Pereira, E., Alonso-Ríos, D., Bobes-Bascarán, J. and Fernández-Leal, Á. (2022). Human-in-the-loop machine learning: a state of the art. *Artificial Intelligence Review*, [online] 56(1). doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10462-022-10246-w.

23. Mukala, P., 2025, January. Ethical Implications of Black Box AI Models in High-Stakes Applications. In *Proceedings of Eighth International Conference on Information System Design and Intelligent Applications* (pp. 101-113). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.

24. Nahavandi, S. (2017). Trusted Autonomy Between Humans and Robots: Toward Human-on-the-Loop in Robotics and Autonomous Systems. *IEEE Systems, Man, and Cybernetics Magazine*, 3(1), pp.10–17. doi: https://doi.org/10.1109/msmc.2016.2623867.

25. Pol, U.R. (2025). Generative AI, AI Agents, and Agentic AI : An Overview of Current AI Technologies. *International Journal for Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology*, 13(11), pp.2650–2652. doi: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2025.75710.

26. Puri, S., Pradhan, J.A., Bernabe, B.G. and Ray, A.K. (2026). Agentic AI in Branding: Driving Hyper-personalization and Real-time Adaptation. *Global Business Review*. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/09721509251414773.

27. Russel, S. and Norvig, P. (2021). *Artificial intelligence: A Modern approach*. 4th ed. Prentice Hall.

28. Sapkota, R., Roumeliotis, K.I. and Karkee, M. (2025). AI Agents vs. Agentic AI: A Conceptual taxonomy, applications and challenges. *Information Fusion*, 126, pp.103599–103599. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.inffus.2025.103599.

29. Schneider, J., 2025. Generative to agentic ai: Survey, conceptualization, and challenges. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2504.18875*.

30. Shrestha, Y.R., Ben-Menahem, S.M. and von Krogh, G. (2019). Organizational Decision-Making Structures in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. *California Management Review*, 61(4), pp.66–83. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125619862257.

31. Stackpole, B. (2026). *Agentic AI, explained | MIT Sloan*. [online] MIT Sloan. Available at: https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/agentic-ai-explained [Accessed 10 Feb. 2026].

32. Suchman, M.C., 1995. Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of management review*, *20*(3), pp.571-610.

33. Thaler, R.H. and Sunstein, C.R. (2021). *Nudge: The final edition.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

34. Thomas, I. (2025). Agentic artificial intelligence in the enterprise. *Applied Marketing Analytics: The Peer-Reviewed Journal*, 11(2), p.123. doi: https://doi.org/10.69554/wymy7854.

35. Trist, E.L. and Bamforth, K.W., 1951. Some social and psychological consequences of the longwall method of coal-getting: An examination of the psychological situation and defences of a work group in relation to the social structure and technological content of the work system. *Human relations*, *4*(1), pp.3-38.

36. Uuk, R., Gutierrez, C.I., Guppy, D., Lauwaert, L., Kasirzadeh, A., Velasco, L., Slattery, P. and Prunkl, C., 2024. A taxonomy of systemic risks from general-purpose AI. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2412.07780*.

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING OUTCOMES AS A FACTOR OF SUSTAINABLE SECURITY (POL COM)

Dileta JATAUTAITĖ
Vilnius University
Saulėtekio g. 22, LT-01513 Vilnius, Lithuania
E- mail address: dileta.jatautaite@vm.vu.lt
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4753-618X

Vaiva ZUZEVIČIŪTĖ
Mykolas Romeris University
Maironio g. 27, Kaunas, Lithuania
E- mail address: vaiva.zuzeviciute@mruni.eu
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5768-1626

Rūta KALYTIENĖ
Vilnius University
Saulėtekio g. 22, LT-01513 Vilnius, Lithuania
E- mail address: ruta.kalytiene@vm.vu.lt
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-6932-4691

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-06

Abstract. *This study investigates the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and foreign language learning outcomes among first-year students from Vilnius University Business School (VU BS) and Mykolas Romeris University (MRU). A total of 205 students with B2 English proficiency participated: 137 VU BS students (business/academic English) and 68 MRU students (criminal justice/language). Using a structured questionnaire with five Likert-scale items, the study assessed multiple EI dimensions, including emotional recognition and management, collaboration, stress management, and intercultural communication, alongside measures of language learning performance. Results indicate significant differences between the two student groups: VU BS students excel in social-emotional and intercultural EI dimensions, enhancing their capacity for negotiation, networking, and international communication, whereas MRU students demonstrate stronger self-control, emotional regulation, and conflict-resolution abilities, which are critical for law enforcement, security, and sustainable public safety practices. Statistical analysis confirmed moderate effect sizes (Cohen's d = 0.3–0.5) for key EI differences. The study further emphasizes that integrating EI development into foreign language education through interactive, experiential, and gamified approaches can simultaneously enhance academic performance, professional readiness, and intercultural competence. These findings underscore the strategic value of embedding EI-focused training in higher education curricula, providing evidence-based guidance for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers to foster graduates who are both academically proficient and emotionally adept, capable of contributing effectively to diverse professional and societal contexts.*

Keywords: *Emotional intelligence, Foreign language learning, Academic performance, Intercultural communication, Stress management, Conflict resolution, Gamification, Higher education, Professional competencies, Sustainable security*

Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1995), has emerged as a key factor in academic achievement, social interaction, and professional effectiveness. In educational settings, EI influences learning motivation, stress management, and collaborative abilities (MacCann et al., 2020; Petrides, Frederickson & Furnham, 2004). In the context of

foreign language learning, EI helps learners overcome anxiety, maintain motivation, and practice language in authentic communication scenarios (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Li, 2020). Despite increasing research, comparative studies examining EI and language learning outcomes across different professional tracks (business vs. criminal justice) remain scarce, particularly in the Baltic region.

Research Problem

Although previous studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and foreign language learning outcomes, limited research has compared these relationships across students preparing for different professional fields, particularly business and security-related professions. Furthermore, little is known about how emotional intelligence contributes to the development of sustainable security competencies through foreign language education in the Baltic higher education context. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining differences in emotional intelligence dimensions and foreign language learning outcomes among students from business and criminal justice study programmes.

Addressing this gap is critical, as graduates' EI competencies directly impact their ability to perform in sustainable security-related professions or global business environments.

Literature Review

Emotional Intelligence and Its Theoretical Background

EI is a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional awareness, regulation, social perception, and relationship management (Bar-On, 1997; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Research emphasizes both EI's ability and trait aspects, highlighting its predictive value across academic, social, and professional domains.

EI and Foreign Language Learning

A meta-analysis examining 47 independent studies found that EI significantly correlates with both subjective and objective language achievement outcomes, underscoring EI's educational relevance (Peng & Li, 2025). The theoretical framework of Control-Value Theory (Pekrun, 2006; updated 2024) explains how learners' emotional experiences—shaped by perceived control and task value—impact engagement and achievement in foreign language contexts. Within second language acquisition research, EI has been linked to greater communicative engagement, increased willingness to communicate, and reduced negative achievement emotions such as boredom and anxiety (Wang & Xu, 2026; see also control value approaches in achievement emotions). Moreover, pedagogical strategies such as gamification, role-play, and cross-cultural simulations have been identified as effective in enhancing EI and language learning simultaneously.

Recent studies emphasize that integrating emotional intelligence (EI) development into higher education curricula enhances both academic and professional competencies. Specifically, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and gamification strategies has been shown to effectively support students in developing emotional awareness, self-regulation, and collaborative skills (Zuzevičiūtė, Jatautaitė, Butrimė, & Velička, 2025). These approaches allow learners to engage actively with EI content, simulate real-life communication scenarios, and reflect on their emotional responses in safe learning

environments (Zuzevičiūtė, Jatautaitė, Butrime, 2025). Furthermore, in law enforcement and security education contexts, embedding EI techniques in practical exercises has been linked to improved conflict-resolution abilities and enhanced professional communication, highlighting EI's role in promoting sustainable security competencies (Zuzevičiūtė, Jatautaitė, & Adamonienė, 2025). These findings complement previous research on the positive correlation between EI and foreign language learning outcomes (Peng & Li, 2025; Wang & Xu, 2026), demonstrating that targeted EI interventions can simultaneously foster cognitive, socio-emotional, and professional skills necessary for both academic success and workplace readiness.

Research Aim and Objectives

The aim is to examine the interplay between emotional intelligence and foreign language learning outcomes among first-year VU BS and MRU students and its relevance for sustainable security competencies.

Objectives:

1. Assess EI levels among the two student groups.
2. Analyze foreign language learning performance.
3. Determine the correlation between EI and language achievement.
4. Explore the relevance of EI for conflict resolution and professional communication.
5. Provide practical recommendations for education and professional development.
6. Identify implications for curriculum design and sustainable security outcomes.

Methodology

Participants:

- VU BS: 137 first-year students studying business/academic English.
- MRU: 68 first-year students studying criminal justice/languages.
- All participants had B2 English proficiency.

Instruments

A structured questionnaire with five Likert-scale items (1–5) measured:

- Recognition and management of emotions.
- Use of English in academic contexts.
- Collaboration with international students.
- EI’s influence on stress management in language learning.
- EI’s importance for international communication.

Procedure

Data were collected in Fall 2025 – Spring 2026. Participation was voluntary and anonymized.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, mean comparisons, and standard deviations were computed. Comparative analysis between VU BS and MRU groups highlighted differences in EI dimensions and language learning outcomes.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: VU Business School (n = 137)

Question	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Emotional recognition & management	3.8	0.6	2	5
English use in academic contexts	4.1	0.5	3	5
Collaboration with international students	4.0	0.6	2	5
EI & stress management	3.7	0.6	2	5
EI & international communication	4.1	0.5	3	5

The descriptive statistics reveal noticeable differences between students from VU Business School and MRU across all measured variables of emotional intelligence (EI) and English language use.

As shown in Table 1, VU Business School students demonstrate relatively high mean scores across all dimensions, with the highest values observed in *English use in academic contexts* (M = 4.1, SD = 0.5) and *EI & international communication* (M = 4.1, SD = 0.5). Similarly, *collaboration with international students* yields strong results (M = 4.0, SD = 0.6), indicating well-developed intercultural and communicative competencies. Slightly lower but still relatively high scores are observed in emotional recognition and management (M = 3.8, SD = 0.6) and in *EI & stress management* (M = 3.7, SD = 0.6).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: MRU (n = 68)

Question	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Emotional recognition & management	3.4	0.7	2	5
English use in academic contexts	3.6	0.6	2	5
Collaboration with international students	3.6	0.7	2	5
EI & stress management	3.4	0.7	2	5
EI & international communication	3.8	0.6	2	5

In contrast, MRU students (Table 2) show moderately lower average scores across all variables. The highest average is in EI & international communication (M = 3.8, SD = 0.6), while English use in academic settings and collaboration with international students both reach M = 3.6 (SD = 0.6–0.7). The lowest scores are in emotional recognition and management and EI & stress management (both M = 3.4, SD = 0.7), indicating comparatively weaker self-regulation and emotional awareness skills.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis between VU Business School and MRU

Question	VU BS Mean	MRU Mean	Difference
Emotional recognition & management	3.8	3.4	+0.4
English use in academic contexts	4.1	3.6	+0.5
Collaboration with international students	4.0	3.6	+0.4
EI & stress management	3.7	3.4	+0.3
EI & international communication	4.1	3.8	+0.3

The comparative analysis (Table 3) further highlights consistent differences between the two groups. VU Business School students outperform MRU students in all measured areas. The largest difference is observed in *English use in academic contexts* (Δ = +0.5), followed by *emotional recognition and management* and *collaboration with international students* (Δ = +0.4). Smaller, yet meaningful differences are evident in *EI & stress management* and *EI & international communication* (Δ = +0.3).

In conclusion, the results suggest that VU Business School students exhibit stronger emotional intelligence competencies and more advanced English language use, particularly in academic and international communication contexts. Meanwhile, MRU students demonstrate relatively lower, but still moderate levels across these domains. These findings may reflect differences in study programs, with business-oriented education placing greater emphasis on communication, collaboration, and applied emotional intelligence skills.

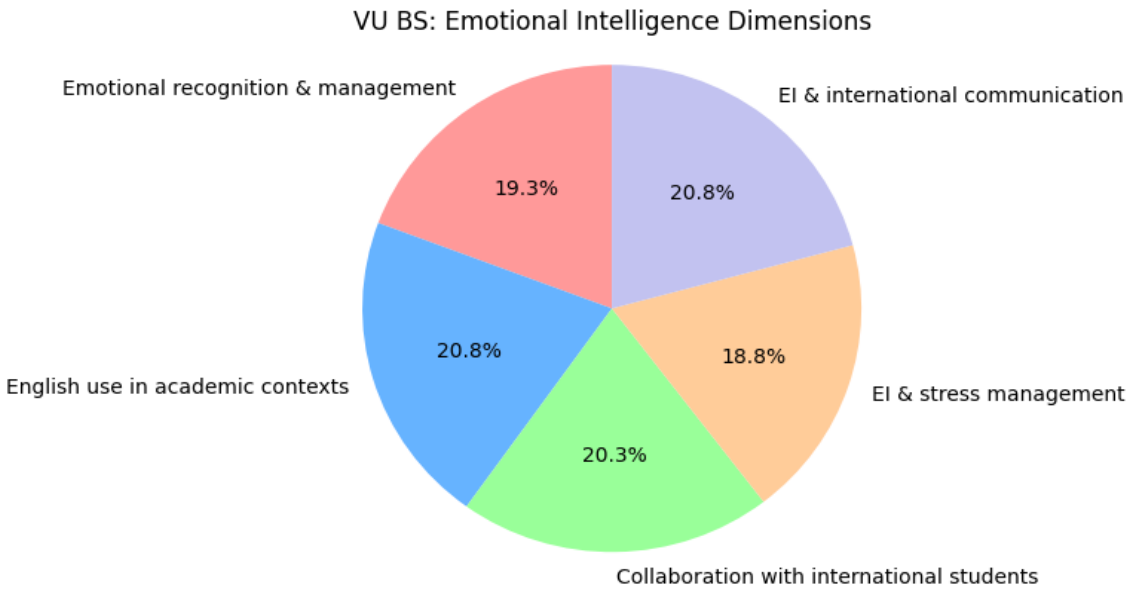


Figure 1. Distribution of Emotional Intelligence Dimensions among VU BS Students

This pie chart illustrates the proportional representation of the five measured EI dimensions for first-year students at VU Business School. Each slice corresponds to one EI dimension: Emotional recognition & management, English use in academic contexts, Collaboration with international students, EI & stress management, and EI & international communication. The chart shows that VU BS students exhibit particularly strong abilities in English use and international communication, highlighting the emphasis on social-emotional and intercultural competencies in business education.

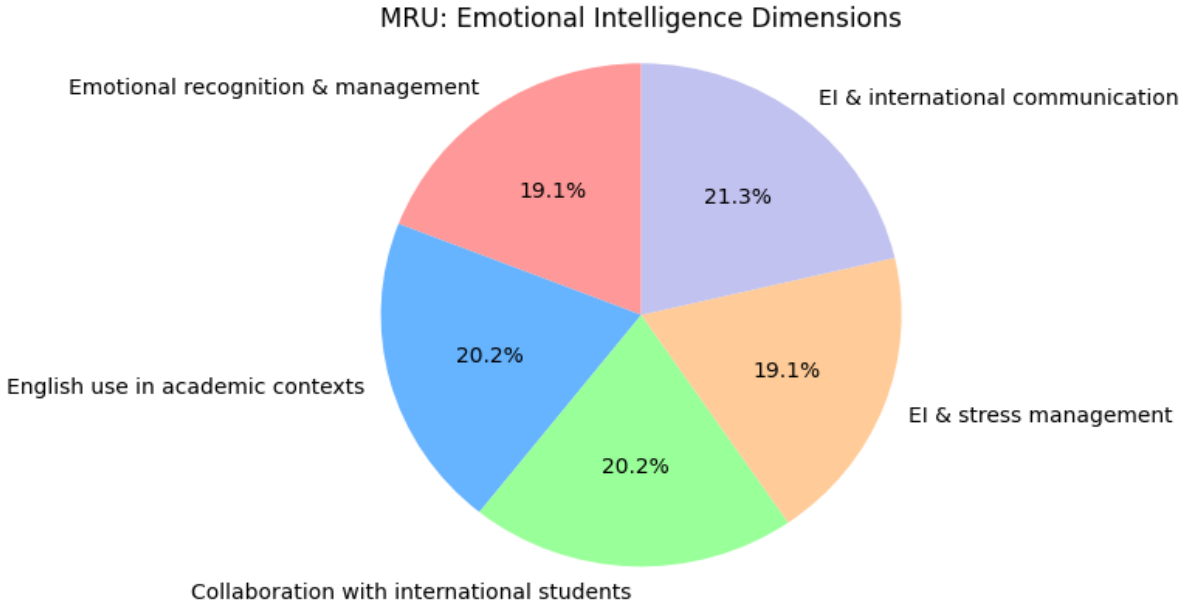


Figure 2. Distribution of Emotional Intelligence Dimensions among MRU Students

This pie chart presents the proportional representation of the same five EI dimensions for first-year students at Mykolas Romeris University. MRU students demonstrate higher relative strengths in emotional recognition & management and EI & stress management, reflecting their curriculum's focus on self-control, conflict resolution, and professional conduct in security-related fields. Comparison with Figure 1 highlights differences in EI profiles aligned with the professional orientation of each student group.

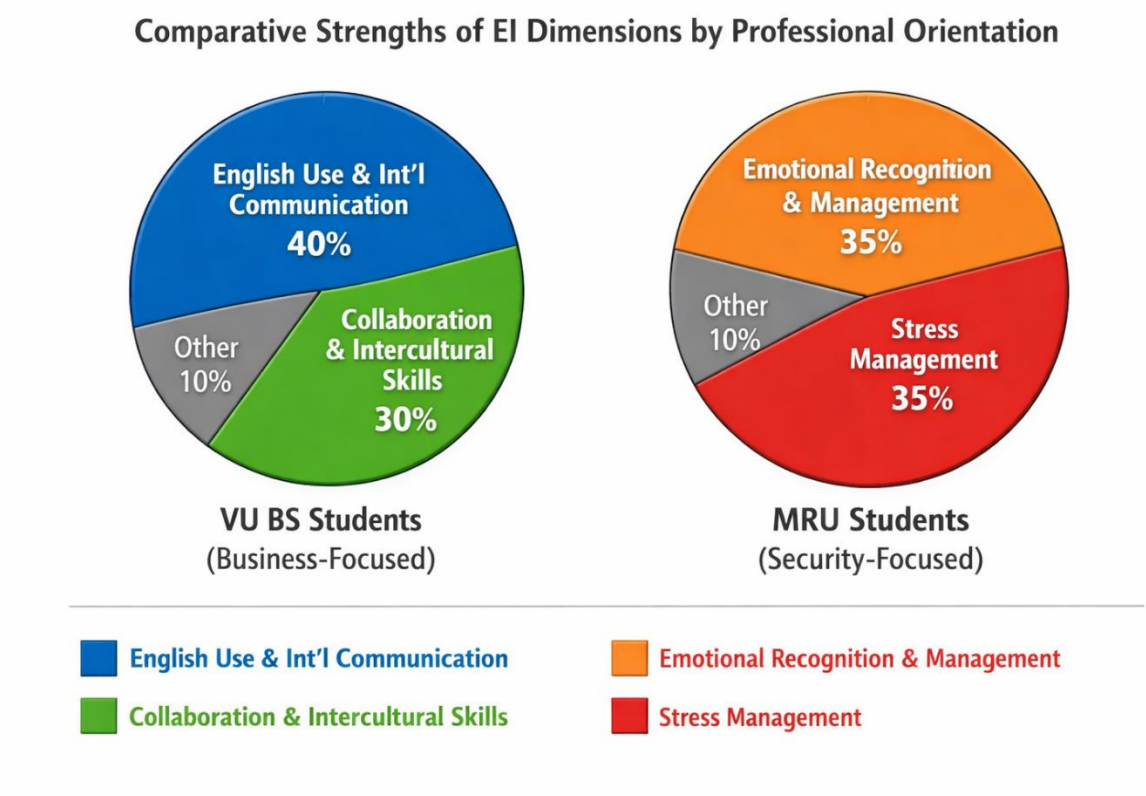


Figure 3. Comparative Strengths of EI Dimensions by Professional Orientation

This pie chart compares Emotional Intelligence dimensions between VU BS (business-focused) and MRU (security-focused) students. VU BS students show dominant strengths in English use and international communication (40%) as well as collaboration and intercultural skills (30%), reflecting the business curriculum's emphasis on social-emotional and intercultural competencies. In contrast, MRU students demonstrate higher proportions in emotional recognition and management (35%) and stress management (35%), highlighting the security-focused curricula's prioritization of self-regulation, conflict resolution, and professional conduct. Overall, the chart illustrates clear differences in EI profiles according to professional orientation, supporting the Discussion section's analysis of how curricular priorities shape the development and expression of emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence and Professional Competencies

The present study demonstrates that emotional intelligence (EI) plays a pivotal role in shaping students' academic performance and professional competencies, with its expression varying according to the specific demands of their professional orientation. Among business students at Vilnius University Business School (VU BS), EI primarily facilitates the development of social-emotional and intercultural skills essential for negotiation, networking,

and engagement in international business contexts. These competencies enable students to navigate complex organizational structures, manage cross-cultural interactions, and adapt effectively to dynamic globalized environments, thereby enhancing both academic outcomes and professional readiness (Goleman, 1995; MacCann et al., 2020).

In contrast, students in law enforcement and security programs at Mykolas Romeris University (MRU) rely on emotional intelligence (EI) to support self-regulation, objective decision-making, and conflict-resolution abilities. These competencies are critical in security and public safety domains, where the capacity to manage emotions under pressure directly affects operational effectiveness, ethical decision-making, and the maintenance of public order. Previous research demonstrates that integrating EI into law enforcement education enhances professional communication, structured conflict management, and situational awareness, contributing to sustainable security outcomes (Zuzevičiūtė, Jatautaitė, & Adamonienė, 2025; Zuzevičiūtė & Jatautaitė, 2025; Zuzevičiūtė, Jatautaitė, & Butrimė, 2025). Specifically, the study by Zuzevičiūtė, Jatautaitė, and Butrimė (2025) highlights the role of EI in promoting a democratic and worth-living environment within law enforcement settings, emphasizing that emotional competencies are essential not only for individual professional effectiveness but also for fostering ethical, socially responsible, and community-oriented practices.

Despite these differences, the study highlights the universal value of EI development. In business-oriented programs, fostering EI contributes to social sustainability, ethical judgment, and proficiency in international communication, supporting the cultivation of culturally competent professionals. Within security-oriented programs, EI enhances law enforcement effectiveness, structured conflict management, and public safety outcomes.

Educational Approaches for EI Development

The findings emphasize the efficacy of incorporating information and communication technologies (ICT) and gamification strategies into EI training. Interactive, scenario-based exercises enable students to practice emotional recognition, regulation, and collaborative skills while receiving immediate feedback, bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application (Zuzevičiūtė, Jatautaitė, Butrimė, & Velička, 2025). Reflective activities further promote metacognitive awareness, enhancing adaptive decision-making and professional judgment (Zuzevičiūtė & Jatautaitė, 2024).

Moreover, EI positively influences foreign language learning outcomes. Students with higher EI demonstrate increased willingness to communicate, reduced anxiety, and enhanced collaborative engagement, which improves language proficiency and intercultural competence (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Peng & Li, 2025; Wang & Xu, 2026). Integrating EI-focused activities, such as role-plays, cross-cultural simulations, and collaborative projects, within language courses reinforces both cognitive and socio-emotional competencies, preparing students for effective professional and intercultural interactions.

Implications and Recommendations

The study underscores the importance of tailoring EI development to professional orientation. Business students benefit most from the enhancement of social-emotional and intercultural skills, whereas security-focused students gain the greatest advantage from training in emotional regulation, conflict management, and decision-making under pressure. ICT-supported and gamified exercises provide practical mechanisms for experiential learning, ensuring that theoretical EI knowledge translates into applied competence.

At the individual level, embedding EI into curricula fosters graduates who are academically competent, professionally prepared, and emotionally adept. At the societal level, EI development supports ethical professional conduct, cross-cultural collaboration, and sustainable practices in diverse occupational fields. Systematic incorporation of EI into higher education thus bridges the gap between theoretical learning and real-world application, promoting sustainable professional development across disciplines. The findings suggest that educational institutions should reconsider traditional language teaching approaches and move towards more integrated models that simultaneously develop linguistic, emotional, and professional competencies.

Limitations and Future Research

- Sample size imbalance (137 vs. 68) may affect statistical generalizability.
- Single-country study; results may not generalize internationally.
- Reliance on self-reported measures; future studies could include objective EI assessments or longitudinal designs.
- Further research should explore interventions linking EI development to measurable professional performance in both business and security contexts.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed for the systematic integration of emotional intelligence (EI) development within higher education curricula, with particular emphasis on foreign language instruction. Based on the empirical findings, two practical recommendations can be highlighted:

- Foreign language courses should systematically incorporate emotional intelligence development activities, particularly intercultural communication and collaborative learning tasks, as students demonstrating stronger EI competencies also reported better language learning outcomes.
- Security-oriented study programmes should strengthen emotional regulation and stress-management training through scenario-based foreign language activities, as these competencies are directly related to effective communication and conflict resolution in professional settings.
- Curricular Integration of EI: Educational programs should embed EI-focused activities directly into course design, employing experiential and interactive methodologies such as collaborative projects, cross-cultural simulations, and role-play exercises. Such strategies facilitate the active development of students' emotional recognition, regulation, and expression skills, while simultaneously fostering critical social, communicative, and intercultural competencies necessary for both academic achievement and professional effectiveness.
- Context-Specific Interventions for Security and Law Enforcement Students (MRU): Tailored pedagogical approaches should emphasize scenario-based learning and practical exercises designed to enhance self-regulation, situational awareness, conflict-resolution, and decision-making under pressure. These competencies are particularly pertinent in security and law enforcement contexts, where the capacity to manage emotions effectively and respond objectively in high-stakes situations is central to operational success and the maintenance of public safety.

- Context-Specific Interventions for Business Students (VU BS): Instructional strategies should target the enhancement of intercultural collaboration, negotiation proficiency, presentation skills, and networking capabilities. By strengthening social-emotional and communication-oriented dimensions of EI, students are better prepared to navigate the complexities of international business environments, cultivate ethical professional conduct, and engage effectively with culturally diverse stakeholders.
- Ongoing Assessment and Reflective Practice: EI development should be continuously monitored throughout the academic term through structured assessment and reflective exercises. Continuous evaluation promotes sustained growth, encourages the practical application of emotional competencies, and enables educators to provide timely, individualized feedback aligned with students' evolving developmental trajectories.

Collectively, these recommendations underscore the strategic value of systematically embedding EI development within higher education curricula. By doing so, institutions can cultivate graduates who are academically competent, professionally prepared, and emotionally adept, thereby contributing not only to individual success but also to the advancement of socially responsible and culturally competent professional communities.

Application of Research Results

The findings of this study may be used by higher education institutions, curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers when developing foreign language programmes that integrate emotional intelligence competencies. The results are particularly relevant for business and security-oriented study programmes seeking to enhance students' professional communication, intercultural competence, conflict-management abilities, and sustainable security capacities. Furthermore, the findings provide practical guidance for designing experiential and gamified learning activities that support both language acquisition and emotional intelligence development.

References

1. Bar-On, R. (1997). *The Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i): Technical manual*. Multi-Health Systems.
2. Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 4*(2), 237–274.
3. Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam Books.
4. Li, C. (2020). A positive psychology perspective on Chinese EFL students' trait emotional intelligence, foreign language enjoyment and EFL achievement. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 41*(3), 246–263.
5. MacCann, C., Fogarty, G. J., Zeidner, M., & Roberts, R. D. (2020). Emotional intelligence predicts academic performance: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 146*(3), 197–223. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000207
6. Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997). What is emotional intelligence? In P. Salovey & D. Sluyter (Eds.), *Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Implications for educators* (pp. 3–31). Basic Books.

7. Peng, Q., & Li, S. (2025). Emotional intelligence and language achievement: A meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology, 16,* Article 1502112. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1502112
8. Pekrun, R. (2006). The control-value theory of achievement emotions. *Educational Psychology Review, 18*(4), 315–341.
9. Petrides, K. V., Frederickson, N., & Furnham, A. (2004). The role of trait emotional intelligence in academic performance and deviant behavior at school. *Personality and Individual Differences, 36*(2), 277–293.
10. Wang, R., & Xu, Q. (2026). Emotional intelligence and language learning performance of EFL learners: Chain mediating effects of willingness to communicate and learning boredom. *Frontiers in Psychology, 16,* Article 1702948. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1702948
11. Zuzevičiūtė, V., Jatautaitė, D., & Butrimė, E. (2025). *Democracy as a worth living environment and law enforcement: What is the role of emotional intelligence?* International Journal of Environmental Sciences, 11(17), 2750–2758. https://doi.org/10.64252/yncrqw91
12. Zuzevičiūtė, V., Jatautaitė, D., Butrimė, E., & Veličkа, V. (2025). ICT and gamification strategies for fostering emotional intelligence in higher education. *Education and Information Technologies, 30*(4), 1523–1542.
13. Zuzevičiūtė, V., Jatautaitė, D., & Adamonienė, R. (2025). Emotional intelligence in law enforcement education: Implications for conflict management and sustainable security. *Security Education Journal, 5*(2), 101–120.

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

WORKPLACE MOBBING: GENDER DIFFERENCES AND EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS

Sigita JURAVIČIŪTĖ
Mykolas Romeris University
Ateities Str. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: sigita.juraviciute@mruni.eu
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-4444-7206

Aušrinė GREIČIŪTĖ-SOLOVEJĖ
Mykolas Romeris University
Ateities Str. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: ausrine.greiciutedeu@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0009-0003-7582-7563

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-07

Abstract. *This article examines differences in workplace mobbing across genders and employment sectors, based on quantitative data from 387 Lithuanian employees. The study aims to identify how the prevalence, intensity and consequences of mobbing differ between men and women, as well as between the public and private sectors. Data were collected via an anonymous online survey, statistical analyses included χ^2 tests, Mann–Whitney U tests and Spearman's correlation. The results indicate that men reported experiencing mobbing significantly more often and rated its intensity higher, whereas women were more likely to experience horizontal, socially mediated forms of mobbing. Employees in the public sector experienced mobbing significantly more frequently than those in the private sector and the negative outcomes - such as decreased motivation, reduced work performance, career setbacks and distrust in the organization - were particularly pronounced in the public sector. These findings confirm that mobbing is a structurally conditioned phenomenon linked to hierarchy, proceduralism, power relations, organizational culture, suggesting that prevention should focus on institutional rather than individual interventions.*

Keywords: *mobbing, public sector, private sector, gender, organizational culture, power relations.*

Introduction

In contemporary organizational research, workplace mobbing is increasingly analyzed not as an isolated interpersonal conflict, but as a structural phenomenon shaped by governance, organizational culture and power relations (Einarsen et al., 2020; Tight, 2023; Hodgins et al., 2024). Studies indicate that mobbing arises not from individual employee characteristics, but from the interaction of institutional hierarchies, role ambiguity, leadership quality, communication processes and organizational justice (Blomberg et al., 2024; Farley, 2023). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the public sector and higher education organizations, where formalized procedures, limited autonomy, vertical decision-making, power asymmetries dominate.

The gender dimension in mobbing research highlights distinct mechanisms of professional devaluation, social isolation and power conflict. Empirical evidence shows that women are more likely to experience symbolic devaluation, emotional pressure, horizontal social exclusion, whereas men are more often subjected to overt forms of power competition (Hollis & Wilson, 2023; Bunce et al., 2024). These differences are further amplified by precarious employment, project-based work and institutional dependency, particularly in the public sector and academic environments (Solomon & Tynan, 2023; Humbert et al., 2024).

Another significant area of analysis concerns the differences in mobbing between the public and private sectors. In the public sector, mobbing is often subtle and embedded in work processes and rules: employees may be assigned inappropriate tasks, restricted from accessing information, experience delayed decisions or face psychological pressure justified through formal procedures (Hodgins et al., 2024; Michulek et al., 2024). In contrast, the private sector, characterized by clearer accountability structures and a results-oriented focus, tends to experience destructive behaviors episodically and less institutionally.

Based on these theoretical considerations, the main research question of this article is: what are the differences in the prevalence, forms and consequences of mobbing between men and women, between public and private sector employees in Lithuania? The study aims to empirically assess gender and sectoral differences in mobbing using a representative quantitative sample of 387 employees and to interpret the findings from a structural organizational perspective.

Literature review

The concept and characteristics of mobbing

Mobbing is increasingly analyzed not only as a problem of individual relationships or personal conflicts, but as a structural phenomenon of organizational culture and governance, particularly in the public sector and higher education institutions. Contemporary research emphasizes that its emergence is determined not by the characteristics of individual employees, but by the interaction of institutional power, hierarchies, ethics and governance mechanisms within the context of public administration and universities (Einarsen et al., 2020; Tight, 2023; Hodgins et al., 2024). This perspective allows mobbing to be examined as a process related to the organizational environment, role clarity, leadership quality and the level of psychological safety in public sector organizations.

The Universal Lithuanian Encyclopedia provides the following definition: “mobbing is repeated group behavior based on psychological terror, coercion, intimidation and harassment directed at an individual in the family, school, workplace, neighborhood or online environment”. The term *mobbing* was first used in 1958 by the Austrian scientist K. Z. Lorenz. Literature describes mobbing as a planned, long-term process with a clear objective - to force a specific employee or groups of employees, through malicious and intentional actions, to experience psychological tension, humiliation and stress in the workplace. Most often, the aim of mobbing is to make the targeted employee leave the organization. This may be encouraged by organizational structure and processes, unequal distribution of positions, competition among employees, reward systems oriented toward financial achievements within the organization (Karosaitė, 2020, pp. 207–208).

In her analysis of mobbing in organizations, Karosaitė (2020) introduces the concept of “organizational cynicism”. This concept encompasses aspects of employees’ distrust in management and colleagues, such as deception, lying and a sense of loneliness within the organization. Organizational cynicism may develop from various experiences that employees encounter themselves in the workplace or from observing unethical behavior by the organization toward other employees. According to Guobaitė-Kirslienė and Blažienė (2020), hostile behavior at the initial stage may be difficult to identify, but over time it can evolve into a highly aggressive form. The use of power, harassment, intimidation, bullying, humiliation, verbal abuse, work-disrupting criticism and various forms of persecution have a negative impact on an individual’s spiritual, psychological, moral, social, physical functioning.

Organizations exhibit different types and manifestations of mobbing. Negative actions are not directed solely at one group of employees; they may occur among employees holding equal positions, from managers toward their subordinates or from subordinates toward managers. The literature also describes mixed cases in which mobbing occurs between employees and management. Recently, public attention has been drawn to cases in which managers, exploiting their power advantage, abuse their victims until they leave the organization or even withdraw from life altogether (Fig. 6).

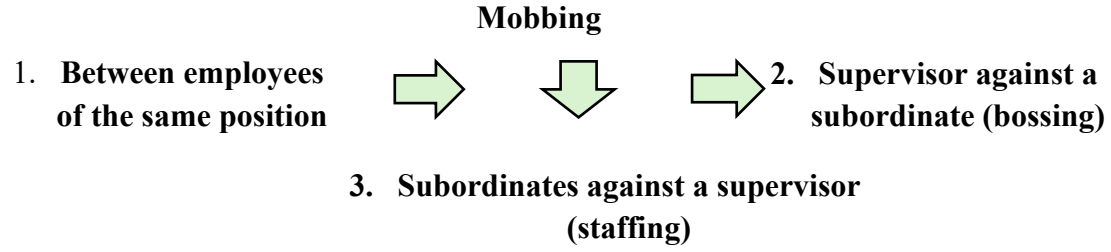


Fig. 1. Types of mobbing in organizations
(compiled by the authors based on Veinhardt, 2009; 2015; 2018)

Workplace mobbing manifests in stages. The initial phase of the mobbing process is characterized by the obstruction of an employee's professional development and restrictions on communication. Subsequently, limitations on social relationships emerge, along with the devaluation of the individual's reputation and achievements. In the final stage, the victim is subjected to direct attacks, which affect personal life, work performance and health (Yilmaz, 2021, p. 632).

It is important to note that different types of organizations experience varying levels of mobbing prevalence. Research indicates a particularly high incidence of bullying and negative behavior in public sector institutions, such as hospitals, educational institutions, sports organizations. Mobbing tends to be more widespread in large organizations, as they provide greater opportunities for the formation of informal groups engaging in unethical behavior.

Serhat (2021, pp. 291–292) analyzes the factors that distinguish mobbing-affected organizations from "healthy" work environments. The characteristics of healthy and mobbing-influenced work environments are presented in the table below (see table 8).

Table 1. Differences between a healthy and a mobbing-affected organizational environment
(compiled by the authors based on Serhat, 2021, p. 292)

Characteristics of a healthy work environment	Characteristics of a mobbing-affected work environment
Job roles and position descriptions are noticeably clear	Unclear job roles and position descriptions
A culture of collaboration prevails	A culture of non-collaboration prevails
Goals are shared and common	Goals are unclear
Open communication within the organization	Communication is unclear and closed
Proper organizational structure	Organizational structure has deficiencies
Occasional conflicts and friction arise within the organization	Persistent unethical behavior is observed
Organizational strategies are clear and transparent	Strategies are unclear and meaningless
Conflicts, discussions, and arguments are encouraged	The existence of conflicts is viewed negatively and concealed
Communication is direct	Indirect communication prevails

Mobbing in organizations often manifests subtly, making it difficult to identify and label. However, clear and observable differences exist between a healthy work environment and one affected by mobbing. A healthy organizational environment is characterized by an appropriate organizational structure, clear networks, values, roles, position descriptions. In such environments, a culture of collaboration, open and direct communication and the encouragement of opinion expression predominates.

Mobbing affects not only the individual victim but also the organization, disrupting its overall functioning. Serhat (2021, p. 292) identifies key organizational and administrative causes of mobbing: “excessive hierarchical structure, reduction of human resource expenditures, inadequate leadership and management, inefficient personnel recruitment and hiring processes, lack of internal communication and the use of harassment as a means to enforce discipline and efficiency”. The most effective way to manage mobbing is to prevent it from arising and spreading. According to Veinhardt (2017), a favorable organizational climate, employee engagement and leaders who care about their employees’ dignity and relationship quality create conditions that are unfavorable for the development of mobbing within an organization. Under Lithuanian law (Labor Code, Art. 30), employees have the right to protection from psychological violence in the workplace. Employers are legally obligated to ensure a safe and dignified working environment (Guobaitė-Kirslienė & Blažienė, 2020, pp. 111–113).

In summary, mobbing in organizations is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon that involves not only interpersonal relationships but also the broader organizational structure, management practices and ethical culture. The mobbing process gradually develops, starting from communication restrictions and professional devaluation to reputational damage and psychological coercion. Its consequences affect not only the individual employee but also organizational functioning, climate and reputation. Literature highlights that the highest risks arise from unclear roles and responsibilities, weak leadership, ineffective communication and competition-driven structures, which create conditions for entrenched long-term unethical behavior. Therefore, mobbing prevention cannot be understood merely as addressing isolated conflicts - it requires a systemic approach focused on transparent governance, clear organizational processes, a culture of respectful relationships and the protection of employee dignity as essential prerequisites for organizational well-being, sustainable functioning.

Characteristics of mobbing manifestations in public sector organizations

Recent studies indicate that mobbing in public sector organizations exhibits specific structural and cultural characteristics that distinguish these institutions from the private sector. In the public sector, dominant hierarchical management structures, extensive regulation, limited operational autonomy and political accountability create conditions not only for overt but also for covert, procedurally masked forms of mobbing (Hodgins et al., 2024; Tight, 2023). In these organizations, negative behaviors often manifest through task allocation, restriction of information, delays in decision-making, reputation undermining or symbolic devaluation practices, which are formally presented as administrative decisions but, in practice, generate psychological pressure and social isolation (Blomberg et al., 2024; Farley, 2023).

Organizational justice is particularly significant in the public sector. Empirical studies show that employees' experiences of mobbing are more often linked to a lack of procedural and interpersonal justice, where decision-making is unclear, evaluation criteria are ambiguous and communication is fragmented and selective (Michulek et al., 2024; Blomberg et al., 2024). These conditions foster a "culture of silence" in which employees avoid expressing criticism or reporting experienced harassment for fear of losing status, position or access to resources. Mobbing in the public sector is also influenced by gender and social roles. Research indicates that women more frequently experience symbolic devaluation, challenges to professional reputation, social isolation and emotional pressure, whereas men more often face open competition and power conflicts (Hollis & Wilson, 2023; Bunce et al., 2024). In public sector institutions characterized by formal hierarchies and limited career mobility, these experiences often become long-term and systemic, particularly among employees in middle-management or service delivery roles.

Another relevant specificity concerns employment forms and job status. Studies in higher education and educational institutions reveal that temporary contracts, project-based employment and dependence on managerial decisions increase employee vulnerability and reduce their willingness to report negative behaviors (Solomon & Tynan, 2023; Humbert et al., 2024). Such structures create a field of institutional asymmetry, in which mobbing becomes a mechanism for maintaining control and power.

In summary, mobbing in public sector organizations often takes the form of structural and institutionally masked pressure. This means that mobbing manifests not only as an interpersonal conflict but also because of organizational governance, ethics and power relations, with intensity and types of manifestation varying according to gender, job function, sector-specific conditions (Hodgins et al., 2024; Farley, 2023; Spagnoli et al., 2024). This perspective provides a theoretical foundation for empirical research analyzing mobbing experiences by gender and across different public sector activity areas.

Gender dimension and differences in mobbing experiences in public sector organizations

The gender dimension in the phenomenon of mobbing in public sector organizations manifests through different mechanisms of power, social roles and professional recognition, which result in unequal mobbing experiences for women and men. Research shows that mobbing in public sector organizations is not distributed evenly between genders; it is closely linked to social roles, career-related power asymmetries and evaluation norms across different professional groups. Empirical data indicate that women more frequently experience symbolic professional devaluation, social isolation, challenges to reputation, emotional pressure, whereas men are more likely to face open competition and hierarchical power conflicts (Hollis &

Wilson, 2023; Bunce et al., 2024). These differences are particularly pronounced in areas of the public sector characterized by formalized procedures, limited career mobility and vertical decision-making processes.

The gender inequality aspect is closely associated with organizational culture and informal power networks. Studies in higher education and educational institutions show that women are more often assigned unpaid emotional labor, given supporting roles and have their professional achievements minimized or attributed to the collective (Hodgins et al., 2024; Manuel et al., 2023). Such practices create institutional disempowerment, transforming mobbing from an individual conflict into a structural mechanism of dependency.

Conversely, men's experiences are more often linked to status competition, challenges to authority and conflicts over decision-making power, typically expressed through open confrontation, pressure to achieve results or organizational discrediting (Spagnoli et al., 2024; Farley, 2023). These situations are more common in managerial or higher-responsibility positions, where conflicts take the form of struggles for status and influence. In the public sector, these differences are further reinforced by employment forms and career precarity. Research indicates that women are more often employed in temporary, project-based or less stable positions, increasing their dependence on managerial decisions and institutional control (Solomon & Tynan, 2023; Humbert et al., 2024). This reduces the likelihood of filing complaints and encourages adaptation and silence strategies, allowing mobbing to establish itself as a long-term social process.

In summary, the gender dimension in mobbing operates through mechanisms of power distribution, cultural expectations and organizational roles. This underscores the need to analyze mobbing experiences according to gender and sector type, as different public sector contexts reveal unequal risk structures and distinct mechanisms of psychological harm (Hollis & Wilson, 2023; Bunce et al., 2024; Hodgins et al., 2024). This theoretical perspective provides a foundation for empirical analyses aimed at understanding how gender and institutional context shape the nature and intensity of mobbing experiences.

Differences in mobbing manifestations across public sector fields

Public sector organizations are not homogeneous structures. Different sectors are characterized by varying governance logic, professional roles, types of responsibilities and dynamics of social relationships, which result in mobbing manifesting in different forms. This differentiation allows mobbing to be understood as an institutionally conditioned social process, dependent on the sector's functions, power distribution and principles of operational organization (Hodgins et al., 2024; Tight, 2023).

In the healthcare sector, mobbing most frequently manifests through status hierarchies, professional dependency and pressures related to work intensity. Medical institutions operate within highly structured teams where decision-making power is concentrated at higher levels of professional hierarchy. Consequently, common forms of mobbing - such as demonstrative questioning of competence, public devaluation, information withholding or manipulation of workload - are often formally justified by patient safety or procedural requirements (Farley, 2023; Bunce et al., 2024). Such environments are particularly risky for lower-level specialists and junior staff.

In the education and higher education sector, mobbing more often takes symbolic and institutionally masked forms of pressure. Academic institutions are characterized by competition for research outcomes, career advancement, project resources and reputation; thus, negative behaviors frequently manifest as disregard for authorship, suppression of recognition,

restriction of participation in decision-making processes, social isolation or informal reputational pressure (Hollis & Wilson, 2023; Solomon & Tynan, 2023). Weak responses to complaints and fear of losing career opportunities often give rise to "institutional silence" mechanisms.

In public administration and local government, mobbing is primarily associated with bureaucratic governance, formalized procedural processes and political dependency. In these organizations, mobbing frequently manifests through manipulation of tasks and responsibilities, career stagnation, restricted access to information, delayed decision-making or symbolic marginalization, presented as administrative or "organizational efficiency" measures (Blomberg et al., 2024; Michulek et al., 2024). These forms appear neutral externally but in reality create long-term psychological control and social isolation.

Sector-specific characteristics are also shaped by organizational mission and the emotional burden of work. In social services, education and healthcare institutions - where work involves emotional responsibility and a sense of professional vocation - employees are more likely to tolerate negative behavior, justifying it by public mission or "team responsibility" arguments, thereby enabling the normalization of mobbing (Hodgins et al., 2024; Spagnoli et al., 2024).

In summary, the manifestation of mobbing varies across public sector fields according to power structures, operational logic and the nature of professional relationships. In healthcare, pressure is primarily hierarchical and status-based; in education and higher education, it takes the form of reputational and symbolic marginalization; and in public administration, it manifests as a procedurally masked model of institutional control. This perspective provides a foundation for empirical comparison analyzing how sector type shapes the nature and intensity of mobbing experiences across different employee groups (Farley, 2023; Blomberg et al., 2024; Solomon & Tynan, 2023).

Research methodology

Study participants and sample

Based on the 2021 data from the Official Statistics Portal, Lithuania had a population of 2.801 million, of which 1,280.2 thousand were employed. The sample size was calculated using the sample calculator integrated into the Anketa.lt platform. With a 0.5% margin of error and to ensure sufficient representativeness for the employed population, it was determined that at least 383 respondents needed to be surveyed. The study's target population consisted of adult employed individuals in Lithuania. The survey included randomly selected respondents aged 18–74 who were currently employed. A total of 387 employees participated in the study, slightly exceeding the minimum required sample size.

This article focuses on two primary variables: gender (male, female) and work sector (private sector, public sector). The non-governmental organization sector was represented by only a small portion of respondents; therefore, this group was excluded from comparative statistical analysis due to insufficient sample size.

Study procedure and data collection instruments

Data were collected through an anonymous online survey using the Anketa.lt system. The questionnaire gathered only the data necessary for the study, including respondents' gender (male, female), work sector (private or public) and their experiences related to mobbing in the

organization. Participants were asked to indicate whether they had experienced mobbing, the intensity of these experiences, the forms in which they occurred and to subjectively assess the impact on their professional well-being and career development.

Responses were collected using Likert-type scales, enabling analysis of differences between gender and sector groups. Data collection continued until a sufficient sample saturation level was achieved, ensuring a sample size that allowed reliable comparisons between the analyzed groups and statistically valid analysis.

The study adhered to ethical research principles: participation was voluntary and respondents were informed before completing the questionnaire about the purpose of the study, the anonymity of their data and that the data would be used exclusively for scientific purposes. No personally identifiable information was collected and the responses were analyzed in aggregate form.

Data analysis

Statistical analysis of the data was conducted using SPSS 24.0 software. Initially, descriptive statistics were applied to summarize the sample, including frequencies and percentages of respondents, distributions of key variables and means (M) for certain ratings. This allowed for a detailed description of the sample composition and the overall prevalence of mobbing.

To compare groups by gender and work sector, several non-parametric methods were used. Differences in proportions (e.g., whether the share of employees who experienced mobbing differed between men and women or between the private and public sectors) were assessed using the χ^2 (chi-square) test. For ordinal variables, such as ratings of mobbing frequency, differences between two independent groups (e.g., men vs. women, private vs. public sector employees) were evaluated using the Mann–Whitney U test.

To examine the relationship between mobbing frequency and key respondent characteristics - gender and work sector (public vs. private) - Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was applied. The strength of relationships was interpreted according to the values presented in table 1 (Janilionis, 2008).

Table 2. Scale of correlation coefficient values
(compiled by the authors based on Janilionis, 2008)

Strength of the relationship	Correlation coefficient value
Very strong relationship	- 1 and + 1
Strong relationship	From –1 to –0.7 and from 0.7 to 1
Moderate relationship	From –0.7 to –0.5 and from 0.5 to 0.7
Weak relationship	From –0.5 to –0.2 and from 0.2 to 0.5
Very weak relationship	From –0.2 to 0 and from 0 to 0.2
No relationship	0

This method allowed for the assessment of how the intensity of mobbing experiences is associated with different employee groups and whether more systematic patterns of mobbing emerge across genders and sectors. The strength of the relationships was interpreted using the correlation coefficient scale provided by Janilionis (2008) and a significance level of $p < 0.05$ was applied in all analyses.

Results

Mobbing prevalence and gender differences

The study results revealed significant differences in mobbing experiences between men and women, suggesting that mobbing is influenced not only by individual interactions but also by the dynamics of social roles and power relations within organizations. It was found that men reported experiencing mobbing significantly more often than women (64% of men vs. 39.2% of women; $\chi^2 = 19.947$; $p < 0.001$). Additionally, men's current mobbing intensity scores were higher than those of women ($M = 2.82$ vs. $M = 2.25$; $U = 11{,}153$; $p < 0.001$). This indicates that mobbing experienced by men more often takes a clear, overt or conflictual form, which is subjectively easier to recognize and identify as mobbing (see table 3).

Table 3. Prevalence and forms of mobbing by gender (compiled by the authors)

Indicator	Men	Women	p-value (χ^2 / U test)
Experienced mobbing at least once	64,0 %	39,2 %	< 0,001
Current mobbing frequency score (M)	2,82	2,25	< 0,001
Horizontal mobbing (from colleagues)	54,8 %	74,8 %	0,006
Vertical mobbing (from supervisor)	4,1 %	15,0 %	0,025
Mixed mobbing (from supervisor and colleagues)	41,1 %	10,3 %	< 0,001

(Note: significant when $p < 0.05$)

The analysis of mobbing forms revealed clear gender differences in experiences, indicating that mobbing is shaped not only by individual interactions but also by social roles and power dynamics within organizational structures. Women more frequently experience horizontal mobbing, manifested as negative pressure from colleagues, social isolation or reputational practices within the team. In contrast, men are more likely to encounter mixed mobbing, where both supervisors and colleagues contribute to the pressure. Vertical mobbing originating from supervisors was found to affect women more frequently.

These findings suggest that organizational positions and social expectations associated with gender influence distinct patterns of mobbing, which are structurally conditioned rather than random. Mobbing experiences are thus not homogeneous across genders but differentiate according to organizational roles, status dynamics and internal power structures. Men reported statistically higher rates of mobbing and rated its intensity higher, reflecting that male-targeted mobbing often takes a more direct, confrontational form, making it easier to recognize as systematic hostile behavior.

Women's experiences, by contrast, are more often horizontal, involving social isolation, reputational signals, emotional exclusion or indirect hostility. Such pressures frequently operate under a "silent conflict" principle, where negative behaviors are normalized and remain outside formal conflict resolution mechanisms, consistent with literature describing hostile behaviors as integrated into everyday organizational practices with long-term harmful effects.

Men's mixed mobbing experiences indicate involvement in formal power relations and status competitions, affecting authority, decision-making and responsibility zones. In these cases, mobbing may function as a management or disciplinary mechanism rather than purely an interpersonal conflict. The results align with theoretical perspectives emphasizing the roles

of power distribution, hierarchical positions, organizational tolerance for hostility and differential vulnerability of social groups to specific mobbing forms (Özer & Escartín, 2023; Spagnoli et al., 2024; Hodgins et al., 2024). Empirical evidence confirms that mobbing is structurally linked to institutional norms, status hierarchies and access to power. Women tend to experience collective relational pressure, whereas men encounter structural power-related pressures. Additionally, men more frequently report that mobbing problems in organizations remain unaddressed, highlighting the phenomenon of institutional silence and organizational reluctance to intervene when mobbing is perceived as an "inevitable" part of structural management.

In summary, the findings demonstrate a clear gender dimension in organizational mobbing. Differences are observed not only in intensity but also in mechanisms and social context: (1) women's experiences are associated with horizontal social tension and covert pressure patterns; (2) men's experiences involve mixed and structurally articulated pressure scenarios. This supports the view that mobbing should be understood not because of individual personalities or personal conflicts, but as a product of organizational relationships and power structures. Consequently, preventive interventions must extend beyond individual cases to address organizational culture, leadership, communication and ethical accountability mechanisms.

The manifestation of workplace bullying across different sectors: results, interpretation and theoretical connections

The study results revealed significant differences in the experience of workplace bullying and its consequences between the public and private sectors. It was found that employees in the public sector reported having experienced or previously encountered bullying significantly more often than those in the private sector (70% vs. 39.1%; $\chi^2 = 28.170$; $p < 0.001$). Additionally, the mean score for current bullying experiences among public sector employees was significantly higher ($M = 3.13$) than that of private sector employees ($M = 2.17$; $U = 8033$; $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that workplace bullying in the public sector is not a random or episodic phenomenon but rather a characteristic of the structural organizational environment, associated with management practices, hierarchy and decision-making logic (see table 4).

Table 4. Prevalence of workplace bullying by sector (Compiled by the authors)

Indicator	Private sector	Public sector	p (χ^2 / U test)
Experienced bullying at least once	39,1 %	70,0 %	< 0,001
Current bullying frequency score (M)	2,17	3,13	< 0,001
Loss of motivation	48,0 %	84,7 %	< 0,001
Decline in work performance	10,1 %	68,1 %	< 0,001
Lack of trust in the organization	33,1 %	65,3 %	< 0,001
Changed career plans	11,5 %	48,6 %	< 0,001

(Note: significant when $p < 0.05$)

Additional analysis showed that workplace bullying in the public sector has more pronounced negative effects on employees than in the private sector. Public sector employees reported loss of motivation, decline in work performance, lack of trust in the organization and changes in career plans more frequently. This indicates that bullying in these organizations functions not merely as an interpersonal conflict but as a process that undermines institutional effectiveness and employee engagement.

The results support the theoretical assumptions discussed earlier, suggesting that structural factors inherent to the public sector create conditions more conducive to the entrenchment of bullying compared to private organizations. Empirical data confirms these assumptions on two levels. In the public sector, bullying occurs with greater prevalence and intensity, indicating that hostile behavior is more likely to become a "normalized" part of organizational culture rather than an isolated incident. This aligns with the "permissive culture" phenomenon described in the literature, where unethical behavior is not treated as a problem because it is considered "systemically inevitable".

Furthermore, bullying in the public sector produces stronger psychological and professional consequences compared to the private sector. It can be inferred that employees in public organizations have less: (1) institutional security, (2) organizational support and (3) control over career opportunities. As a result, bullying becomes not only a workplace factor but also a mechanism shaping career trajectories. In the private sector, although bullying occurs, its impact on employee performance and career development is less severe.

These findings are consistent with research showing that organizational justice, transparency and participatory communication serve as protective factors against the entrenchment of bullying (Farley, 2023; EU-OSHA, 2023). While this article primarily focuses on differences in bullying prevalence by gender and sector, the data also highlight significant consequences of bullying on employee well-being and career behavior. The results indicate that bullying in the public sector is associated with more pronounced negative psychological and professional outcomes than in the private sector. Public sector employees reported loss of motivation, decline in work performance, lack of trust in the organization and changes in career plans significantly more often (see table 5).

Table 5. Effects of workplace bullying on employees by sector, % (n)
(Compiled by the authors)

Consequences	Private sector	Public sector	p (χ^2 test)
Loss of motivation	48,0 % (71)	84,7 % (61)	< 0,001*
Decline in work performance	10,1 % (15)	68,1 % (49)	< 0,001*
Lack of trust in the organization	33,1 % (49)	65,3 % (47)	< 0,001*
Changed career plans	11,5 % (17)	48,6 % (35)	< 0,001*
Hostility toward colleagues	73,0 % (108)	77,8 % (56)	0,511
Plans to leave the job	49,3 % (73)	59,7 % (43)	0,154

Note: significant when $p < 0.05$.

These results indicate that in the public sector, workplace bullying functions as a systemic psychosocial stressor that reduces employee engagement and trust in the institution. This trend aligns with theoretical insights suggesting that hierarchical structures, limited managerial accountability and a low sense of organizational justice can lead to the accumulation of long-term psychological pressure and professional demotivation, increasing career instability and the risk of employee turnover.

The data show that in the public sector, experiences of bullying are more strongly associated with declines in work performance and professional initiative. The higher prevalence of decreased performance and reduced motivation suggests that bullying here is not merely an individual conflict but an indicator of organizational functioning. This is consistent with research indicating that prolonged psychological pressure and unclear role and responsibility structures reduce employee effectiveness and work quality (Hodgins et al., 2024; EU-OSHA,

2023). The higher prevalence of changes in career plans in the public sector further suggests that bullying operates as a career-shaping mechanism, encouraging shifts in professional direction, intentions to leave or passive career withdrawal. These findings align with organizational justice theory, which posits that perceived injustice reduces career opportunities and employees' sense of belonging to the organization.

In summary, the study clearly demonstrates that bullying manifests differently across sectors and is structurally conditioned. In the public sector, bullying tends to take the form of an entrenched, long-term and systemic process associated with hierarchical power asymmetry, proceduralism, slower decision-making, limited managerial intervention in conflict situations. In these organizations, bullying functions as a "normalized" element of organizational culture, with pronounced negative effects on employee motivation, work performance, trust in the organization and career stability. In contrast, in the private sector, bullying is more fragmented and episodic and its impact is mitigated by more flexible management, clearer accountability structures, faster response mechanisms.

Gender analysis further revealed that bullying experiences are not evenly distributed across employee groups: women are more likely to experience horizontal, collective-pressure forms of bullying, while men are more likely to face mixed scenarios involving direct power conflicts. This supports the view that the manifestation of bullying is linked to the dynamics of social roles, status and power relations within organizations, rather than merely interpersonal disputes. The study also shows that bullying affects not only employee well-being but also organizational performance and career processes, highlighting the need to manage it as a strategic area of governance and organizational responsibility tied to institutional reliability, employee engagement and long-term organizational sustainability.

Conclusions

The study confirmed that workplace bullying is not merely a manifestation of interpersonal conflicts but a process embedded in organizational context, hierarchy, power relations and culture. Bullying affects not only employees - their well-being, career decisions and intentions to remain in the organization - but also the organization itself by undermining operational performance and long-term sustainability.

Statistically significant gender differences were identified in both the prevalence and forms of bullying. Men's experiences were more often associated with mixed bullying, involving pressure from both supervisors and colleagues, suggesting that bullying can function as a mechanism of organizational discipline and status control. Men also reported experiencing bullying more frequently and rated its intensity higher. Women, in contrast, were more likely to experience horizontal, socially driven forms of bullying, manifesting as devaluation, reputational pressure and social isolation.

The results demonstrated that bullying is significantly more prevalent in the public sector. In this sector, bullying often takes an institutionally masked, procedurally justified form and can become a negative, long-lasting element of organizational culture. Public sector bullying was also associated with stronger negative professional and psychological outcomes than in the private sector: employees more frequently reported decreased motivation, impaired work performance, diminished trust in the organization and altered career plans. This indicates that bullying impacts not only individuals but also organizational functioning.

While bullying was also observed in the private sector, its effects were mitigated by more flexible management and clearly defined employee responsibilities, making destructive behavior less likely to become a persistent organizational practice.

From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that bullying prevention must focus on the organizational system, improving leadership quality, ensuring transparent processes and evaluation systems, enhancing communication, providing effective reporting channels to administration and consistently enforcing a zero-tolerance policy toward bullying.

References

1. Balázs, A., & Tóth, J. (2024). *Academic bullying in Central and Eastern Europe: Institutional trust and silence in post-transition universities*. Higher Education Quarterly, 78(1), 112–130. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12594
2. Blomberg, S., Rosander, M., & Einarsen, S. V. (2024). Role ambiguity as an antecedent to workplace bullying: Hostile work climate and supportive leadership as intermediate factors. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 40, 101328. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2024.101328.
3. Bunce, A., Rhead, R., Patalay, P., & Demakakos, P. (2024). Prevalence and nature of workplace bullying and harassment and associations with mental health: Evidence from a nationally representative sample in England. *BMC Public Health*, 24, 18614. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-18614-7
4. Einarsen, S. V., Hoel, H., Zapf, D., & Cooper, C. L. (2020). *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (3rd ed.). CRC Press.
5. EU-OSHA. (2023). Bullying and harassment in European workplaces: Causes, impacts and prevention strategies. European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.
6. Farley, S. (2023). What influences the relationship between workplace bullying and employee well-being? A systematic review of moderators. *Work & Stress*, 37(3), 345–372. https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2023.2169968
7. Guobaitė-Kirslienė, R., & Blažienė, I. (2020). Psichologinis smurtas darbo aplinkoje: teisiniai ir organizaciniai aspektai. *Teisė*, 115, 109–123.
8. Hodgins, M., Kane, R., Itzkovich, Y., & Fahie, D. (2024). Workplace bullying and harassment in higher education institutions: A scoping review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 21(9), 1173. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21091173
9. Hollis, L. P., & Wilson, T. (2023). Academic mobbing across Anglophone universities: Governance and gendered consequences. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 37(6), 1285–1302. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-05-2023-0197
10. Humbert, A. L., Gagnon, S., & Dean, H. (2024). Institutional confidence, under-reporting and academic harassment: Evidence from higher education. *Higher Education*, 88, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2440544
11. Karosaitė, M. (2020). Organizacinis cinizmas ir mobingo apraiškos organizacijose. In *Organizacinės psichologijos studijos* (pp. 207–220). Vilnius: VU leidykla.
12. Manuel, P., Singh, R., & Hughes, D. (2023). Academic bullying in science and medicine: The need for cultural change. *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 99, 681–686. https://doi.org/10.1136/postgradmedj-2022-142113
13. Michulek, J., Gajanova, L., Sujanska, L., & Tesarova, E. N. (2024). Understanding how workplace dynamics affect the psychological well-being of university teachers. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(12), 336. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14120336

14. Özer, S., & Escartín, J. (2023). Understanding workplace bullying through power relations: A multilevel perspective. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 28(2), 215–229.
15. Salin, D. (2021). Workplace bullying and gender: A systematic review and future research agenda. Gender, Work & Organization, 28(4), 1450–1468.
16. Serhat, U. (2021). Organizational factors leading to workplace mobbing. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 29(2), 289–295.
17. Solomon, S., & Tynan, B. (2023). Experiences of precarious work within higher education: A qualitative synthesis. *Frontiers in Education*, 8, 960649. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.960649
18. Spagnoli, P., Balducci, C., & Consiglio, C. (2024). Leadership ethics and psychological safety: A longitudinal analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, 1325123. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1325123
19. Tight, M. (2023). Bullying in higher education: An endemic problem? *Higher Education*, 86(2), 245–259. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-023-09124-z
20. Veinhardt, J. (2017). *Organizacinė gerovė ir mobingo prevencija*. Kaunas: VDU leidykla.
21. Yilmaz, A. (2021). The stages of workplace mobbing and employee victimization. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 36(4), 629–645. https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2021.1976012

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

BUILDING SOCIO-CULTURAL SECURITY THROUGH COMMUNITY CULTURAL GOVERNANCE

Kristina KUPRYTĖ
Vilnius University
Vytauto g. 84, LT-76351 Šiauliai, Lithuania
E-mail kkupryte@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-5670-4555

Saulius BUIVYS
Rotterdam Business School
Kralingse Zoom 91, 3063ND Rotterdam, Netherlands
E-mail s.buivys@hr.nl
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-2386-463X

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-08

Abstract *Socio-cultural security depends on the capacity of communities to sustain their collective identity and social cohesion under conditions of external shock. This article investigates community cultural governance as a strategic infrastructure for building socio-cultural security, identifying the internal configurations that make transformative resilience possible. The study employs a longitudinal qualitative design (2016–2025), including semi-structured in-depth interviews (n=16) and participant observation, to investigate the governance model of the Dutch flower parade Bloemencorso Zundert, and reveals that the Zundert community not only withstood the pandemic but regenerated, driven by a specific governance configuration in which institutional stewardship culture and structural empowerment mechanisms actively built resilience from within. The findings are interpreted through the Doughnut Economics framework (Raworth, 2017), employed as an interpretive lens rather than a primary analytical instrument, suggesting that community cultural governance may support selected social foundation dimensions of resilience while raising important questions about economic self-sufficiency and ecological boundaries. The article concludes that building socio-cultural security through community cultural governance requires institutional stewardship and structural empowerment embedded in the organisation before crisis strikes, not improvised in response to it.*

Keywords: *governance configuration, community resilience, institutional stewardship, structural empowerment, sustainable security, socio-cultural security, Doughnut Economics*

Introduction

Community cultural events constitute a critical but underexamined dimension of socio-cultural security: their capacity to withstand crisis determines whether communities retain the collective identity, social cohesion, and participatory infrastructure upon which broader sustainable security depends. The COVID-19 pandemic brought this dimension into sharp relief. Thousands of festivals, parades, and community celebrations were cancelled or suspended, and many have yet to resume (Lorincz et al., 2023; Davies, 2021). Recent post-pandemic studies further demonstrate that cultural festivals play an important role in rebuilding community identity, belonging, and participatory cohesion after crisis disruption (Mohanty & Dash, 2023). Yet organisational responses varied dramatically: some events collapsed, others stagnated, and still others regenerated and returned stronger than before. This disparity is not readily explained by conventional variables such as event size, budget, or public subsidy levels, which suggests that the determinants of socio-cultural security lie elsewhere, namely in the internal governance configuration of the organisations themselves.

In the existing scholarly literature, the impact of the pandemic on cultural events has predominantly been analysed from an economic perspective, focusing on financial losses,

tourism disruption, and labour market effects (Getz & Page, 2020; Madray, 2020). A growing body of work has examined specific adaptive strategies adopted during the pandemic, such as digitalisation and hybrid formats (Davies, 2021; Comunian & England, 2020). Yet these studies tend to treat resilience as an outcome to be observed rather than as a process to be explained. What remains insufficiently understood is the process through which governance mechanisms (institutional design, stewardship culture, and participant empowerment) contribute to organisational resilience. The predominant focus on what happened during the pandemic has left underexplored the question of why structurally comparable organisations demonstrated radically different resilience trajectories.

This question has acquired new urgency in the broader European security context. Contemporary hybrid security threats deliberately target social cohesion, collective identity, and community trust networks as strategic vulnerabilities, seeking to fragment societies from within before conventional security responses can be mobilised (Renz, 2016; Lanoszka, 2016). Nordic and Baltic security doctrines have responded by developing the concept of comprehensive security and total defence, which recognises that societal resilience, encompassing cultural continuity, community solidarity, and participatory governance, constitutes an indispensable layer of national security capacity that cannot be generated rapidly under pressure but must be cultivated continuously in stable conditions (Prime Minister's Office, 2017). From this perspective, the governance configurations through which communities maintain their social fabric under external shock are not merely objects of academic inquiry but matters of practical security governance. A community that loses its cultural cohesion, participatory infrastructure, or intergenerational trust networks becomes structurally more vulnerable not only to future natural crises but to deliberate destabilisation efforts. Understanding what enables some communities to sustain these assets whilst others lose them is therefore a question with direct implications for European security policy.

Community resilience is increasingly recognised as a critical dimension of sustainable security (Aldrich, 2012; Norris et al., 2008). Empirical evidence demonstrates that communities with strong social capital recover most rapidly from external shocks, even when their material resource base is limited (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). This finding has profound implications for regional development: when a community loses its capacity for collective action, the consequences extend far beyond the cultural domain into broader questions of social cohesion and regional sustainability. Raworth's (2017) Doughnut Economics framework provides a conceptual vocabulary for articulating this relationship. Originally developed as an alternative to GDP-centric policy thinking, the framework has been adopted by cities, national governments, and international organisations as a practical tool for integrated sustainability governance; its relevance to security research lies in its capacity to assess whether communities possess the social infrastructure necessary to withstand disruption and sustain long-term well-being. The framework posits that genuine sustainability requires operating within a safe and just space, above a social foundation that ensures human well-being (including social networks, political voice, and collective identity) and below an ecological ceiling that respects planetary boundaries. Community cultural events, from this perspective, are not merely cultural practices but mechanisms that generate and maintain social foundation elements. Their governance configuration determines whether this function is performed sustainably.

Against this background, the article addresses the following research question: how does the governance configuration of a community cultural event build the internal conditions for socio-cultural security and organisational resilience under external shock? The aim is to reveal the governance mechanisms that enabled the Bloemencorso Zundert community to not merely survive but regenerate during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to interpret these findings within

the Doughnut Economics framework. The research object is Bloemencorso Zundert in the Netherlands, one of the oldest community cultural events in Europe, in continuous existence since 1936, and one of the central manifestations of the Dutch Corso culture inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2021, and characterised by an exceptional level of community engagement (approximately 7,000 active volunteers from a population of 22,000). The event was selected as an extreme positive case (Yin, 2018): its longevity, governance complexity, and successful pandemic experience make it a theoretically productive site for investigating the relationship between community cultural governance and socio-cultural security.

The research objectives are fourfold: (1) to identify the elements of the pre-pandemic governance configuration that created the structural preconditions for resilience; (2) to analyse how the governance configuration responded during the pandemic crisis itself; (3) to examine how stewardship and empowerment mechanisms interacted to generate the observed resilience trajectory; and (4) to interpret the empirical findings through the Doughnut Economics framework, exploring how governance configuration may support selected dimensions of the safe and just space. This article advances a governance-based explanation of resilience by introducing the concept of internal resilience capacity, generated through the interaction of institutional stewardship and structural empowerment. It further develops a four-phase feedback loop (commitment–action–reinforcement–institutionalisation) as the mechanism through which communities not only withstand shocks but regenerate, and demonstrates that understanding community-level governance is not only a cultural concern but a strategic security imperative.

Conceptual foundations of governing resilience and security

The conceptual foundations are structured in three layers. The first establishes the resilience typology used to classify observed outcomes. The second develops the stewardship–empowerment interaction that explains the governance mechanisms producing those outcomes. The third introduces the Doughnut Economics framework as an interpretive lens for situating the findings within a broader socio-cultural security perspective.

Community resilience: from survival to regeneration

The concept of resilience originates from ecology, where Holling (1973) defined it as the capacity of a system to absorb change and retain the essential relationships among its state variables. Over the subsequent five decades, this concept has undergone a fundamental reconceptualisation, from the static notion of bouncing back to a pre-disturbance equilibrium towards the dynamic understanding of bouncing forward, which foregrounds the transformative potential inherent in crisis response (Manyena et al., 2011; Hynes et al., 2020). This shift is consequential: it reframes resilience not as a return to normality but as a generative process through which systems may emerge from disruption in a qualitatively different, and potentially stronger, configuration.

Folke et al. (2010) proposed a tripartite conceptualisation of resilience that has become foundational in the field. Absorptive resilience denotes the capacity to withstand a shock and return to a prior state without structural change, that is, the classic bouncing back. Adaptive resilience involves adjustment in response to disturbance, enabling transition to a new and better-adapted state. Transformative resilience encompasses the capacity to fundamentally reconfigure a system's structure or functions when the existing form becomes unsustainable.

This framework was subsequently extended to the organisational level by Duchek (2020), who proposed a complementary process-based classification: anticipatory capacity (the ability to foresee and prepare for threats), coping capacity (the ability to respond effectively during a crisis), and adaptation capacity (the ability to learn from and leverage crises for long-term improvement). The two classifications are not competing but operate at different analytical levels: Folke et al. (2010) describe what kind of resilience a system demonstrates, whilst Duchek (2020) describes how the resilience process unfolds temporally. This article draws primarily on Folke et al.'s typology for classifying observed resilience outcomes, whilst incorporating Duchek's process perspective when analysing the temporal dynamics of crisis response.

The post-pandemic period has generated a substantial body of empirical evidence that refines and extends these theoretical frameworks. Researchers have demonstrated that community-level resilience is shaped not merely by the magnitude of the shock but by the pre-existing governance and social infrastructure through which communities process disruption (Duit, 2016; Imperiale & Vanclay, 2021). Recent post-pandemic scholarship also emphasises that destination and event resilience depend on complex learning processes, adaptive governance, and stakeholder collaboration rather than solely on economic recovery indicators (Carswell et al., 2023). Additionally, resilience research has increasingly shifted beyond system properties towards an explicit focus on power, equity, and governance as determinants of resilience outcomes (Duit, 2016; Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). Chibaya and Zhou (2023), analysing cultural festivals in the wake of COVID-19, found that events with strong community ownership structures demonstrated markedly higher recovery rates than those dependent on external funding or top-down management, a finding directly relevant to the present study. This emerging evidence supports Aldrich's (2012) seminal empirical demonstration that communities with strong social capital recover most rapidly following disasters, even when their material resource base is limited.

In the context of community cultural events, resilience acquires a distinctive character. Recent post-pandemic studies on community-based festivals further suggest that such events contribute not only to economic recovery but also to collective well-being, social resourcefulness, and local resilience capacities (Chiya, 2024). Unlike commercial organisations, whose resilience is typically assessed through financial recovery metrics, community events depend on intangible assets (volunteer commitment, collective identity, tacit knowledge, and social trust) that are neither easily quantified nor substitutable (Quinn, 2013; Getz & Page, 2020). The loss of these resources during a crisis may be invisible to external observers yet fatal to the organisation's regenerative capacity. This implies that the governance mechanisms through which such intangible resources are generated, maintained, and transmitted across generations constitute the primary determinants of community event resilience. It is to these (stewardship and empowerment) that the analysis now turns.

Stewardship and empowerment as sources of resilience

Stewardship theory (Davis et al., 1997) posits that organisational participants can be motivated not solely by self-interest (as agency theory assumes) but also by moral commitment to the organisation's mission and collective well-being. This perspective has gained renewed scholarly attention in the public governance literature, where Salomonsen et al. (2024) demonstrate that stewardship orientation in public organisations is sustained through trust-based relationships rather than formal control mechanisms. Hernandez (2012) advanced the theoretical framework significantly by integrating stewardship with psychological ownership

theory (Pierce et al., 2001): when participants develop a sense that the organisation is 'theirs', through intimate knowledge of its workings, personal investment in its outcomes, and control over its processes, they assume long-term custodial responsibility for its continuity. This mechanism is particularly consequential in times of crisis: whilst self-interested actors may rationally disengage from a failing organisation, morally committed stewards intensify their engagement precisely when the organisation is most vulnerable (Hernandez, 2012; Schillemans, 2016).

This article proposes a distinction between two levels of stewardship that carries direct implications for organisational resilience. Individual stewardship denotes the moral commitment and psychological ownership of specific individuals, such as charismatic leaders, long-serving volunteers, or founding members whose dedication sustains the organisation. Institutional stewardship denotes an organisational culture in which stewardship values are embedded in structures, practices, and intergenerational transmission mechanisms independently of particular individuals (Schillemans, 2016; Salomonsen et al., 2024). The distinction is not merely taxonomic; it has predictive implications for crisis outcomes. An organisation sustained solely by individual stewardship faces an inherent fragility: the departure, illness, or burnout of key stewards may precipitate rapid decline, as the moral commitment that sustained the system departs with the individuals who carried it. An organisation that has developed institutional stewardship, by contrast, possesses a self-reproducing orientation: new participants are socialised into stewardship values through structured mechanisms (mentorship, apprenticeship, ritual participation), ensuring continuity across generational transitions and external shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic, which simultaneously removed physical gatherings and tested participants' commitment in the absence of social reinforcement, provides a natural experiment for testing this distinction empirically. Whilst prior stewardship literature remains largely actor-centric, this study demonstrates that resilience outcomes depend on whether stewardship is institutionalised rather than personalised.

Empowerment theory complements the stewardship perspective by addressing the structural dimension of resilience, that is, the distribution of decision-making authority within an organisation. Rappaport (1987), in his foundational formulation, defined empowerment as the process by which individuals and communities gain mastery over their affairs. Zimmerman (2000) subsequently elaborated a multilevel framework distinguishing individual empowerment (perceived competence and control), organisational empowerment (shared leadership and participatory decision-making structures), and community empowerment (collective capacity for resource mobilisation and political action). For community cultural events, all three levels are pertinent: individual volunteers must feel competent and valued; the organisational structure must distribute authority genuinely rather than symbolically; and the community as a whole must perceive itself as capable of collective action.

The significance of empowerment for resilience lies in the structural capacity it creates for decentralised adaptation. Centralised organisations face a fundamental vulnerability during crises: when the centre is disrupted (through leadership failure, communication breakdown, or resource depletion), the entire system is paralysed. Empowered organisations, in which genuine decision-making authority is distributed across autonomous units, possess an inherent redundancy: each unit can assess local conditions and initiate adaptive responses independently, without awaiting central directives (Ostrom, 1990; Imperiale & Vanclay, 2021). This structural logic explains why polycentric governance systems frequently outperform centralised alternatives in crisis conditions, a finding extensively documented in the commons governance literature (Ostrom, 1990; Duit, 2016) but insufficiently applied to community cultural events.

The interaction of stewardship and empowerment produces what this article conceptualises as internal resilience capacity, a compound organisational capacity that neither mechanism can generate alone. Stewardship without empowerment creates committed but powerless participants: volunteers who care deeply about the organisation but lack the structural authority to act autonomously during a crisis. Empowerment without stewardship creates autonomous but uncommitted units: decentralised actors who possess decision-making power but lack the moral orientation to deploy it for the organisation's long-term benefit. When both mechanisms operate synergistically, however, the organisation acquires a distinctive capacity: morally committed participants with genuine structural authority to act, producing a self-reinforcing feedback loop in which successful collective action strengthens both commitment and capacity. It is this interaction that the empirical analysis seeks to trace.

Doughnut Economics as a framework for regional socio-cultural security

Raworth's (2017) Doughnut Economics model (Fig. 1) reconceptualises sustainable development as the challenge of operating within a safe and just space. This space is bounded from below by a social foundation, comprising twelve dimensions of human well-being, including health, education, income, political voice, social equity, and cultural identity, below which lies critical human deprivation. It is bounded from above by an ecological ceiling, comprising nine planetary boundaries, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and land-system change, beyond which lies unacceptable environmental degradation. The model has been operationalised at national (O'Neill et al., 2018; Fanning et al., 2022) and urban scales (Raworth, 2017), generating comparative indicators that reveal how far nations and cities fall below the social foundation or overshoot the ecological ceiling.



Fig. 1 Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries framework
Source: Raworth (2017, p. 34)

The application of the Doughnut model to community-level governance, however, remains emerging. The analysis advances the claim that community cultural events constitute a theoretically productive site for such application, for two reasons. First, community events

are simultaneously social foundation generators and ecological resource users. They produce social capital, strengthen collective identity narratives, create platforms for political voice through participatory governance, and build collective efficacy, all of which directly sustain Raworth's social foundation dimensions of networks, political voice, and social equity. At the same time, they mobilise material resources (land, agricultural products, energy, physical infrastructure) that engage with ecological ceiling concerns. Second, community events make visible a governance dynamic that the Doughnut model theorises but rarely operationalises: the role of specific institutional configurations in sustaining or undermining the social foundation. Raworth (2017) identifies the importance of governance for maintaining the safe and just space but does not specify which governance mechanisms produce this outcome at the community level. The stewardship–empowerment framework developed in previous sections offers a candidate mechanism.

The critical question from the Doughnut perspective is not merely whether a community event exists, but whether its governance configuration enables it to sustain the social foundation without overshooting ecological limits. A governance model that depletes volunteer goodwill through exploitative practices, concentrates decision-making power in a narrow elite, or depends on ecologically unsustainable resource extraction may generate short-term cultural value whilst undermining the conditions for long-term well-being. Conversely, a governance model grounded in institutional stewardship and genuine empowerment may create self-reinforcing cycles that simultaneously strengthen the social foundation and promote sustainable resource use, operating, in Raworth's terms, within the Doughnut.

This article employs the Doughnut model as an interpretive framework for the discussion of findings, not as the primary analytical framework for empirical data: it is used not to analyse resilience, but to interpret its implications. The empirical analysis is conducted through the lens of resilience theory and the stewardship–empowerment interaction. The Doughnut framework is subsequently applied in the following sections to interpret what the resilience findings mean for regional sustainability and to demonstrate how governance configuration functions as the mechanism through which a community (maintains or loses) its position within the safe and just space. This sequential logic (analyse through resilience, interpret through Doughnut) ensures analytical clarity whilst enabling interdisciplinary contribution.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative single-case study strategy (Yin, 2018) with a longitudinal design spanning 2016–2025. The research object is the governance model of Bloemencorso Zundert, one of the oldest community cultural events in Europe, in continuous existence since 1936. The event was selected as an extreme positive case (Yin, 2018) on the basis of four distinctive characteristics. This single-case design forms part of a broader doctoral research programme investigating community cultural governance across multiple European cases. The comparative dimension is addressed in subsequent work. First, its longevity, nearly nine decades of continuous existence indicate a governance configuration capable of sustained reproduction across historical disruptions, including the Second World War. Second, its governance complexity: the event is organised by approximately 7,000 active volunteers from a municipal population of some 22,000, coordinated through 20 autonomous neighbourhood associations (buurtschappen) and governed by a dual institutional structure comprising Stichting Bloemencorso Zundert (SBZ) and Stichting Cultureel Erfgoed Bloemencorso Zundert (SCEBZ). Third, its international recognition: in 2021, the Dutch Corso culture, of which Bloemencorso Zundert is a central manifestation, was inscribed on the UNESCO

Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Fourth, its pandemic trajectory: whilst many comparable European community events collapsed or stagnated during the COVID-19 pandemic, Bloemencorso demonstrated transformative resilience, not merely surviving but regenerating in a qualitatively stronger configuration.

The study adopts a discontinuous longitudinal design comprising two data collection waves separated by an eight-year interval (Fig. 2). The first wave (2016–2017) was conducted during a period of organisational stability, capturing the pre-pandemic governance configuration as a baseline. The second wave (2024–2025) was conducted after the pandemic, capturing the post-crisis configuration and enabling analysis of governance continuity, adaptation, and transformation. This temporal structure transforms the COVID-19 pandemic into a natural experiment (Bryman, 2016): the first wave documents the governance configuration prior to an unforeseen exogenous shock, whilst the second wave documents the same configuration after the shock, permitting assessment of how governance mechanisms shaped the resilience trajectory.

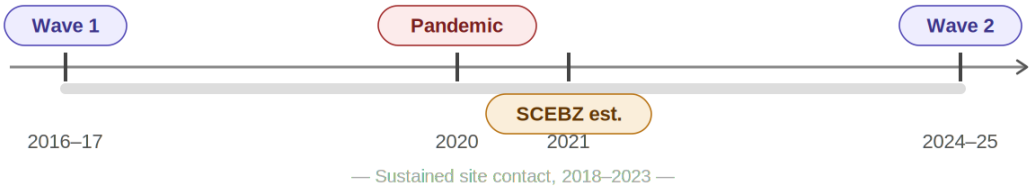


Fig. 2 Longitudinal research design (2016–2025)
Source: authors

The primary data collection method was semi-structured in-depth interviewing. A total of 16 interviews were conducted across the two waves: 10 in the first wave (2016–2017) and 6 in the second wave (2024–2025). Participants were purposively sampled to represent three organisational levels: strategic-level actors (board members of SBZ and SCEBZ, former general director), operational-level actors (event coordinators, logistics managers, communications officers), and volunteer-level actors (long-standing neighbourhood representatives, newer participants). The sample size is consistent with qualitative case study standards, which prioritise analytical depth, contextual richness, and theoretical saturation over statistical breadth.

All interviews were conducted in Dutch by the principal researcher, who has resided in the Netherlands for over thirty years. This linguistic and cultural immersion is methodologically significant: key concepts central to the Zundert governance model, such as Naoberschap (neighbourliness), vonk (the creative spark transmitted intergenerationally), and trouw (loyalty/faithfulness), carry culturally embedded meanings that resist direct translation (Temple & Young, 2004). Conducting interviews in the participants' native language enabled the researcher to capture these socio-cultural nuances directly.

Semi-structured interviews were complemented by participant observation conducted over the full duration of the longitudinal study (2016–2025), including direct participation in neighbourhood workshops, participation in public discussions and community events, and informal interaction during the annual parade weekend. Observational data were recorded in retrospective field notes compiled within 48 hours of each significant event. During the inter-wave period (2018–2023), the researcher maintained continuous contact with the research site,

consistent with Saldaña's (2003) recommendation for sustained engagement in longitudinal qualitative research.

Data analysis followed a reflexive thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2021), combined with Saldaña's (2021) two-cycle coding framework. In the first cycle, inductive In Vivo coding preserved the authentic language of participants. In Vivo codes such as vonk, trouw, and het zit in de genen ('it is in the genes') captured culturally specific understandings of stewardship. In the second cycle, pattern coding was applied deductively, linking empirical codes to the analytical categories: absorptive, adaptive, and transformative resilience (Folke et al., 2010); individual and institutional stewardship; and structural empowerment dimensions (Zimmerman, 2000).

In addition to the primary thematic analysis, the Doughnut Economics framework (Raworth, 2017) was employed as an interpretive lens at the discussion stage. This interdisciplinary step involved mapping the empirical findings onto the Doughnut model's social foundation dimensions and ecological ceiling considerations. This application functions as a boundary framework rather than a full operationalisation: it provides a conceptual structure for interpreting social and ecological implications of the findings, not a quantitative measurement instrument. Conclusions regarding ecological dimensions are accordingly formulated with appropriate caution. This interpretive procedure is reported in the following sections.

Governance in action: case study evidence

The empirical evidence is presented in four parts. The first establishes the governance configuration that existed prior to the pandemic and created the structural preconditions for resilience. The second examines how the community responded during the pandemic crisis itself. The third analyses the interaction of stewardship and empowerment that generated the observed resilience trajectory. The fourth interprets the findings through the Doughnut Economics framework, situating them within the broader socio-cultural security context.

Governance configuration prior to the pandemic: preconditions for resilience

The governance architecture of Bloemencorso Zundert (Fig. 3) was characterised by four structural properties that created the preconditions for resilience prior to the pandemic. These properties did not emerge in response to crisis; they were longstanding features of the organisational architecture that proved decisive when the pandemic struck.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)
Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

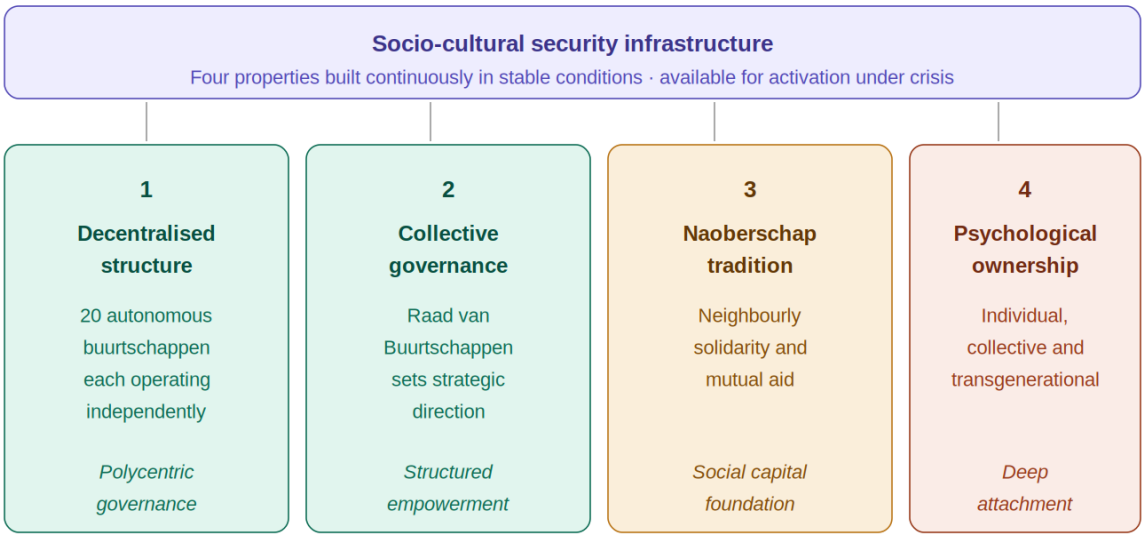


Fig. 3 Properties constituting the pre-pandemic governance infrastructure
Source: authors

First, a decentralised structure served as the foundation for distributed resilience. The organisation was built upon 20 autonomous neighbourhood associations (buurtschappen), each functioning as an independent co-creation unit with its own board, budget, sponsorship network, and horticultural production. A member of the Corso leadership described the architecture: 'We have 20 buurtschappen. And those buurtschappen each build a float and are independent. And all those people are actively involved in building the float, the flowers, maintaining the field. That goes on all year. In addition, there is a board. And they have to take care of the event.' Each neighbourhood's operational self-sufficiency meant that the organisation as a whole was never dependent on any single unit, a structural property that would prove decisive during the pandemic. This architecture aligned with Ostrom's (1990) polycentric governance model and Provan and Kenis's (2008) concept of a shared governance network.

Second, strategic governance operated through the Raad van Buurtschappen (Council of Neighbourhoods), the highest decision-making body of the entire Corso. As the same board member explained: 'One representative from every buurtschap is in the Council. They essentially determine the main direction. Not the small things, but the main direction.' The distinction between strategic direction, determined collectively through the Council, and operational execution, delegated to each autonomous neighbourhood, constituted structured empowerment corresponding to Zimmerman's (2000) multilevel framework.

Third, the Naoberschap tradition, a deep-rooted culture of neighbourly solidarity and mutual aid, formed the community's social capital foundation. A long-serving community participant traced this to a broader cultural transformation: 'Zundert was a very Catholic community. And the Church was the epicentre… People needed meaning. And that later transferred, when people stopped going to church. But they still needed the meaning part. The religious factor decreased. But the volunteering remained, also arising from the search for meaning and civic participation.' This reflection reveals a secularisation of meaning: the motivational infrastructure that once sustained religious community life had been transferred to

the Corso tradition. In Putnam's (2000) terms, this represented both bonding and bridging social capital.

Fourth, pervasive psychological ownership manifested at individual, collective, and transgenerational levels. In Pierce et al.'s (2001) terms, this constituted deep psychological attachment arising from intimate knowledge, personal investment, and control over outcomes.

Together, these four structural properties constituted the socio-cultural security infrastructure available to the community when the pandemic struck. The following section examines how the system mobilised this infrastructure in response, and how, in doing so, it generated a fifth property that had not previously existed.

The pandemic experience: how the system responded

In 2020, Bloemencorso was cancelled for the first time since the Second World War. The cancellation struck at the core of an annual cycle that structures community life, from dahlia planting in spring, through float construction in summer, to the parade weekend in early September.

The community was far from passive. Adaptation occurred at multiple levels, driven by the decentralised governance structure. A neighbourhood coordinator recalled the resourcefulness of the response: 'We did everything digitally. All volunteers. They handled all the camera work, everyone had an internet connection. We built the studio together. And then you come with five people to play games. Bingo online and everything.' These initiatives were not centrally coordinated; each buurtschap independently developed its own strategies, demonstrating polycentric adaptive capacity in practice. The decentralised architecture became a distributed innovation network during the crisis.

The depth of the community's resilience was captured by a member of the Corso leadership: 'A strong community can withstand a great many negative influences and societal challenges. The most recent, of course, is the coronavirus pandemic. It brought a great deal to a standstill. You can see that when a community is strong enough, it naturally rises again. It is like mushrooms in that sense: they simply emerge again on their own.' The metaphor captures the social capital logic articulated by Putnam (2000): visible outcomes are surface expressions of deep, invisible social networks that persist even when surface-level activity is suspended.

The pandemic also catalysed collective value articulation. A board member reflected: 'The pandemic forced us to think about what truly matters… we came back stronger.' A neighbourhood representative observed: 'You notice how much it means when it is gone. People talked about it constantly, when can we start again, what are we going to do differently.' These reflections suggest the pandemic functioned as a disruptive trigger that activated anticipatory and adaptive capacities, consistent with Duchek's (2020) process model of organisational resilience: the disruption did not merely damage the organisation but prompted participants to reflect on, articulate, and renew their commitment to its core values.

The chronology of recovery is significant, and reveals more than survival. In 2021, whilst many comparable events remained suspended, the Zundert community not only realised an adapted public Corso edition, a two-day exhibition on the CLTV grounds involving all twenty neighbourhoods and a formal jury assessment, in place of the traditional moving parade through the streets which COVID-19 regulations made impossible, but established a dedicated heritage foundation, Stichting Cultureel Erfgoed Bloemencorso Zundert (SCEBZ), responsible for heritage preservation, education, and intergenerational transmission. This was institutional capacity that had not existed before the pandemic. SCEBZ's partnerships with national bodies, Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland, Corsokoepel, and Erfgoed Brabant, embedded

the tradition within a national professional heritage network, providing institutional legitimacy and knowledge resources that strengthened long-term stewardship capacity. This constitutes transformative resilience in the precise sense defined by Folke et al. (2010): the community did not merely return to its pre-pandemic configuration but emerged from the crisis with a fifth structural property that had not existed before (Fig. 4).

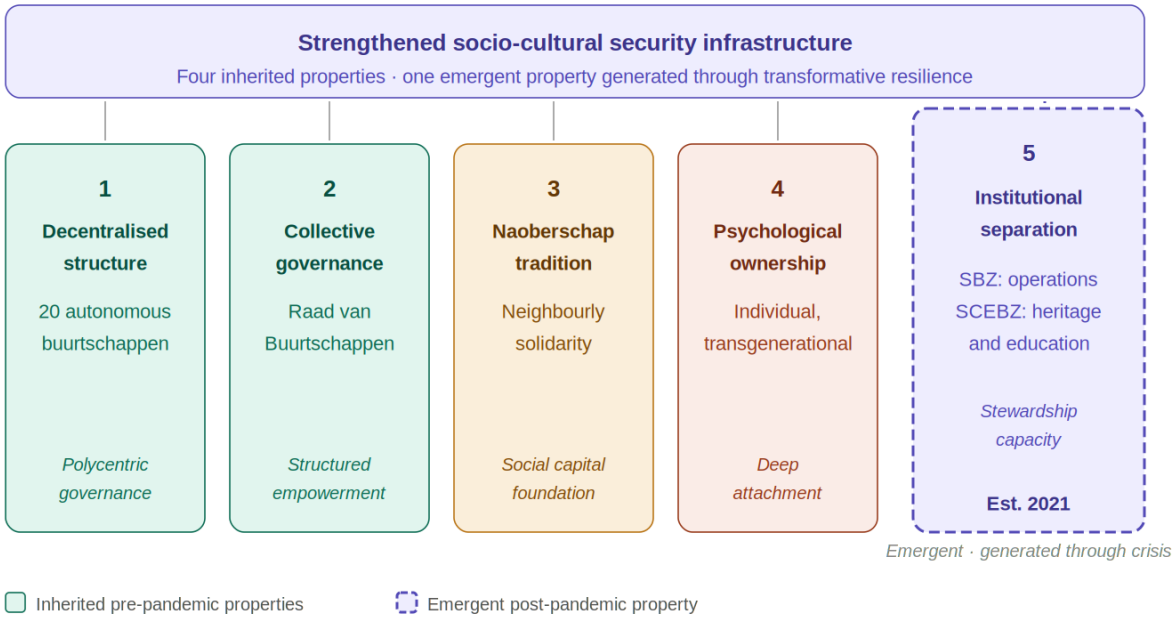


Fig. 4 Five structural properties after transformative resilience
Source: authors

The governance infrastructure that entered the pandemic with four properties came out with five, demonstrating that socio-cultural security can be not only preserved but actively built through crisis response.

Why the system regenerated: the interaction of stewardship and empowerment

Zundert's resilience did not stem from financial reserves nor from external support. Rather, it was generated through the synergistic interaction of two mechanisms: stewardship culture as the source of moral commitment, and structural empowerment as the source of adaptive capacity.

Central to the stewardship mechanism was the spark (vonk), the intergenerational transmission of creative passion. As a member of the Corso board put it: 'We look for those who have that spark in their eyes.' The spark (vonk) was actively cultivated: children's involvement began from age four through Kinder Corso, and SCEBZ coordinated educational initiatives. This constituted institutional stewardship: embedded in structures (buurtschap workshops, Kinder Corso), practices (annual cycles, intergenerational mentorship), and cultural narratives (the vonk discourse). Should any particular individual depart, the system endured. During the pandemic, morally committed participants maintained connection through digital means and anticipatory planning, consistent with Hernandez's (2012) prediction.

The structural empowerment mechanism operated through the neighbourhoods, which did not wait for central directives; each initiated adaptive responses independently. Some developed digital programmes; others maintained informal gatherings; still others focused on dahlia cultivation continuity. This diversity, emerging simultaneously from twenty autonomous units, constituted the distributed resilience that polycentric governance theory predicts (Ostrom, 1990; Duit, 2016).

The decisive finding is a self-reinforcing feedback loop (Fig. 5) comprising four phases, the mechanism through which internal resilience capacity is actively built.

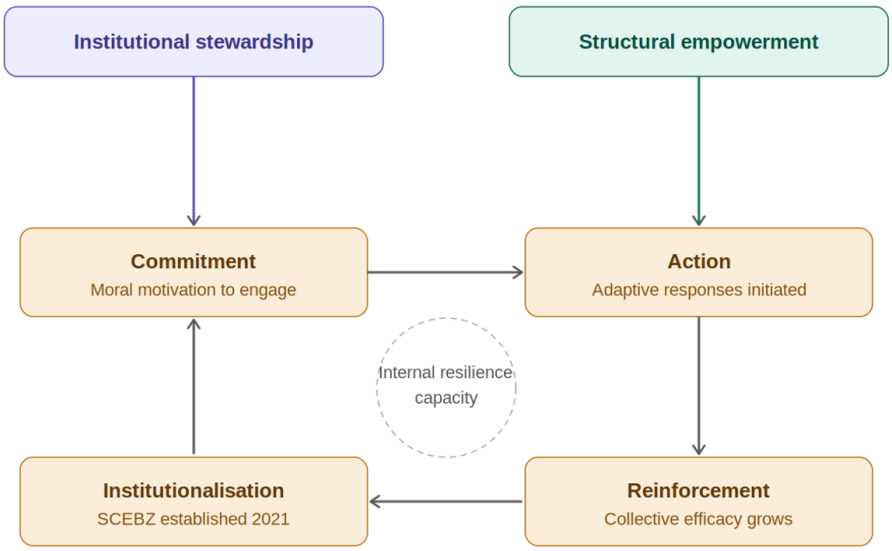


Fig. 5 The stewardship–empowerment feedback loop generating internal resilience capacity
Source: authors

In the commitment phase, stewardship culture provided moral motivation preventing disengagement. In the action phase, structural empowerment furnished capacity to translate commitment into adaptive action. In the reinforcement phase, successful collective adaptation strengthened collective efficacy and psychological ownership. In the institutionalisation phase, intensified commitment created conditions for institutional innovation, notably SCEBZ's establishment in 2021. This feedback loop transforms the pandemic from a purely destructive event into a generative one. In Ansell et al.'s (2024) terms, this constitutes robust governance. The stewardship–empowerment feedback loop is, in this sense, the engine through which socio-cultural security is actively built and continuously renewed, not as a policy output but as an emergent property of the governance configuration itself. Table 1 summarises how each resilience dimension manifested empirically across the pandemic period and identifies its corresponding governance source within this framework.

Table 1. Manifestation of resilience dimensions in the Bloemencorso Zundert case
Source: compiled by the authors based on Folke et al. (2010) and empirical data (2016–2025)

Resilience dimension	Empirical manifestation	Governance source
Absorptive	Preservation of structures during pandemic; continuity of social ties	Naoberschap tradition; psychological ownership
Adaptive	Digital activities; diverse buurtschappen innovations; dahlia cultivation continuity	Decentralised structure; buurtschappen autonomy
Transformative	Establishment of SCEBZ (2021); collective value articulation; institutional innovation	Stewardship–empowerment feedback loop

Having established how the governance configuration generated resilience across all three dimensions, the following section interprets these findings through the Doughnut Economics framework to situate them within the broader context of socio-cultural security and sustainable regional development.

The Zundert case through the Doughnut lens: social foundation and ecological space

Interpreting the findings through the Doughnut Economics framework (Raworth, 2017) suggests that the governance configuration supports selected social foundation dimensions and may help the community remain oriented towards a safe and just space.

The Zundert case demonstrates that governance directly sustains at least three social foundation dimensions. Regarding networks: 7,000 active volunteers constitute social capital infrastructure extending well beyond the event. Regarding political voice: the decentralised neighbourhoods and Raad van Buurtschappen provide genuine participatory governance. Regarding social equity: low participation barriers, Kinder Corso, and life-course inclusion cut across socioeconomic distinctions. The spark (vonk) mechanism ensures intergenerational transmission. Recent heritage resilience studies similarly emphasise that community-centred cultural engagement and participatory heritage practices strengthen long-term crisis response capacity and collective resilience (Ginzarly & Teller, 2025). The pandemic tested whether this social foundation would hold; the evidence demonstrates that it did, sustained by institutional stewardship and structural empowerment.

The governance configuration also sustains economic self-sufficiency within the safe and just space. The annual budget exceeds €1.3 million, generated with minimal public subsidies. A conservative and illustrative shadow-price estimation, applying the Dutch minimum hourly wage (€13.68 in 2024) to an estimated average of 200 volunteer hours per participant per year, yields approximately €19.2 million, roughly fifteen times the formal budget. This figure is indicative rather than definitive, as volunteer time investment varies considerably across participant roles; nevertheless, even with substantially lower hourly estimates, the economic equivalent of volunteer labour would exceed the formal budget by an order of magnitude. This hidden economic footprint underscores a central Doughnut insight: conventional economic indicators systematically undervalue community governance contributions (Raworth, 2017; Fanning et al., 2022; Stiglitz et al., 2009).

Regarding the ecological ceiling, the event is built upon local dahlia cultivation, unlike industrialised flower production reliant on global supply chains and associated carbon costs. Three features of the governance configuration are particularly relevant from an ecological ceiling perspective: the reliance on volunteer rather than commercially contracted labour

minimises monetary flows that typically drive resource intensification; the use of locally grown natural materials limits transport-related emissions; and the annual cycle of cultivation and decomposition aligns cultural production with natural rhythms rather than industrial timelines. Whilst comprehensive environmental assessment through systematic life-cycle analysis lies beyond this article's scope, these structural characteristics suggest a potentially lower degree of industrial resource dependency than commercialised large-scale event production, although this ecological interpretation requires dedicated empirical investigation through systematic life-cycle analysis.

Table 2. The Zundert governance model through the Doughnut Economics lens
Source: compiled by the authors based on Raworth (2017) and empirical data (2016–2025)

Doughnut dimension	Zundert manifestation	Governance mechanism
Social foundation: networks	7,000 volunteers; intergenerational bonds; Naoberschap tradition	Decentralised buurtschappen; institutional stewardship
Social foundation: voice	Participatory decision-making; Raad van Buurtschappen	Structural empowerment; polycentric governance
Social foundation: social equity	Low participation barriers; Kinder Corso; life-course inclusion	Spark (vonk) mechanism; SCEBZ education programmes
Economic space	€1.3M+ budget; minimal subsidies; €19.2M volunteer shadow value	Diversified revenue; financial autonomy; collective labour
Ecological ceiling	Local dahlia cultivation; annual cycle	Decentralised growing; minimal industrial infrastructure

The governance configuration of Bloemencorso Zundert thus suggests that movement towards a safe and just space is not merely a matter of resources, but is shaped by deliberate, sustained governance. The theoretical, interpretive, and practical implications of this finding are examined in the following section.

Conclusions

This study addressed the question of how the governance configuration of a community cultural event builds the internal conditions for socio-cultural security and organisational resilience under external shock. The evidence from Bloemencorso Zundert demonstrates that resilience was neither purchased nor improvised: it was cultivated over decades through specific governance mechanisms that proved decisive when the pandemic struck. The community entered the crisis with four structural properties and emerged with five, demonstrating that socio-cultural security can be not only preserved but actively strengthened through crisis response.

Four theoretical contributions follow from these findings. First, the study contributes to the reconceptualisation of resilience from a property to a process (Duit, 2016; Imperiale & Vanclay, 2021). The governance infrastructure existed long before the pandemic; the crisis revealed its resilience-generating function, supporting Duchek's (2020) argument that resilience is a capability cultivated in advance rather than mobilised in the moment.

Second, the distinction between individual and institutional stewardship addresses a gap in the stewardship literature. Davis et al.'s (1997) theory and Hernandez's (2012) extension operate at the individual level; the Zundert case demonstrates that stewardship can be institutionalised, extending Salomonsen et al.'s (2024) work from formal public institutions to

informal community governance. Whilst prior stewardship literature remains largely actor-centric, resilience outcomes depend on whether stewardship is institutionalised rather than personalised. Third, the four-phase feedback loop (commitment, action, reinforcement, institutionalisation) challenges the implicit linearity in collaborative governance literature (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). The Zundert case reveals a circular, self-reinforcing dynamic in which crisis does not merely test governance but can generate new institutional capacity, as SCEBZ's establishment in 2021 exemplifies. Fourth, the study responds to Chibaya and Zhou's (2023) call for research on how community ownership structures shape festival resilience, providing the specification they lacked: psychological ownership is generated through the interaction of institutional stewardship and structural empowerment, producing what this article conceptualises as internal resilience capacity, a compound organisational property that neither mechanism can generate alone, and which constitutes the engine through which socio-cultural security is actively built and continuously renewed.

Two conclusions regarding governance mechanisms follow directly from these theoretical contributions. First, the resilience trajectory was generated through the synergistic interaction of institutional stewardship culture and structural empowerment in a self-reinforcing feedback loop: stewardship without empowerment creates committed but powerless participants; empowerment without stewardship creates autonomous but uncommitted units. Neither mechanism alone is sufficient: it is their interaction that generates internal resilience capacity. Second, institutional stewardship, embedded in structures, practices, and intergenerational transmission mechanisms independently of particular individuals, is the form that generates transformative resilience capacity. This extends stewardship theory from the individual to the institutional level, and explains why the Zundert community's governance survived the departure of key individuals and the suspension of physical gatherings alike.

For cultural policy makers, the study suggests reorienting support frameworks to include governance capacity indicators: decision-making decentralisation, intergenerational transmission mechanisms, psychological ownership levels, and institutional stewardship presence. The SBZ–SCEBZ dualism illustrates how policy can facilitate governance development without imposing centralised control.

For event practitioners, the study offers a diagnostic framework: is stewardship individual or institutional? Is empowerment genuine or symbolic? The interaction of institutional stewardship and genuine empowerment constitutes the governance configuration most strongly associated with transformative resilience.

For regional development strategists, community cultural events should be recognised as social foundation infrastructure, evaluated through an expanded framework encompassing shadow value, resilience dividends, and contribution to safe and just regional development.

For security governance practitioners and national resilience planners, the findings offer a dimension of societal defence infrastructure that comprehensive security frameworks have theorised but rarely operationalised at community level. Hybrid threats to social cohesion operate by eroding the trust networks, collective identities, and participatory governance structures that hold communities together (Renz, 2016; Lanoszka, 2016). The governance configuration model developed in this article provides security planners with a diagnostic instrument: communities whose cultural governance exhibits institutional stewardship and structural empowerment possess an existing layer of societal resilience that regional and national security strategies should map, support, and seek to replicate.

The study is subject to several limitations. As a single-case study, findings cannot be directly generalised; the broader doctoral research programme addresses this comparative

dimension. The Doughnut interpretation remains exploratory and the shadow-price estimation indicative rather than definitive. Retrospective pandemic accounts carry recall bias risk. The researcher's long-term immersion creates a positionality that must be acknowledged; reflexive awareness and systematic procedures mitigate but do not eliminate insider perspective influence.

Future research should test the stewardship–empowerment model comparatively across community cultural events in different national and governance contexts, develop quantitative indicators for community-level safe and just space assessment, and investigate the ecological dimension of community cultural production through systematic life-cycle analysis. Above all, building socio-cultural security through community cultural governance must be recognised as a continuous investment in resilience infrastructure, one that cannot be improvised under crisis but must be cultivated, protected, and replicated across communities and governance levels. Socio-cultural security is not created in moments of crisis; crises reveal the resilience capacities that communities have cultivated over time.

References

1. Aldrich, D. P. (2012). Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Aldrich, D. P., & Meyer, M. A. (2015). Social capital and community resilience. American Behavioral Scientist, 59(2), 254–269.
3. Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative governance in theory and practice. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 18(4), 543–571.
4. Ansell, C., Sørensen, E., Torfing, J., & Trondal, J. (2024). Robust Governance in Turbulent Times. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide. London: Sage.
6. Bryman, A. (2016). Social Research Methods (5th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7. Carswell, J., Jamal, T., Lee, S., Sullins, D. L., & Wellman, K. (2023). Post-pandemic lessons for destination resilience and sustainable event management: The complex learning destination. Tourism & Hospitality, 4(1), 91–140. https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp4010007
8. Chibaya, T., & Zhou, Z. (2023). Impact, recovery and resilience of the events and festivals sector from COVID-19 crisis: Lessons from Zimbabwe. In K. Dube, I. Mensah, & L. Chapungu (Eds.), COVID-19, Tourist Destinations and Prospects for Recovery (pp. 119–139). Cham: Springer.
9. Chiya, A. (2024). The role of rural music festivals in community resilience, resourcefulness, and well-being. The International Journal of Social Sustainability in Economic, Social and Cultural Context, 21(1), 25–50. https://doi.org/10.18848/2325-1115/CGP/v21i01/25-50
10. Comunian, R., & England, L. (2020). Creative and cultural work without filters. Cultural Trends, 29(2), 112–128.
11. Davies, K. (2021). Festivals post COVID-19. Leisure Sciences, 43(1–2), 184–189.
12. Davis, J. H., Schoorman, F. D., & Donaldson, L. (1997). Toward a stewardship theory of management. Academy of Management Review, 22(1), 20–47.

13. Duchek, S. (2020). Organizational resilience: A capability-based conceptualization. Business Research, 13, 215–246.
14. Duit, A. (2016). Resilience thinking: Lessons for public administration. Public Administration, 94(2), 364–380.
15. Emerson, K., & Nabatchi, T. (2015). Collaborative Governance Regimes. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
16. Fanning, A. L., O'Neill, D. W., Hickel, J., & Roux, N. (2022). The social shortfall and ecological overshoot of nations. Nature Sustainability, 5(1), 26–36.
17. Folke, C., Carpenter, S. R., Walker, B., Scheffer, M., Chapin, T., & Rockström, J. (2010). Resilience thinking. Ecology and Society, 15(4), 20.
18. Getz, D., & Page, S. J. (2020). Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events (4th ed.). Abingdon: Routledge.
19. Ginzarly, M., & Teller, J. (2025). Leveraging social media for resilient cultural heritage: a people-centred conceptual framework for community engagement and crisis response. Built Heritage, 9(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s43238-025-00209-9
20. Hernandez, M. (2012). Toward an understanding of the psychology of stewardship. Academy of Management Review, 37(2), 172–193.
21. Holling, C. S. (1973). Resilience and stability of ecological systems. Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics, 4, 1–23.
22. Hynes, W., Trump, B., Love, P., & Linkov, I. (2020). Bouncing forward. Environment Systems and Decisions, 40, 174–184.
23. Imperiale, A. J., & Vanclay, F. (2021). Conceptualizing community resilience and the social dimensions of risk to overcome barriers to disaster risk reduction and sustainable development. Sustainable Development, 29(5), 891–905.
24. Lanoszka, A. (2016). Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe. International Affairs, 92(1), 175–195.
25. Lorincz, K., Formadi, K., & Ernszt, I. (2023). Towards a more resilient festival industry: An analysis of the adoption of risk management models for sustainability. Risks, 11(2), 45. https://doi.org/10.3390/risks11020045
26. Madray, J. S. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on the event management industry. International Journal of Engineering Applied Sciences and Technology, 5(3), 533–535.
27. Mohanty, S. K., & Dash, P. C. (2023). The moderating effect of participation on community identity in cultural festivals: A post-pandemic reality check. Journal of Convention & Event Tourism, 24(4), 341–361. https://doi.org/10.1080/15470148.2023.2231626
28. Manyena, S. B., O'Brien, G., O'Keefe, P., & Rose, J. (2011). Disaster resilience: A bounce back or bounce forward ability? Local Environment, 16(5), 417–424.
29. Norris, F. H., Stevens, S. P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K. F., & Pfefferbaum, R. L. (2008). Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy. American Journal of Community Psychology, 41, 127–150.
30. O'Neill, D. W., Fanning, A. L., Lamb, W. F., & Steinberger, J. K. (2018). A good life for all within planetary boundaries. Nature Sustainability, 1(2), 88–95.
31. Ostrom, E. (1990). Governing the Commons. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
32. Pierce, J. L., Kostova, T., & Dirks, K. T. (2001). Toward a theory of psychological ownership. Academy of Management Review, 26(2), 298–310.

33. Prime Minister's Office, Finland. (2017). The Security Strategy for Society. Helsinki: Finnish Government.
34. Provan, K. G., & Kenis, P. (2008). Modes of network governance. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 18(2), 229–252.
35. Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling Alone. New York: Simon & Schuster.
36. Quinn, B. (2013). Key Concepts in Event Management. London: Sage.
37. Rappaport, J. (1987). Terms of empowerment/exemplars of prevention. American Journal of Community Psychology, 15(2), 121–148.
38. Raworth, K. (2017). Doughnut Economics. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.
39. Renz, B. (2016). Russia and 'hybrid warfare'. Contemporary Politics, 22(3), 283–300.
40. Saldaña, J. (2003). Longitudinal Qualitative Research. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
41. Saldaña, J. (2021). The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers (4th ed.). London: Sage.
42. Salomonsen, H. H., Schillemans, T., & Brummel, L. (2024). Aligning the steering of governmental organizations: A comparative mixed-methods study in Denmark using stewardship theory. Public Management Review, 26(11), 3320–3341. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2024.2332778
43. Schillemans, T. (2016). Calibrating public sector accountability: Translating experimental findings to public sector accountability. Public Management Review, 18(9), 1400–1420.
44. Stiglitz, J. E., Sen, A., & Fitoussi, J.-P. (2009). Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress. Paris.
45. Temple, B., & Young, A. (2004). Qualitative research and translation dilemmas. Qualitative Research, 4(2), 161–178.
46. Yin, R. K. (2018). Case Study Research and Applications (6th ed.). London: Sage.
47. Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). Empowerment theory, organizational and community levels of analysis. In J. Rappaport, J. and Seidman, E. (eds) Handbook of Community Psychology. New York: Springer, pp. 43–63.

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

Mykolas Romeris University
ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

RISK MANAGEMENT AT MAJOR EVENTS, USING THE EXAMPLES OF LOVE PARADE 2010 AND UEFA EURO 2024

Jonathan LEMMER
University of Police and Public Administration of North Rhine-Westphalia
Erna-Scheffler-Str. 4, DE-51103 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: jonathan.lemmer@studium.hspv.nrw.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-0375-8469

Robert BECKER
University of Police and Public Administration of North Rhine-Westphalia
Erna-Scheffler-Str. 4, DE-51103 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: robert.becker@stadt-koeln.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0005-1893-1625

Torsten HUSCHBECK
University of Economics in Bratislava
Dolnozemská cesta 1, 852 35 Bratislava, Slovakia
E-mail: torsten.huschbeck@euba.sk
ORCID ID: 0009-0000-1983-9509

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-09

Abstract. *This article provides a critical analysis of risk management and the security architecture for large-scale events, focusing on the interdependencies among established security measures, system risk factors, and psychological determinants of crowd behavior. The central research problem addresses the structural deficits in the interplay of architectural, organizational, and socio-psychological components that lead to critical system failures in contemporary event planning. The study aims to answer the question of how integrated risk assessment frameworks can systematically mitigate these systemic hazards. Methodologically, the paper employs a multi-stage systematic literature review across seven academic databases utilizing a multi-layered keyword cluster, combined with a comparative, qualitative case study analysis of two contrasting structural paradigms: the Love Parade 2010 (representing a centralized bottleneck infrastructure failure) and the UEFA Euro 2024 (representing a decentralized, intelligence-led security architecture). The results demonstrate that classic mass-psychological models fail to accurately predict crowd dynamics. Instead, applying the Social Identity Approach (SIA) reveals that asymmetric or perceived as illegitimate external interventions by security forces catalyze behavioral escalation. Furthermore, the analysis establishes that conventional, isolated risk metrics ignore the compounding effects of hybrid threats and localized structural bottlenecks. Finally, this paper delivers a newly synthesized, holistic security framework that bridges architectural design, cross-agency digital communication, and behavioral psychology into an actionable, integrative operational strategy for modern hazard prevention.*

Keywords: *risk management, security architecture, major events*

Introduction

"On 24 July 2010, the Love Parade in Duisburg turned into a nightmare: 21 people lost their lives, more than 650 were injured"(Gallwitz & Laska, 2025). Every year, large-scale public events attract millions of participants (Statista, 2025). The spectrum ranges from demonstrations and music festivals to sports competitions, Christmas markets, and city festivals. For attendees, such events can represent, e.g., political participation or cultural experience. For organizers and security authorities, those constitute a formidable organizational challenge. When dense crowds gather, a multitude of hazards emerge, ranging from technical failures and weather conditions to security-related incidents such as panic,

violent outbreaks, or terrorist/extremist attacks. Furthermore, the heightened risk of sabotage as a tool of hybrid warfare can no longer be ignored.

Professional risk management is indispensable for recognizing, evaluating, and mitigating threats before they materialize, and for developing appropriate preventive and interventive strategies. Adequate preparation is essential to enable a proper response in the event of an incident. Planning and executing large-scale events demand a systematic approach that integrates technical, organizational, legal, and psychological dimensions and accounts for their mutual interactions. In addition to physical hazards, psychological factors pose a high risk. The behavior of individuals in groups or crowds, group dynamic processes, and the influence on subjective perceptions of safety and their regulation through crisis communication are only some of the factors that may exert influence.

Consequently, the core scientific problem of this study lies in the structural and methodological fragmentation of current event security architectures, which fail to systematically integrate behavioral-psychological paradigms with infrastructural and operational risk metrics. This fragmentation leads to a lack of predictability and adaptivity during real-time critical incidents. To address this problem, the primary purpose of this paper is to evaluate the systemic vulnerabilities in current major-event security architectures and to develop a synthesized, multidimensional risk-mitigation framework. This objective is achieved by analyzing the critical nexus between physical infrastructure, inter-agency operational workflows, and socio-psychological crowd dynamics. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What specific systemic, infrastructural, and emerging hybrid risks must be accounted for in the public realm to ensure the resilience of modern large-scale events?

RQ2: How do micro-level psychological factors (such as stress-induced cognitive biases) and macro-level crowd dynamics (specifically within the paradigm of the Social Identity Approach) interact with external operational interventions to either mitigate or escalate security risks?

RQ3: To what extent can a comparative analysis of the structural failures of the Love Parade 2010 and the intelligence-led strategies of the UEFA Euro 2024 inform a standardized, integrative risk management framework?

Methodology

The present work is based on a systematic literature review of the field of risk management for large-scale events. To ensure a high-quality research process, suitable material had to be identified first. Relevant scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed articles, practical guidelines, and standards were located using the following databases:

- Google Scholar
- JSTOR
- SpringerLink
- Nomos eLibrary
- Beck Online
- Statista
- DeStatis

To optimize recall and precision, the search string was structured using Boolean operators (AND, OR) across three distinct conceptual keyword clusters in both English and German:

Cluster A (Operational/Spatial): "large-scale event" OR "Großveranstaltung" AND "security architecture" OR "Sicherheitsarchitektur" AND "crowd management".

Cluster B (Risk/Managerial): "risk management" OR "Risikomanagement" AND "hazard prevention" OR "Gefahrenabwehr" AND "safety concept" OR "Sicherheitskonzept".

Cluster C (Behavioral/Psychological): "crowd psychology" OR "Massenpsychologie" AND "Social Identity Approach" AND "stress-induced decision making" OR "Stressreaktion".To guarantee contemporary relevance and scientific rigor, strict boundary conditions were applied (inclusion and exclusion criteria): only peerreviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, official government reports, and statutory guidelines published between 2000 and 2025 were included; secondary citations were systematically traced back to their original empirical or legal roots; literature was restricted to English and German; and purely anecdotal trade-magazine articles or non-peer-reviewed blog posts were excluded. The initial database query yielded N = 247 results; after title and abstract screening, N = 84 full-text articles were evaluated, resulting in a final synthesis corpus of N = 62 highly relevant academic sources.

The extracted literature was subjected to a qualitative content analysis to map the theoretical foundations of crowd dynamics and systemic risk factors. These findings were applied to a comparative case study matrix using a purposive sampling strategy that selects two opposing structural paradigms: the Love Parade 2010 (Duisburg) as a negative paradigm of centralized infrastructural bottleneck, communication silos, and outdated mass-psychology assumptions; and the UEFA Euro 2024 (Germany) as a contemporary positive paradigm of a decentralized, intelligence-led security architecture with multi-agency coordination hubs and modern crowd-steering communication.

The comparative analysis evaluates both cases across four standardized operational dimensions: infrastructural confinement, inter-agency communication flows, psychological crowd interventions, and adaptability to dynamic changes in threat, ensuring that the resulting recommendations are grounded in reproducible, empirical observations.

Results

Large-scale events are not uniformly defined. According to the first edition of the Orientation Framework issued by the Ministry of the Interior and Municipal Affairs of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) for municipal planning, permitting, execution, and post-event evaluation of outdoor large-scale events, the following definition applies:

“Large-scale events within the meaning of this framework are events that anticipate more than 100 000 visitors per day, or where the number of simultaneously expected visitors exceeds one-third of the municipality’s population and at least 5 000 visitors are expected to be present on the site at the same time, or which possess an elevated hazard potential”(MIK NRW 2012).

In the second edition, the term “large-scale events” is no longer used definitively. Instead, the emphasis shifts to an elevated hazard potential independent of visitor numbers (MIK NRW, 2021).

Consequently, large-scale events are characterized by a high number of participants, organizational complexity, increased potential for conflict and hazards, and specific infrastructural and security-related requirements. Such events often attract crowds with their own mass psychology, influencing individual behavior and creating crowd-management challenges.

Safety concepts and their design are shaped, among other things, by state law via the Versammlungsstättenverordnung (Special Building Ordinance – Regulation on Construction

and Operation of Special Structures NRW). While there are differences on the substantive level across the federal states, most refer to the Mustervesammlungsstättenverordnung (Model Assembly Venue Ordinance NRW). This ordinance is drafted by the Building Ministers' Conference and is regularly updated. It has no legally binding effect; the States remain free to legislate independently. Nevertheless, such concepts are also demanded by the local authorities responsible for the specific event.

"Safety concepts bundle the totality of measures necessary for the secure execution of an event, and that must be undertaken in the case of disruptions, accidents, or emergencies"(Bahr, 2023). The Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (BBK) defines risk management in its glossary as follows:

"A continuously running, systematic procedure for targeted handling of risks, which includes the analysis and assessment of risks as well as the planning and implementation of measures, especially for risk avoidance/minimization and risk acceptance" (BBK, n.d.).

The risk management process comprises four sequential steps: risk identification, analysis, evaluation, and risk mitigation. Because it is a continuous cycle, new risks are regularly identified, analyzed, assessed, and mitigated (Haag, 2017).

Risk management is the overarching, systematic process that governs uncertainties in large-scale events. It encompasses the ongoing analysis and assessment of risks, as well as the planning and execution of avoidance, mitigation, and acceptance measures. In contrast, the safety concept constitutes the practical implementation of the insights gained through the risk management process. It operationalizes these insights into concrete security measures necessary for the safe conduct of an event and applicable in the event of disruptions, accidents, or emergencies.

Both domains are tightly interlinked: a robust safety concept rests on a thorough risk analysis performed within the risk management process. Conversely, a comprehensive risk management approach cannot be fully realized without a concrete safety concept. Only the interaction between the two elements guarantees a structured and effective approach to event safety.

Large-scale events can become crisis sites due to a range of disturbances, from technical defects and weather events to mass turbulence or attacks (Ronft, 2025). Even when preventive security measures are in place, an incident at a large-scale event can thrust attendees into a crisis situation. This acute crisis triggers stress, which reduces the individual's perception and sensitivity (Mühlfelder, 2025). Consequently, stimulus thresholds are lowered, and the brain's ability to discriminate similar cues deteriorates, so-called "stimulus discrimination loss" (Mühlfelder, 2025). This perceptual narrowing may lead to poor decisions due to insufficient information (Broemme, 2020).

A crisis is defined psychologically as "a dynamic process of unforeseen and hardly predictable events that can suddenly intensify and become existentially threatening for those affected" (Mühlfelder, 2025).

Safety is a fundamental need for physical and mental well-being. In today's experience-driven society, the safety component often recedes into the background during leisure activities, yet adventure and entertainment always carry inherent risks that are usually recognized only after a critical event occurs(Schütte et al., 2021).

Decision-making generally follows a simplified five to six-stage process.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)
Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

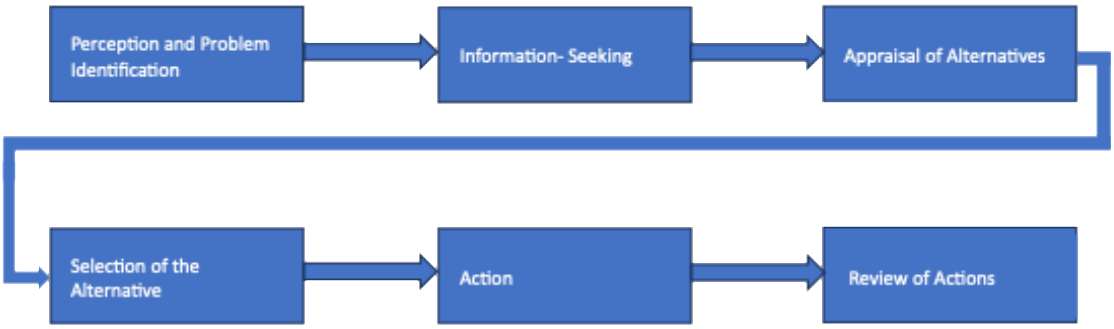


Figure 1. Process of Human Decision Making.
Source: Own illustration

Figure 1 serves as the baseline reference model for the subsequent argument. It depicts decision-making under normal conditions as a sequential process that involves problem detection, information gathering, evaluation of alternatives, selection of an option, and a concluding review. The model reflects the assumption, rooted in the bounded-rationality tradition (Barros, 2010), that decisions are the outcome of a cognitive process that binds limited attentional and informational resources over time. For event safety, the relevance of this baseline is twofold: first, it establishes that sound decisions presuppose sufficient time and undistorted information, both of which are precisely the resources that become scarce during a critical incident. Second, it provides an explicit point of comparison for Figure 2, since deviations from this sequence under stress generate operationally relevant risk. The model is therefore not only illustrative but also defines the analytical yardstick against which stress-induced decision behavior is assessed.

The human decision-making process typically proceeds through successive phases, beginning with the detection of a problem or decision situation, followed by an information-seeking phase in which both internal (experience, knowledge) and external data are collected (Barros, 2010). Identified alternatives are then evaluated for their consequences, after which the decision-maker selects the most favorable option and implements it. Finally, a feedback loop evaluates the outcome and informs future decisions.

The model illustrates that decisions are not spontaneous or random; they are the product of a cognitive process that binds perception, information processing, evaluation, and learning. Emotional and social factors can additionally influence the flow. Theoretical underpinnings can be traced to bounded rationality (Barros, 2010) and dual-process theory (Kahneman, 2013), which argue that human decisions are shaped by both rational, analytical influences and intuitive, emotional influences.

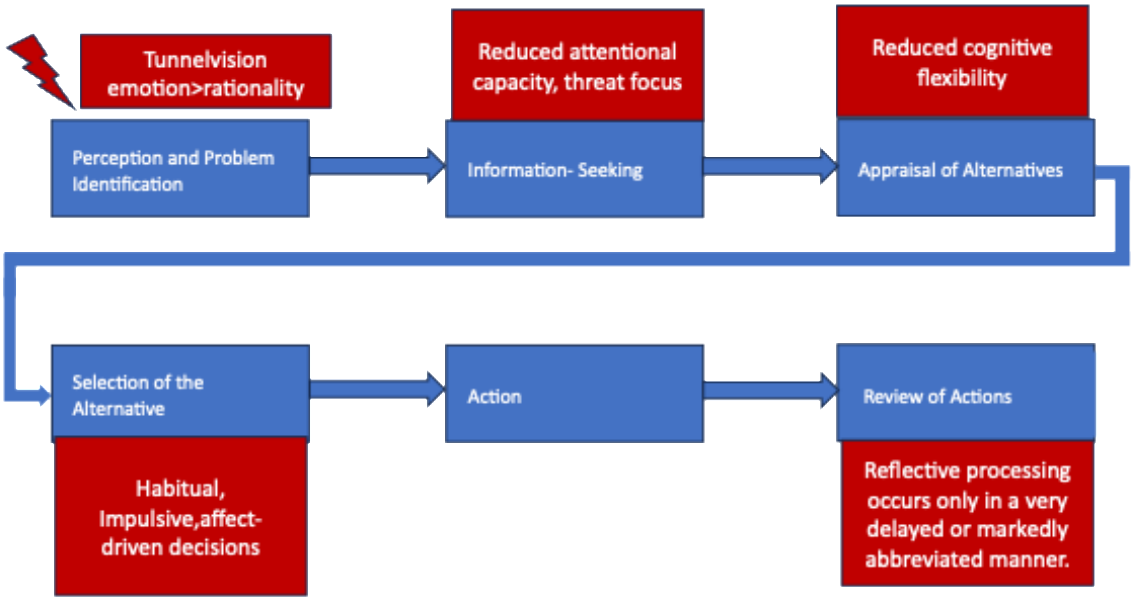


Figure 2. Process of human decision-making under stress.
Source: Own illustration

Figure 2 contrasts this baseline with decision-making under acute stress, thereby demonstrating the mechanism most consequential for crowd safety. Under stress, the deliberative stages of Figure 1 are compressed or skipped: information gathering and the systematic evaluation of alternatives give way to rapid, heuristic-driven, and habitual responses (Klein, 2025). Read together, the two figures explain why individual behavior in dense crowds can shift abruptly from ordered movement to collective survival reactions once time pressure and perceived threat rise. This interpretation links the cognitive model directly to the case analysis: at the Love Parade 2010, the convergence of spatial confinement and acute threat created exactly the conditions under which heuristic processing dominates, whereas at UEFA Euro 2024, the security architecture deliberately sought to preserve the informational and temporal conditions of the Figure 1 baseline through early communication and crowd-steering measures. The two figures thus supply the conceptual bridge between individual cognition and the macro-level crowd dynamics examined in the following sections.

Under stress, people tend to rely more heavily on heuristics (cognitive shortcuts) and habitual behaviors (Klein, 2025). These Behavioral patterns influence experience and decision-making, either consciously or unconsciously (Kahneman, 2013). In time-critical situations, the capacity to acquire and process information declines (Brunsch, 2021).

In sum, stress suppresses slow, rational deliberation while accelerating fast, intuitive processing, rendering decisions more vulnerable to heuristics and biases and reducing effective information handling.

Crowd psychology investigates the behavior of groups of people, especially during large-scale events, and how individual actions give rise to collective patterns (Musse & Thalmann, 1997, as cited in Clegg et al., 2009).

Various psychological explanations have been proposed for crowd behavior. Social Identity Theory (in contrast to earlier deindividuation models that assumed a loss of personal identity and uncontrollable irrationality) posits that crowd behavior is governed by the norms of a shared social identity. Individuals adopt a situationally relevant identity, which then

guides their conduct(Brunsch, 2021). Categorization as a group member is a prerequisite for group behavior. The shared identity creates a sense of belonging, fostering collective, orderly conduct, cooperation, and mutual aid, even among strangers (Künzer & Hofinger, 2021).

This phenomenon is also referred to as collective resilience. The elaborated Social Identity Model emphasizes that crowd behavior is an intergroup phenomenon. In conflicts (e.g., with law enforcement), authorities' actions directly affect the crowd's self-perception and conduct. If the crowd perceives police action as illegitimate and undifferentiated, it may recategorize itself, leading to unified opposition. Negative stereotyping by external actors can trigger a self-fulfilling prophecy, provoking hostile reactions(Clegg et al., 2009).

To address these risks, crowd management and crowd control are essential components of event safety. Crowd management refers to preventive measures, whereas crowd control encompasses measures that can be applied more repressively during the event itself (Künzer & Hofinger, 2021).

External risk factors lie outside the organizer's direct control and can jeopardize the achievement of event objectives (Haag, 2017). They can be grouped into categories ranging from natural hazards to socio-political threats and infrastructural dependencies.

Weather influences are a central external factor, especially for open-air events. The "Making Events Safe" documentation explicitly states that extreme heat, storms, wind gusts above Beaufort 8, snow, or ice can severely affect temporary structures (DStGB, 2017).

Each season presents its own hazard profile; therefore, reliable meteorological monitoring is indispensable (Leber, 2017). Preventive weather-related protection measures and structural precautions must be integrated already during planning.

Critical infrastructure dependencies (energy, water, communication) represent another external risk. A failure of these systems can severely impair logistical processes, lighting, sound systems, sanitary facilities, or evacuation procedures. An integrated risk assessment that accounts for physical, technical, and organizational interdependencies is therefore indispensable. External influences can intentionally or unintentionally disrupt the event or arise from incidents outside it. Intentional disruptions may originate from attendees or non-attendees and include demonstrations, blockades of access routes, vandalism, terrorist attacks, or targeted false reports that may trigger panic situations. Parallel events or failures of transportation systems also constitute external factors that can elevate risk levels (DStGB, 2017).

To safeguard all participants to the greatest extent possible, a multitude of measures previously documented in the safety concept must be implemented. Safety concepts are usually required during the event registration process by the responsible authority, although under the MVStättVO those are mandated only for event venues (Bahr, 2023). A safety concept is an essential preparatory component for a large-scale event. It defines, insofar as possible, every measure necessary to ensure safe execution in the event of disturbances, emergencies, or crises (Bahr, 2023).

The concept must consider all prerequisites and contextual factors, such as infrastructure and expected attendance. It constitutes an event-specific hazard and risk analysis. A safety concept must identify risks, prescribe concrete preventive measures, and outline response procedures for both anticipated and unanticipated incidents. Responsibilities for each measure must be explicitly assigned (MIK NRW, 2021).

In practice, recurring events rarely require a completely new safety concept, but authorities and organizers are obliged to continuously optimize the existing concept.

Crowd Management assesses potential risks during the planning phase, analyses them, and proactively develops response options. Those options are then deployed or adapted during

the event as needed. Examples include evaluating information systems that guide attendees on positioning and visibility; the results inform the real-time deployment of such systems. Various scenarios are simulated, analyzed, and evaluated, and the resulting measures are incorporated into the event's safety concept (Künzer & Hofinger, 2021). Because people tend to look to others for cues in uncertain situations ("herd instinct"), clear and trustworthy communication can positively steer this behavior and reduce uncertainty.

Structural measures focus on ensuring rapid egress and rescue routes, as well as fire protection (Michow & Ulbricht, 2013). To guide visitor flows, clearly identifiable orientation points and signage designed according to the two-senses principle are recommended. This is complemented by unambiguous marking of exits, which helps to strengthen visitors' capacity for autonomous wayfinding (Sommer, 2024).

For public address, permanent or temporary sound systems may be required throughout the venue, particularly in safety-critical zones (MIK NRW, 2012). Professional emergency speakers or pre-recorded announcements are often used with this system.

Mobile barriers constitute another structural measure. Many cities and police agencies use flexible, temporary barriers to protect large-scale events. They enable rapid, event-specific closure of areas to prevent unauthorized vehicle access and to fulfill regulatory requirements. Private organizers also utilize such barriers (KPK & ZGS at LKA BW, 2025). The effectiveness of different vehicle barriers varies considerably (BRANDSchutz / Deutsche Feuerwehr-Zeitung, 2019).

In addition to private security hired by the organizer, personnel measures by police and emergency services are often required. If regular police and medical forces (the so-called AAO) are insufficient, additional units with dedicated command are assembled, and the event is managed under a BAO. Depending on the type of event, entire infrastructures may be created specifically for the event. For example, Munich's Oktoberfest operates a dedicated ambulance service ("Wiesn Ambulanz") and a police station ("Wiesnwache").

The security forces are responsible for internal security at events. Their main tasks include checking entrances and exits, adhering to the maximum number of visitors, keeping escape and rescue routes clear, and orderly evacuation in an emergency (§ 43 SbauVO NRW).

The Love Parade in Duisburg on 24 July 2010 remains a tragic benchmark for large-scale events. Twenty-one people died, and more than 650 were injured (Gallwitz & Laska, 2025). The event was planned for up to 500,000 visitors, while the temporary permit allowed a maximum simultaneous capacity of 250,000 persons (Gerlach, 2021). Planning relied on attendance forecasts and movement models, identifying several bottlenecks, particularly the "single track facilities", tunnel, and ramp sections crucial for inflow and outflow. Recognized technology rules should have been applied as early as the planning phase to correctly determine the suitability of the event site.

From the outset, recognized engineering standards (e.g., HBS 2001 for pedestrian capacity assessment) should have been applied to verify the venue's suitability (Gerlach, 2021). It became clear that the existing inflows (separation systems, tunnels, ramps) were completely insufficient to handle the expected number of visitors (Figure 3).

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)
Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

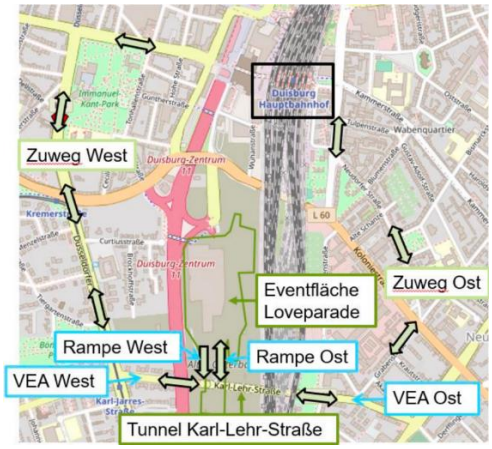


Figure 3. Love Parade area.
Source: Gerlach, 2021

A primary failure was the late identification that the venue was unsuitable (Figure 4)



Figure 4. Unsuitable venue for the Love Parade.
Source: Spiegel, n.d.

Planning documents deviated substantially from the actual built environment; for example, passage dimensions in the single-track facilities and the event zone area were markedly reduced compared with the permit plans. On the day of the event, the response to emerging queues was inadequate. Police cordons were established and then removed inconsistently; openings of single-track facilities under pressure were not coordinated; communication among police, organizers, and crowd-control staff was poor, leading to critical congestion at several "neuralgic points" (Gerlach, 2021). Simulations show that even with alternative procedures, the fundamental structural deficiencies would likely have caused crowd densification. The incident underscores that effective risk management must address several layers: early capacity verification and simulation, recognized design rules, and the use of simulations before the event to confirm venue suitability. Centralized and coordinated control, a unified command for crowd flows, and the use of all available camera feeds for real-time situational awareness were necessary. Communication and public address: the lack of

comprehensive sound systems and insufficient use of communication tools prevented an effective response to critical situations. Emergency management measures, such as closing single-track facilities and coordinating queue management, would have been required to minimize hazards (Gerlach, 2021). Gerlach (2021) concludes that future events demand clear technical and organizational rules, the involvement of independent safety experts from the planning phase onward, strict adherence to pedestrian flow design standards, and the implementation of comprehensive communication systems.

Discussion

A critical appraisal of the source base is warranted before the cases are interpreted, because the two events differ markedly in the quality and independence of the available evidence. For the Love Parade 2010, the analysis can draw on an independent, peer-reviewed reconstruction of the causal chain (Gerlach, 2021) and on official investigation material, which together constitute primary evidence of high reliability. For UEFA Euro 2024, by contrast, much of the publicly available assessment originates from governmental bodies and the organizing authorities themselves, or from media reporting based on those sources; such material carries a potential reporting bias, since the assessing institutions are also the ones whose performance is being evaluated. Following the quality-weighting principle set out in the methodology, conclusions about Euro 2024 are therefore treated as provisional, explicitly attributed to their institutional source, and need to be cross-checked as soon as scientific literature and independent reporting become available. This differentiated treatment of sources is intended to prevent the more favorable but less independent evidence for the positive case from being given the same evidentiary weight as the independently verified findings for the negative case.

The Love Parade tragedy demonstrates the necessity of a holistic risk management approach that integrates technical, organizational, and communicative security strategies. The systematic application of existing regulations, the involvement of independent experts, and the development of new standards for crowd and traffic management are essential to ensuring safety at future large-scale events (Gerlach, 2021).

Another recent example of a large-scale event is UEFA Euro 2024, hosted in Germany. According to the Federal Statistical Office, approximately 4.1 million foreign guests visited the host regions during the tournament—a 23.8 % increase compared with the same months the previous year (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024). The UEFA European Championship is not a single event but a network of numerous large-scale events across the country.

In fan zones such as Frankfurt, a comprehensive security concept with a high police presence was deployed. A video operations center processed central video feeds; police boats patrolled the Main River. Weapons bans and checks were enforced in sensitive areas (e.g., the railway station district). Drones were prohibited around stadiums and fan camps, and police employed counter-drone systems (Röttinger & Werner, 2026). On match days, covert special forces units were on standby; police and rescue services were reinforced at all venues (Menke, 2024).

The security concept incorporated modern technologies such as advanced video surveillance, facial recognition systems, and purpose-built drones for monitoring sensitive zones. A cyber unit protected against digital attacks and secured communication channels, supported by an IT security guideline for preventing cyber incidents and data leaks (Kirchner, 2025).

The federal, state, and municipal authorities, organizers, international security agencies, and UEFA collaborated closely. The International Police Cooperation Center (IPCC) in Neuss served as a central information hub. Extensive training, drills, and tabletop exercises prepared participants for crisis scenarios, including terrorism, major disaster events, and pandemics. Preemptive vehicle checks and trained stewards were also employed (BMI, 2024).

Risk management focused on preventing terrorism, hooliganism, politically motivated crime, and general violence. Border controls prevented unauthorized entry and enabled the execution of outstanding arrest warrants. The goal was a peaceful tournament despite a high abstract threat level, achieved through flexible response capabilities, continuous monitoring, and coordinated command (Andrae & Lehmanns, 2024).

The Interior Ministry and all stakeholders drew a positive overall assessment of the security situation at Euro 2024, noting fewer security-relevant incidents than anticipated (BMI, 2024). However, certain mishaps and shortcomings also occurred during EURO 2024. One illustrative example is the case of YouTuber Marvin Wildhage, who, disguised as a mascot, managed to reach the pitch side during the opening match between Germany and Scotland on 14 June 2024 in Munich using forged accreditation. Even when the self-printed accreditations could not be scanned at the stadium entrance, the influencer's team was simply waved through on the basis of an equally forged parking permit (Wildhage, 2024).

Synthesizing the comparative analysis, the study returns to its three research questions and links them explicitly to the results.

With respect to RQ1, the analysis identifies a risk profile that extends beyond classic technical and weather-related hazards to encompass infrastructural bottlenecks, interagency communication failures, and emerging hybrid threats such as coordinated attacks, cyber-sabotage of event infrastructure, and disinformation; the Love Parade case illustrates the infrastructural and communicative components, while the Euro 2024 case foregrounds the hybrid-threat dimension.

Regarding RQ2, the comparison shows that stress-induced cognitive narrowing (Figures 1 and 2) and social-identity dynamics jointly determine whether a crowd escalates or stabilizes, and that the decisive moderating variable is the perceived legitimacy of external intervention: identical measures can de-escalate or escalate depending on how they are perceived by the crowd.

The results of RQ 3 suggest that a standardized, integrated risk management approach may seem desirable, but it must always be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, lessons from the past are essential for the future. For example, the failed, decentralized communication at the Love Parade serves as a cautionary tale for future events. With the IPCC serving as the central communication hub, UEFA Euro 2024 presents an ideal opportunity to improve risk management. In conclusion, it is noted that integrated risk management for major events is always a multidimensional framework of measures, meaning that a general concept for all major events must give way to a systematic case-by-case analysis.

The study derives concrete recommendations for law enforcement agencies, event organizers, and the research community to sustainably improve safety at large-scale public events. Police forces should prioritize de-escalation strategies, proportionate interventions, and the systematic application of the social identity approach, while strengthening interagency cooperation and expanding the use of real-time monitoring technologies; access and accreditation systems should also be regularly stress-tested to identify vulnerabilities. Furthermore, one of the most fundamental yet simplest measures is open communication at all times among all organizational participants. However, a safe event is always a result of a multitude of measures. Event organizers are encouraged to conduct independent safety audits

early in the planning process, treat safety concepts as dynamic frameworks that are continuously updated, and integrate effective crowd management measures such as clear communication, wayfinding systems, and trained personnel capable of recognizing and responding to emerging risks. At the same time, the research community should adopt more interdisciplinary approaches, focusing on psychological dynamics, decision-making under pressure, and the evaluation of emerging technologies, while improving data access and fostering closer collaboration with practitioners to better translate scientific insights into operational practice.

Conclusions and Limitation

This article has examined the complex field of risk management and security strategies for large-scale public events. The analysis reveals that an effective safety concept extends far beyond protection against physical hazards such as technical failures, extreme weather, or terrorist threats. Psychological factors, particularly stress-induced cognitive changes and crowd dynamics, play a decisive role in shaping event safety outcomes.

Risk management must be understood as a continuous, proactive process that integrates forward-looking planning with the systematic implementation of security measures. Real-world cases, such as the Love Parade 2010, illustrate how structural and organizational deficiencies can lead to catastrophic consequences. However, this positive assessment of UEFA Euro 2024 is subject to an important source related caveat. Unlike the Love Parade 2010, for which independent, peer-reviewed investigative reports are available, the evaluation of Euro 2024 relies predominantly on governmental and organizing-authority sources (e.g., BMI, 2024; Menke, 2024; Kirchner, 2025) as well as media reporting derived from them. Following the quality-weighting principle outlined in the methodology, these sources may exhibit reporting bias, since the institutions being evaluated are also the primary providers of the evidence. Consequently, the characterization of Euro 2024 as a ‚positive paradigm‘ must be regarded as provisional until independent, peer-reviewed post-event analyses become available. The case is included here not as definitive proof of best practice, but as a contemporary, intelligence-led security architecture whose stated measures can serve as hypotheses for future empirical testing.

The psychological influencing factors could only be addressed to a limited extent. These aspects are highly complex and would require a separate and more in-depth analysis. In addition, the restricted public availability of many safety concepts due to confidentiality concerns hampers a comprehensive and transparent evaluation.

Future research should therefore place greater emphasis on the psychological dynamics of visitors and staff at large-scale events. Likewise, the potential of emerging technologies for safety management, such as AI-based crowd monitoring systems, should be systematically evaluated. Furthermore, it appears advisable to pursue interdisciplinary approaches that integratively consider technical, organizational, and psychological components. In summary, an integrative security approach that concurrently addresses technical, organizational, and psychological aspects is essential for the long-term reduction of risks associated with large-scale public events.

Large-scale events in public spaces require consideration of a wide range of risks. These include technical failures, weather-related impacts (e.g., extreme heat, storms, or snow), human factors such as stress and erroneous decision-making in crisis situations, and external influences such as terrorist attacks, political demonstrations, sabotage, and hybrid warfare. Additional risks arise from infrastructural dependencies, such as failures of energy, water, or

communication systems. Cyberattacks and overloads resulting from excessive visitor numbers, combined with inadequate capacity planning, are also significant. Professional risk management relies on systematic risk identification, analysis, and assessment, as well as the implementation of preventive measures within the safety concept, to ensure optimal preparedness and an adequate response in emergency situations.

Psychological factors play a central role. Stress in crisis situations reduces the perception and information processing of those affected, which can lead to wrong decisions. Decision-making processes take place in several phases, during which, under stress, rational thinking is inhibited and intuitive thinking is strengthened, increasing susceptibility to wrong decisions. Crowds are characterized by group dynamic processes, especially social identity, which regulates behavior. Conflicts with authorities can lead to new collective forms of behavior. Crowd management (preventive control) and crowd control (repressive intervention) are important approaches to controlling human masses. In addition, a subjective sense of security and crisis communication have a considerable influence on visitor psychology.

References

1. Andrae, B. & Lehmanns, D. (eds.). (2024, 26. Januar). Unwägbarkeiten bei der Sicherheit rund um die Fußball-EM in Deutschland. https://www.polizei-dein-partner.de/themen/gewalt/gesellschaft/detailansicht-gesellschaft/artikel/sicherheit-rund-um-die-fussball-em-in-deutschland.html.
2. Bahr, H. J. (2023). Handbuch des Veranstaltungsrechts (M. Bisges, ed.). Erich Schmid Verlag GmbH & Co. KG. https://doi.org/10.37307/b.978-3-503-23678-7
3. Barros, G. (2010). Herbert A. Simon and the concept of rationality: Boundaries and procedures. Brazilian Journal of Political Economy, 30(3), 455–472. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-31572010000300006
4. BRANDSchutz / Deutsche Feuerwehr-Zeitung (Producer). (2019, Juli 30). Anti-Terror-Barrieren im Härtetest [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FecrBTFZn3s
5. Broemme, A. (2020). Das THW – Erfahren im Umgang mit Hochrisikosituationen. In E.-M. Kern, G. Richter, J. C. Müller, & F.-H. Voß (eds.), Einsatzorganisationen (pp. 207–222). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-28921-8_11
6. Brunsch, D. (2021). Publikumszentrierte Sicherheits- & Krisenkommunikation auf Veranstaltungen. In S. Ronft (ed.), Eventpsychologie: Veranstaltungen wirksam optimieren: Grundlagen, Konzepte, Praxisbeispiele. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-28888-4
7. BBK [Bundesamt für Bevölkerungsschutz und Katastrophenhilfe]. (n.d.). Glossar. BBK. Abgerufen 26. Oktober 2025, von https://www.bbk.bund.de/DE/Infothek/Glossar/_functions/glossar.html?lv2=19836
8. Clegg, C. W., Challenger, R., & Robinson, M. A. (2009). Understanding crowd Behaviours.
9. Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund (DStGB) (ed.). (2017, Juni). Veranstaltungen Sicher machen.
10. BMI [Bundesministerium des Innern]. (2024). Ein sicheres „Heimspiel für Europa“: Millionen Fans feierten ein friedliches Fußballfest in Deutschland. (2024, Juli 15).

https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2024/07/EURO-Bilanz.html?nn=20131726

11. Gallwitz, J., & Laska, M. (2025, Juli 24). 15 Jahre Loveparade-Unglück in Duisburg: „Plötzlich war es ruhig und dunkel“. hessenschau.de. https://www.hessenschau.de/gesellschaft/15-jahre-loveparade-unglueck-in-duisburg-ploetzlich-war-es-ruhig-und-dunkel-v1,loveparade-15jahre-100.html
12. Gerlach, J. (2021, Mai). Fachliche Aufbereitung von Ursachen der tragischen Ereignisse bei der Loveparade Duisburg 2010.
13. Haag, P. (2017). Risikomanagement im Kongress-, Tagungs- und Konferenzmanagement Risiken erkennen, analysieren und bearbeiten. In C. Bühnert & S. Luppold (eds.), Praxishandbuch Kongress-, Tagungs- und Konferenzmanagement: Konzeption & Gestaltung, Werbung & PR, Organisation & Finanzierung. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-08309-0
14. Kahneman, D. (2013). Thinking, fast and slow (First paperback edition). Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
15. Kirchner, A. (ed.). (2025, 7. November). Sicherheit bei der UEFA Euro 2024. Abgerufen am 22. November 2025, von https://www.europameisterschaftfussball.de/sicherheit-bei-der-uefa-euro-2024
16. Klein, D. (2025). Entscheidungstheoretische Grundlagen der Führung in Krisen. In R. Forsthofer, M. Mühlfelder, & F. Tennert (eds.), Führen in der Krise – Führen aus der Krise (59–76). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-45943-7_4
17. KPG [Kommission Polizeiliche Kriminalprävention] & ZGS [Zentrale Geschäftsstelle] at LKA BW [Landeskriminalamt Baden-Württemberg] (eds.). (2025, Juli 14). BUNDESEINHEITLICHER PFLICHTENKATALOG Fachplanung Zufahrtsschutz. https://www.polizei-beratung.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Pfk_Fachplanung_Zufahrtsschutz_final.pdf
18. Künzer, L., & Hofinger, G. (2021). Veranstaltungen und Besuchersicherheit: Eine Einführung aus Sicht der Human Factors-Psychologie. In S. Ronft (ed.), Eventpsychologie: Veranstaltungen wirksam optimieren: Grundlagen, Konzepte, Praxisbeispiele. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-28888-4
19. Leber, M. (2017). Crowdmanagement: Der Mensch im Mittelpunkt der Planung. In C. Bühnert & S. Luppold (eds.), Praxishandbuch Kongress-, Tagungs- und Konferenzmanagement (pp. 343–355). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-08309-0_23
20. mdr.de. (2025, August 30). Vernichtendes Urteil: Amokfahrt in Magdeburg hätte verhindert werden können | MDR.DE. https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/sachsen-anhalt/magdeburg/magdeburg/gutachten-sicherheit-zufahrt-weihnachtsmarkt-anschlag-100.html
21. Menke, M. (2024, Juni 10). EM 2024 in Frankfurt: Aufwändiges Sicherheitskonzept für die EM-Spiele. hessenschau.de. https://www.hessenschau.de/gesellschaft/em-2024-in-frankfurt-aufwaendiges-sicherheitskonzept-fuer-die-em-spiele-v1,sicherheitskonzept-em-100.html
22. Michow, J., & Ulbricht, J. (2013). Veranstaltungsrecht: Recht der Konzert- und Unterhaltungsveranstaltungen. Beck.

23. MIK NRW [Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen]. (2012, August 15). Sicherheit von Großveranstaltungen im Freien Orientierungsrahmen für die kommunale Planung, Genehmigung, Durchführung und Nachbereitung. https://www.im.nrw/sites/default/files/documents/2017-11/grossveranstaltungen_orientierungsrahmen_druckversion.pdf
24. MIK NRW [Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen]. (2021, November). Sicherheit von Veranstaltungen im Freien mit erhöhtem Gefährdungspotenzial Orientierungsrahmen für die kommunale Planung, Genehmigung, Durchführung und Nachbereitung. https://www.im.nrw/system/files/media/document/file/orientierungsrahmen2210_1_0.pdf
25. Mühlfelder, M. (2025). Psychologie der Krise – Eine Einführung. In R. Forsthofer, M. Mühlfelder, & F. Tennert (eds.), Führen in der Krise – Führen aus der Krise (pp. 1–13). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-45943-7_1
26. Röttinger, R., & Werner, M. (2026). Aktuelle Gefahren und Bedrohungen: Drohnen, Künstliche Intelligenz (KI) und Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN)s. In M. S. Staller, S. Koerner, & S. Schade (Hrsg.), Spezialeinheiten und Spezialkräfte der Polizei (pp. 199–220). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-49902-0_10
27. Ronft, S. (2025). Bewahren Sie Ruhe! Führung und Krisenkommunikation bei Großveranstaltungen. In R. Forsthofer, M. Mühlfelder, & F. Tennert (eds.), Führen in der Krise – Führen aus der Krise (pp. 169–195). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-45943-7_9
28. Schütte, P. M., Schönefeld, M., Hafner, F., & Decker, I. (2021). Alles für die (gefühlte) Sicherheit? Herausforderungen der Sicherheitsproduktion auf Großveranstaltungen für Akteure am Beispiel von Veranstaltungen im öffentlichen Raum. In H.-J. Lange, C. Kromberg, & A. Rau (eds.), Urbane Sicherheit: Migration und der Wandel kommunaler Sicherheitspolitik (pp. 117–148). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-34398-9_6
29. Sommer, K. (2024). Theoretischer Rahmen. In K. Sommer, Locationmanagement für die Eventkonzeption (pp. 5–23). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-43928-6_2
30. SPIEGEL. (n.d.). Abgerufen 28. April 2026, von https://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/photo-gallery-a-catastrophe-at-the-love-parade-fotostrecke-57501.html
31. Statista. (2025, Mai 8). Veranstaltungsmarkt: Veranstaltungen und Teilnehmende. Statista. https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/233136/umfrage/veranstaltungen-und-teilnehmer-auf-dem-veranstaltungsmarkt-in-deutschland/
32. Statistisches Bundesamt. (2024, Oktober 1). 23,8 % mehr ausländische Gäste im Juni und Juli 2024 rund um die Spielorte der Fußball-EM. Statistisches Bundesamt. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/Zahl-der-Woche/2024/PD24_40_p002.html
33. Wildhage, M. (2024, Juni 16). Undercover als Fake-Maskottchen beim EM-Eröffnungsspiel. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiktziNSrb4&themeRefresh=1

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS AND USE OF PREVENTION AND SUPPORT MEASURES FOR PROFESSIONAL VICTIMISATION AMONG LITHUANIAN POLICE OFFICERS

Vilma MILAŠIŪNAITĖ
Mykolas Romeris University
Maironio str. 27, LT 44211 Kaunas, Lithuania
E-mail: v.milasiunaite@mruni.eu
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9293-1192

Ema ATKOČAITYTĖ
Mykolas Romeris University
Maironio str. 27, LT 44211 Kaunas, Lithuania
E-mail: e.atkocaityte@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0009-0002-1105-8841

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-10

Abstract. *Professional (occupational) victimisation in policing—manifesting as external aggression from the public, internal harassment and bullying, and organisational/systemic forms of secondary victimisation—poses significant risks to officers' well-being, perceived safety and organisational performance. Lithuania has developed a multi-layered prevention and support architecture that combines labour-law prohibitions of violence and harassment, occupational safety and health (OSH) duties to manage psychosocial risks, organisational procedures for reporting and case-handling, and statutory provisions for psychological, medical and rehabilitation support. However, empirical evidence remains limited regarding how police officers assess the practical effectiveness of these formally established measures and how often they are used. The purpose of this study is to evaluate police officers' perceptions of the effectiveness of prevention and support measures aimed at addressing professional victimisation and to examine patterns of reporting, utilisation and perceived usefulness of available support. A cross-sectional quantitative research design was applied using an anonymous online survey of Lithuanian police officers (n = 137). Data were analysed with descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests (Mann–Whitney U) to compare evaluations of effectiveness between officers with and without victimisation experience, supplemented by qualitative content analysis of an open-ended question on additional prevention measures (n = 40). The findings indicate that professional victimisation is salient in officers' occupational environment through both direct and indirect exposure, while victimisation experience is not significantly associated with key socio-demographic or occupational characteristics. Officers' evaluations of formally established measures were moderate overall: none achieved high perceived effectiveness, and ratings did not differ significantly between those who had and had not experienced victimisation, suggesting a shared system-level assessment. Psychological support was evaluated most positively, whereas trust- and confidentiality-dependent mechanisms (e.g., confidential reporting pathways, peer/internal support arrangements and rehabilitation-related measures) received lower evaluations. Practice-related indicators revealed substantial underreporting and limited utilisation of support measures among victimised officers, and the perceived usefulness of received support was frequently difficult to assess. Qualitative proposals emphasised strengthening accountability for external aggression, ensuring genuinely anonymous internal reporting, reinforcing leadership accountability and organisational climate, and expanding continuous training. Overall, the results suggest that the principal challenge concerns the credibility, accessibility and consistent implementation of prevention and support mechanisms rather than their formal existence.*

Keywords: *professional victimisation, police officers, prevention measures, support mechanisms.*

Introduction

Professional (occupational) victimisation in policing is an increasingly salient public-safety and organisational governance issue because it undermines officers' health, perceived safety and work capacity, and can indirectly affect service quality and institutional legitimacy. Conceptually, it denotes work-related experiences of harm—physical, psychological, social or

reputational—arising from officers' role-based exposure to aggression and hostile conduct, including threats and behaviours likely to cause psychological harm (Dursun and Aytac, 2021; Pritz and Chou, 2025). The literature supports distinguishing three overlapping forms particularly relevant for policing and prevention. External (public-initiated) victimisation encompasses verbal abuse, intimidation, threats, discrimination and physical attacks by citizens, suspects or detainees. Empirical work on police–citizen encounters treats aggression against officers as involving psychological aggression (e.g., verbal abuse, intimidation, discrimination) alongside physical violence (van Reemst, Fischer and Weerman, 2022), and scoping evidence indicates that while prevalence and correlates are widely described, prevention and protective strategies remain less developed than the scale of the problem would warrant (Pritz and Chou, 2025). Internal (organisation-initiated) victimisation includes bullying/mobbing and harassment by colleagues or supervisors and is treated within workplace-violence frameworks because of its sustained psychosocial impact and implications for mental health and organisational functioning (Dursun and Aytac, 2021). Organisational/systemic victimisation is often discussed as secondary victimisation, whereby unsupportive organisational responses and weak support infrastructures intensify adverse outcomes and diminish trust in reporting and support mechanisms; a recent scoping review shows that organisational reactions and broader system responses can shape the severity and persistence of psychological and occupational consequences after victimisation (Goormans, Verbouw and Vandeviver, 2024). In Lithuania, these forms are visible in available evidence: police activity reviews document unlawful actions against officers and preventive actions by the organisation, including administrative proceedings that frequently relate to degrading content on social media and institutional responses such as preventive conversations and warnings for illegal influence, insults or threats (Lithuanian Police, 2024; Lithuanian Police, 2025). Internal victimisation is also empirically evidenced: Lithuanian research on police employees demonstrates that workplace bullying is present and is negatively associated with well-being, while organisational bullying risk factors predict both bullying and well-being outcomes, implying that prevention must address organisational conditions rather than relying solely on individual coping (Vrublevskaja and Bagdžiūnienė, 2025). More broadly, national-level surveys of statutory services indicate organisational strain that is directly relevant to victimisation vulnerability and secondary victimisation dynamics: in the 2020 statutory services employee study, police employees, relative to other services, evaluated workload, work organisation and work–life balance less positively, and the survey explicitly included the evaluation of psychological assistance and health services, signalling that support and psychosocial risk management are recognised as policy-relevant dimensions (Vileikienė, 2021).

Despite this relevance, the Lithuanian policing environment is characterised by a formal prevention architecture that should, in principle, mitigate victimisation and its consequences: criminal-law provisions define liability for violence, threats and interference with officers' duties, while organisational and sectoral policies provide for preventive and support measures, including psychological assistance and health-related services (Vileikienė, 2021; Lithuanian Police, 2024; Lithuanian Police, 2025). However, the existence of formal measures does not itself demonstrate their practical effectiveness. International evidence suggests that institutional response is a substantive part of the victimisation experience: supportive organisational practices can buffer harm, whereas unsupportive reactions contribute to secondary victimisation and erode trust in protection and reporting (Goormans, Verbouw and Vandeviver, 2024). In Lithuania, the co-occurrence of documented external incidents, empirically observed internal bullying dynamics, and organisational indicators of workload and climate strain suggests a plausible implementation gap between "on-paper" safeguards and experienced protection—yet

empirical assessment of perceived effectiveness of specific prevention and support measures remains limited (Vrublevskaja and Bagdžiūnienė, 2025; Vileikienė, 2021).

Accordingly, the **problem addressed in this paper** is that preventive and supportive measures for police professional victimisation may be formally established but insufficiently effective in practice from officers' perspective, potentially weakening reporting, uptake of support, and overall prevention impact. **The purpose of this paper** is therefore to evaluate whether legally and institutionally defined prevention and support measures are perceived by Lithuanian police officers as effective in addressing professional victimisation. The study is guided **by three research questions**: (RQ1) How do police officers evaluate the effectiveness of formally established prevention and support measures aimed at addressing professional victimisation? (RQ2) Which measures are most and least likely to be used, and how do officers evaluate the usefulness of the support they have received? (RQ3) What additional prevention measures do officers propose as necessary to improve protection and reduce professional victimisation?

To answer these questions, the study uses a cross-sectional quantitative research design based on an anonymous survey of Lithuanian police officers (n = 137). The analysis combines descriptive statistics with non-parametric group comparisons (Mann–Whitney U) to test differences in perceived effectiveness by victimisation-experience groups, complemented by thematic content analysis of responses to an open-ended question on additional prevention measures.

Prevention and Support Architecture for Professional Victimisation in Policing: Global Standards and the Lithuanian Framework

Authoritative international and European policy frameworks converge on a common architecture for preventing and responding to professional victimisation (violence and harassment) in the world of work: (I) a rights-based and OSH-embedded normative commitment that defines violence/harassment broadly and recognises it as a workplace risk; (II) primary prevention through systematic risk assessment and organisational controls (with particular attention to psychosocial risks and gender-based violence); (III) secondary prevention through accessible reporting routes, prompt and impartial fact-finding, confidentiality and protection against retaliation; (IV) tertiary responses through victim-centred remedies, health and psychosocial support, rehabilitation and return-to-work arrangements; and (V) enforcement, monitoring and social dialogue to ensure that formal standards translate into effective practice (International Labour Organization, 2019; International Labour Organization, 2021; European Commission, 2007; European Commission, 2021; World Health Organization, 2022).

Under ILO Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206, violence and harassment are treated as a violation of the right to a safe world of work and require an "inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive" approach that combines prevention, protection, enforcement, remedies and guidance, including training and awareness-raising and the establishment of safe complaint mechanisms with protection from reprisal (International Labour Organization, 2019; International Labour Organization, 2021). The WHO similarly emphasises that workplace mental health protection depends primarily on organisational interventions that reduce psychosocial risks (e.g., excessive workload, poor support, hostile relations), complemented by manager and worker training, accessible support pathways and credible confidentiality safeguards to overcome underuse driven by stigma or low trust (World Health Organization, 2022). European instruments reinforce this model by coupling "zero tolerance" organisational

commitments with procedural guarantees—rapid and impartial handling of complaints, discretion/confidentiality, fair treatment and consequences for perpetrators—while also foregrounding support and reintegration for affected workers (European Commission, 2007). The EU OSH strategic framework embeds psychosocial risks and work-related violence/harassment as OSH priorities and underscores risk assessment, prevention planning, training and enforcement as the practical backbone of prevention (European Commission, 2021). Updated European multi-sectoral guidelines on third-party violence and harassment further stress that high-contact services require robust incident recording and review, de-escalation training, trusted reporting channels, coordination with external authorities, and multi-level victim support; they also highlight that normalisation ("part of the job") and weak confidence in procedures are key drivers of underreporting (European Multi-sectoral Social Partners, 2025). Taken together, these sources frame effective prevention as an implementation challenge: legal norms are necessary but insufficient without organisational capacity, trusted procedures and tangible support that reduces secondary victimisation.

Lithuanian regulation and authoritative national guidance reflect this global architecture to a substantial extent by combining labour-law prohibitions, OSH governance requirements and sector-specific police arrangements. The Labour Code explicitly requires employers to ensure that employees do not experience conduct that violates dignity or physical/psychological integrity and defines violence and harassment broadly (including psychological, gender-based and sexual harassment), covering both single incidents and repeated behaviour capable of producing physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm and/or creating an intimidating, hostile or degrading environment (Republic of Lithuania, 2016/2024). This normative layer is reinforced by equality regulation that defines sexual harassment as unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that violates dignity and creates an intimidating or degrading environment, thereby strengthening the legal basis for addressing harassment and discrimination-related victimisation (Republic of Lithuania, 1998/2024). In parallel, the OSH system institutionalises primary prevention via risk management: the Law on Safety and Health at Work obliges employers to organise preventive measures and structures, while secondary regulation requires professional risk assessment in all workplaces and explicitly integrates psychosocial risk investigation through dedicated methodological instructions (Republic of Lithuania, 2003/2024; Ministers of Social Security and Labour and Health, 2012/2022; Ministers of Health and Social Security and Labour, 2019). National inspectorate guidance operationalises these duties by treating violence/harassment as a psychosocial risk to be prevented through policy commitments, organisational controls, employee involvement, training, monitoring and continuous improvement, thereby aligning with the global emphasis on organisational prevention rather than reliance on individual coping alone (State Labour Inspectorate, n.d.; State Labour Inspectorate, 2022). A further compliance-oriented consolidation is provided through the legally approved description of prevention measures for violence and harassment at work, which specifies core organisational and procedural components (preventive policy, reporting and handling procedures, responsible persons/commissions, training, and support measures) and requires review and updating of measures if they are ineffective (Chief State Labour Inspector, 2024).

Within the policing sector, the Police Department's internal violence and harassment prevention policy translates the general architecture into a police-specific organisational procedure by defining scope across work-related contexts, listing prohibited behaviours, establishing reporting and handling arrangements, and formalising confidentiality and assistance measures (Lithuanian Police, 2022/2024). Tertiary support is particularly developed through statutory-service guarantees: the Internal Service Statute provides for medical

rehabilitation, health restoration and preventive medical and psychological rehabilitation funded through public resources for officers injured in the line of duty and within the system more broadly (Republic of Lithuania, 2003/2024). This is complemented by the Ministry of the Interior's regulation of psychologists' practical activities in statutory institutions, which defines psychologists' functions, stipulates confidentiality, extends support to family members, and specifies that psychological assistance should be provided following critical incidents and occupationally traumatic exposures (Ministry of the Interior, 2023). Pathways for formal recognition of duty-related health impairment are supported by specialised medical expertise regulation, while general frameworks on accident investigation and social insurance provide reporting, investigation and compensation mechanisms for work-related harm (Government of Lithuania, 2004/2014; Republic of Lithuania, 1999/2023; Ministry of the Interior, 2023). Finally, whistleblower protection legislation introduces an additional protective layer by requiring internal reporting channels, mandating confidentiality and prohibiting retaliation through a broad list of adverse actions that includes intimidation, harassment and career restrictions (Republic of Lithuania, 2017/2025). In sum, Lithuanian regulation and guidance map closely onto the global model across the three prevention levels: primary prevention through psychosocial risk assessment and OSH controls; secondary prevention through reporting and internal handling procedures; and tertiary prevention through psychological, medical and rehabilitation support.

At the same time, when assessed against the international emphasis on trusted implementation, several vulnerabilities remain that plausibly contribute to the perception of limited effectiveness among officers. First, while the legal framework clearly defines violence/harassment and mandates psychosocial risk assessment, it leaves substantial discretion over the intensity and enforcement of organisational controls, making outcomes dependent on local managerial capacity and commitment—an issue highlighted internationally as a key determinant of underreporting and secondary victimisation (Ministers of Health and Social Security and Labour, 2019; European Multi-sectoral Social Partners, 2025). Second, internal reporting and case-handling arrangements may be perceived as insufficiently independent in hierarchical organisations if ultimate decision-making authority rests with senior leadership or if "anonymous" reporting is perceived as only partial anonymity—factors known to reduce trust and uptake (Lithuanian Police, 2022/2024; World Health Organization, 2022). Third, whistleblower protection channels may not be perceived as a fit-for-purpose route for reporting all forms of interpersonal victimisation unless the harm clearly meets statutory criteria of reportable wrongdoing, potentially leaving grey zones for reporting internal bullying/mobbing dynamics (Republic of Lithuania, 2017/2025). Fourth, compensation and formal investigation pathways are structurally better aligned with acute, documentable events and medically certified impairment than with cumulative psychosocial harm, meaning that purely psychological victimisation and secondary victimisation may be more difficult to evidence, attribute and remedy despite formal availability of psychological support (Republic of Lithuania, 1999/2023; Government of Lithuania, 2004/2014; Ministry of the Interior, 2023). Finally, while third-party violence is recognised within the psychosocial risk logic, national and organisational texts are comparatively less explicit about policing-specific interfaces between external victimisation, criminal justice processes and organisational support (e.g., structured victim feedback, procedural safeguards to reduce secondary victimisation during external proceedings), leaving a potential gap between deterrence logic and officers' lived experience of protection and assistance (European Multi-sectoral Social Partners, 2025; Lithuanian Police, 2022/2024). These observations support the central premise of the study: Lithuania's prevention and support architecture is formally extensive and broadly consistent with global

standards, yet its practical effectiveness likely depends on the credibility, accessibility and perceived independence of implementation mechanisms.

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative research design using an anonymous online survey to capture police officers' perceptions of the practical effectiveness of formally established prevention and support measures addressing professional victimisation. The choice of a survey design was driven by the need to obtain standardised, comparable evaluations of multiple measures from a geographically dispersed occupational group and to quantify patterns of perceived effectiveness and uptake at a single point in time (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Data collection was implemented via a web-based questionnaire (apklausa.lt) distributed to police units through publicly available institutional work-email contacts, with invitations sent to 16 police units, the Police Department, county chief police commissariats, and selected specialised units. The study relied on non-probability, volunteer participation; accordingly, inference is framed as descriptive and analytical rather than population-representative, consistent with methodological guidance for survey research where sampling frames are constrained and response is self-selected (Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2014; Bryman, 2016). The achieved sample comprised n = 137 internal service police officers aged 20–64 years (M = 41.5), with 44.53% men and 55.47% women; the mean length of service was 17.6 years, and most respondents worked in county/district commissariats (78%), with 20% in specialised units and 2% in the Police Department.

The questionnaire was constructed on the basis of prior literature and structured into six sections: (I) socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, length of service, workplace context); (II) exposure to professional victimisation and situational context (including perceived workplace safety); (III) forms of victimisation; (IV) perceived consequences; (V) perceived causes; and (VI) evaluations of the effectiveness of prevention and support measures embedded in Lithuanian regulation and organisational practice, complemented by an open-ended item on additional measures respondents considered necessary. This structure reflects standard survey design principles for measuring complex occupational phenomena by combining descriptive indicators, attitudinal evaluations, and limited qualitative elaboration to improve interpretability of quantitative findings (Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2014; Bryman, 2016). Given the sensitivity of victimisation-related topics and the hierarchical nature of policing, an online, self-administered format was selected to reduce interviewer effects and social desirability pressures, thereby increasing the likelihood of candid reporting (Tourangeau and Yan, 2007; Dillman, Smyth and Christian, 2014).

Ethical safeguards were integrated into the study procedure. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the study aims, anonymity, and their right to discontinue completion at any stage; informed consent was operationalised through the participant's decision to submit the completed questionnaire ("submit" as affirmative consent). These safeguards align with widely accepted research-ethics principles of respect for persons, voluntary participation, minimisation of harm, and confidentiality (British Psychological Society, 2021; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Data were collected without direct personal identifiers within the survey instrument, and results were analysed and reported in aggregate form, consistent with confidentiality standards and EU data-protection expectations for research processing (European Parliament and Council, 2016; British Psychological Society, 2021).

Statistical analysis was conducted in SPSS using a combination of descriptive and non-parametric inferential methods. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages and means) were used to summarise prevalence-related indicators and the distribution of perceived effectiveness ratings. Because key variables were ordinal and/or did not satisfy normality assumptions, non-parametric tests were applied: χ^2 tests examined associations between categorical socio-demographic variables and victimisation experience; Spearman's rank correlation assessed monotonic relationships between victimisation exposure indicators and perceived workplace safety; the Mann–Whitney U test compared distributions of effectiveness evaluations between groups defined by victimisation experience; and the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test informed decisions about normality assumptions. This analytical strategy is consistent with recommendations to use non-parametric procedures for Likert-type outcomes and non-normal distributions, particularly when the aim is to compare groups and examine rank-based associations without imposing parametric assumptions (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020). Responses to the open-ended question on additional measures were analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify recurrent themes that contextualise and extend the quantitative effectiveness evaluations.

Results

RQ1. How do police officers evaluate the effectiveness of formally established prevention and support measures aimed at addressing professional victimisation? To contextualise evaluations of prevention and support measures, the study first examined the distribution of professional victimisation exposure within the sample. Overall, 10.9% of respondents reported having experienced professional victimisation personally, while a further 30.7% had not been directly victimised but reported awareness of such incidents affecting colleagues; taken together, 41.6% indicated that professional victimisation was salient in their immediate occupational environment. Among those reporting personal experience, exposure was typically infrequent but non-negligible: 46.7% indicated 1–2 incidents in the previous calendar year, 6.7% reported 3–4 incidents, and 5.0% reported more than five incidents, while 41.7% stated they could not specify frequency, suggesting either recall limitations or difficulty demarcating discrete episodes in routine policing work. Importantly, professional victimisation experience was not statistically associated with theoretically relevant socio-demographic or occupational characteristics. Chi-square tests indicated no significant relationship between victimisation experience and gender, geographic work location, organisational unit, or work profile (all p-values > .05). Likewise, Mann–Whitney U tests showed no statistically significant differences between victimised and non-victimised groups in age or length of service (both p-values > .05). These results suggest that, within this sample, professional victimisation should be treated as an exposure that is not confined to a specific demographic subgroup, supporting an interpretation of the problem as structurally distributed across policing roles rather than concentrated within a narrow segment of the workforce.

Against this background, respondents evaluated the effectiveness of formally established prevention and support measures. Across measures, a key pattern was that no single intervention achieved very high endorsement; the highest "effective" rating did not reach 70%, indicating broad scepticism or ambivalence regarding practical impact. The most positively evaluated measure was the possibility of receiving psychological assistance, rated effective by 65.7% of respondents, followed by the employer's duty to ensure safe and psychologically healthy working conditions (59.9%). Legal deterrence tools were evaluated at a moderate level: administrative sanctions for insulting an officer and criminal liability for resistance to an officer

were each rated effective by 56.2%. In contrast, measures that depend on internal organisational trust and procedural credibility received weaker endorsement, including colleagues' support mechanisms and certain internal-help arrangements (39.4%). Other mechanisms—such as psychological rehabilitation following traumatic incidents and the possibility of confidential reporting—were evaluated as effective by fewer than half of respondents, signalling potential deficits in perceived accessibility, confidentiality, or organisational responsiveness. Figure 1 summarises the proportion of respondents who assessed each formally established measure as effective.

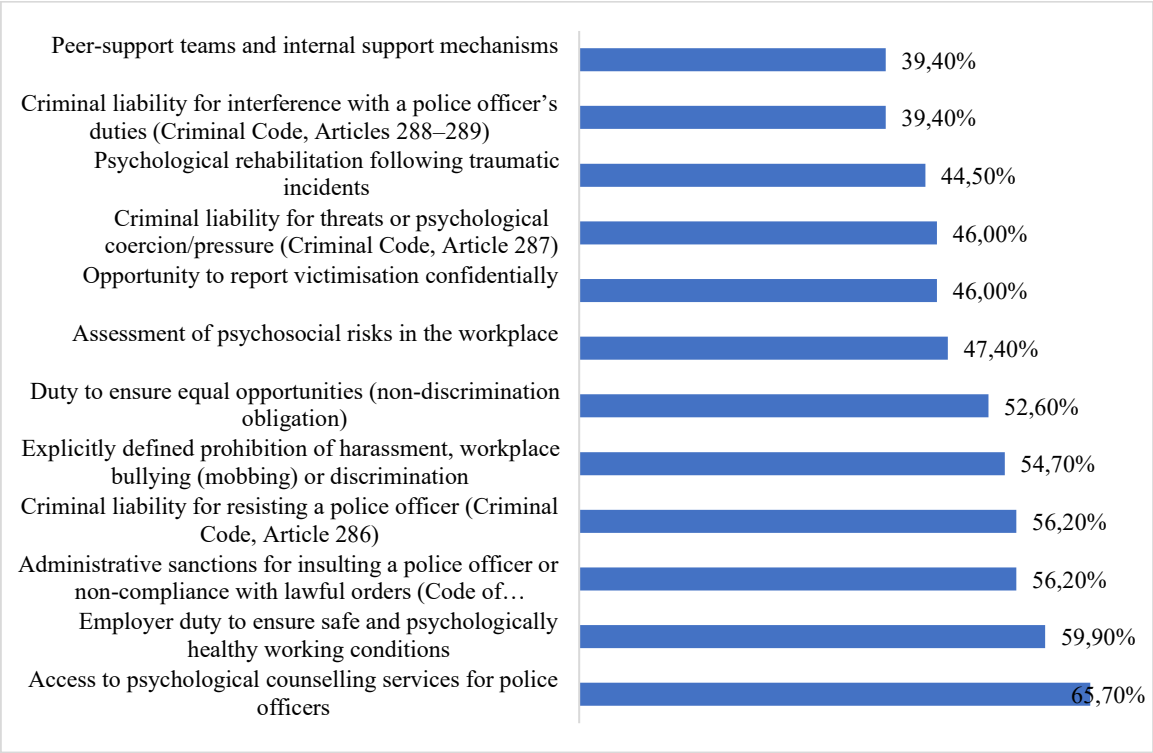


Figure 1. Perceived effectiveness of prevention and support measures (% rating effective).
Source: author's survey (n = 137).

In summary, officers' evaluations suggest a prevention-and-support landscape in which the most credible instruments are those offering direct individual assistance (especially psychological support) and general employer obligations, while internally mediated mechanisms (e.g., confidential reporting pathways and peer-support arrangements) attract lower confidence. The absence of group differences by victimisation experience reinforces the conclusion that perceived limitations are systemic rather than restricted to the subgroup with direct victimisation exposure, thereby supporting the study's central premise of a potential implementation gap between formal provisions and their experienced effectiveness in everyday policing practice.

RQ2. Which measures are most and least likely to be used, and how do officers evaluate the usefulness of the support they have received? Among respondents for whom professional victimisation was salient (i.e., those reporting direct experience or awareness of colleagues' victimisation), reporting behaviour indicates a substantial "non-reporting" pattern. Of officers who had experienced professional victimisation, 29.8% reported the incident(s) to a supervisor or another responsible person, whereas 56.1% chose not to report and 14.0%

preferred not to disclose whether they had reported. Non-reporting was driven primarily by personal reluctance to escalate the issue (48.4%) and by uncertainty regarding where and how to report (12.9%). A further 29.0% selected "other" reasons that largely reflected organisational scepticism and normalisation of victimisation: respondents described such situations as frequent and therefore not worth reporting, perceived them as unimportant to the organisation, or expressed expectations that reporting would not lead to meaningful action. Only 9.7% indicated that they did not report because responsible persons were already aware of the situation through others' reports. Taken together, these findings suggest that underreporting is not explained solely by individual preference but is also shaped by perceived low organisational efficacy, limited procedural clarity, and a "nothing will change" expectation—factors directly relevant to the practical functioning of prevention and support architectures.

Patterns of use of prevention and support measures further reinforce this implementation challenge. Among officers who reported victimisation (n = 57), 43.9% indicated that they had not used any prevention or support measure. The most used measure was participation in training on stress or conflict management (50.9%), implying that the most reachable forms of support are formalised and relatively low-threshold interventions. In contrast, uptake of interventions requiring disclosure, trust, or confidential access was limited: only 10.5% reported using psychological counselling services within the police institution, 14.0% reported receiving support from leadership, and 8.8% used peer-support or internal support mechanisms. Notably, no respondent reported using anonymous/confidential reporting channels for breaches or psychological rehabilitation after a traumatic incident (0% each), which is particularly striking given that these mechanisms are often presented in policy as key instruments for preventing secondary victimisation and facilitating recovery. Overall, the distribution suggests that while training-based prevention is comparatively utilised, individualised and confidentiality-dependent mechanisms—those most closely aligned with early intervention and tertiary support—are least likely to be used.

Officers' evaluations of the usefulness of support received were similarly ambivalent. Among those who had received some form of assistance, 64.9% indicated that it was difficult to assess whether the support was effective, while 22.8% evaluated the received support as effective or very effective. A smaller proportion (12.3%) rated it as ineffective or completely ineffective. This pattern is consistent with two interpretations that are both relevant for policy implications: first, support may be delivered in ways that are insufficiently visible in outcomes (e.g., short-term, generic, or not tailored to the officer's needs), making it difficult for recipients to judge impact; second, low procedural trust and limited follow-up may produce an experience of "formal" support that does not translate into meaningful relief or organisational problem-solving. When considered alongside high non-use of support mechanisms and substantial non-reporting, these findings suggest that the principal limitation is not merely the existence of measures but their practical accessibility, perceived confidentiality, and credibility as routes to real assistance and organisational change.

In summary, with respect to RQ2, formally established measures are most likely to be used when they are routine, low-threshold and institutionally embedded (training), and least likely to be used when they require disclosure, trust in confidentiality, or engagement with internal procedures (confidential reporting channels, psychological rehabilitation, peer support, and—despite high perceived value—psychological counselling). Officers' own accounts of non-reporting and the predominance of "hard to say" evaluations of received support together indicate that the prevention-and-support system is experienced as insufficiently transparent and/or effective to motivate disclosure and sustained uptake, thereby limiting its capacity to mitigate victimisation and prevent secondary harm.

RQ3. What additional prevention measures do officers propose as necessary to improve protection and reduce professional victimisation? Open-ended responses (n = 40) were analysed using qualitative content analysis, applying systematic coding to identify recurrent meaning units, aggregate them into subthemes, and synthesise higher-order themes that capture shared prevention priorities (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Schreier, 2012). Because respondents could propose multiple measures, thematic proportions are interpreted as indicative salience rather than mutually exclusive frequencies. Eight themes emerged. First, strengthening legal accountability and sanctions (approximately 30% of respondents) reflected a strong deterrence logic: officers argued for clearer prohibitions, higher penalties and the inevitability of consequences for aggression and non-compliance, including stronger responses to ignoring lawful orders and insulting officers (e.g., "Aiškesni teisiniai draudimai ir griežtesnės sankcijos" [Clearer legal prohibitions and stricter sanctions]; "įstatyminės bazės keitimas, nuobaudos neišvengiamumas" [legal change, inevitability of punishment]; "Didesnės piniginės baudos už pareigūnų teisėtų reikalavimų nevykdymą" [Higher fines for failure to comply with lawful orders]). Second, ensuring anonymity and protection from internal victimisation (about 20%) emphasised safe disclosure as a prerequisite for prevention, proposing fully anonymous reporting channels and repeated anonymous climate surveys, particularly for mobbing and psychological pressure (e.g., "Visiškai anonimiškas pranešimas apie mobingą, psichologinį spaudimą ir kt." [Fully anonymous reporting on mobbing, psychological pressure, etc.]; "Reguliarios apklausos apie mikroklimatą darbo kolektyve (anonimiškai)" [Regular anonymous surveys on team climate]; "Apsauga nuo mobingo bei patyčių" [Protection from mobbing and bullying]). Third, improving organisational climate and interpersonal relations (about 20%) framed victimisation prevention as a cultural and relational task, stressing respectful interaction, teamwork and trust as protective resources (e.g., "mikroklimato realus gerinimas" [real improvement of the microclimate]; "stiprinti darbą komandoje, pasitikėjimas tarp komandos narių" [strengthen teamwork, trust among team members]; "Požiūris į patį pareigūną ir jo labai sunkų atliekamą darbą" [attitude towards the officer and their very difficult work]). Fourth, leadership accountability and ethical management (about 10%) highlighted supervisory behaviour as both a risk factor and a leverage point, proposing explicit, dissuasive consequences for managerial misconduct and more equitable managerial attitudes across roles (e.g., "Numatyti realias, atgrasančias sankcijas vadovams už tokį elgesį" [Provide real, dissuasive sanctions for leaders for such behaviour]; "Vadovų požiūris į skirtingus darbus atliekančius kolegas" [leaders' attitudes towards colleagues in different roles]). Fifth, training and education (about 12.5%) was proposed as a sustained organisational investment: respondents requested regular training for officers and managers focused on ethical behaviour, leadership and psychological health, alongside public education about causes and consequences of aggression against police (e.g., "Reguliarūs mokymai pareigūnams ir vadovams… (etiško elgesio, lyderystės, psichologinės sveikatos temos)" [Regular training for officers and managers… ethical behaviour, leadership, psychological health]; "Šviesti visuomenę, pateikti priežastis ir pasekmes" [Educate the public, explain causes and consequences]). Sixth, strengthening occupational safety and health (about 10%) functioned as a cross-cutting theme, expressed in concise calls to prioritise safety and health as an organisational duty rather than an individual burden (e.g., "Darbuotojų sauga ir sveikata" [Occupational safety and health]; "saugos ir sveikatos užtikrinimas" [ensuring safety and health]). Seventh, enhancing professional prestige and retention (about 10%) linked prevention to structural resourcing and workforce sustainability: respondents emphasised competitive remuneration and retaining experienced officers as conditions that could reduce strain and vulnerability (e.g., "tolygus darbo užmokesčio didinimas, kad PD būtų konkurencingas rinkoje" [gradual wage increases so

the Police Department is competitive in the labour market]; "patyrusių pareigūnų 'išsaugojimas'" [retaining experienced officers]). Eighth, perceived sufficiency of existing measures coupled with implementation scepticism (about 22.5%) captured a critical tension: some officers argued that formal measures are already adequate but poorly implemented, while others expressed resignation and distrust in any preventive intervention (e.g., "Manau pakaktų ir tų priemonių, kurios yra, jei tik jos būtų efektyvios" [Existing measures would be sufficient if they were effective]; "Priemonių pakanka, reikia jas tinkamai pritaikyti" [Measures are sufficient; they need to be properly applied]; contrasted with "Jokios. Tai neveikia" [None. It doesn't work]).

Overall, this qualitative evidence suggests that officers' prevention priorities extend beyond individual-level support and deterrence toward institutional credibility: effective prevention is expected to combine stronger accountability for external aggression, genuinely safe and anonymous reporting for internal harm, leadership responsibility, and a workplace culture and resource base that make protection and assistance both accessible and trustworthy.

Discussion

The findings support an "architecture–implementation gap" interpretation: although global and European guidance conceptualises prevention and support as an integrated system—rights-based norms, OSH-embedded risk management, trusted reporting and impartial procedures, and accessible victim-centred support—officers' assessments suggest that Lithuanian provisions may not consistently translate into effective, experience-level protection. This aligns with ILO Convention No. 190 and its implementation guidance, which emphasise that prevention requires integrated organisational measures, functioning complaint mechanisms, protection from retaliation and remedies rather than formal prohibition alone (International Labour Organization, 2019; International Labour Organization, 2021). The same logic is reiterated by WHO guidance that prioritises organisational interventions for psychosocial risks and stresses that support is only effective when stigma, confidentiality and trust barriers are addressed (World Health Organization, 2022). In this study, no formally established measure achieved high endorsement (>70%), indicating that the practical credibility of the system remains contested.

A second interpretive point concerns why effectiveness ratings remain moderate across instruments. In policy terms, Lithuania's framework includes broad legal prohibitions (e.g., violence and harassment under labour law), OSH duties and psychosocial risk assessment requirements, and employer-level prevention duties and procedures (Republic of Lithuania, 2016/2024; Republic of Lithuania, 2003/2024; Ministers of Health and Social Security and Labour, 2019; Chief State Labour Inspector, 2024). Yet officers' evaluations suggest that the presence of these mechanisms does not guarantee perceived effectiveness—consistent with European guidance that "zero tolerance" commitments must be supported by visible, fair enforcement and credible case handling (European Commission, 2007; European Commission, 2021). The pattern that even the most highly rated measure—psychological assistance—remains below two-thirds endorsement implies that officers may be judging measures not on formal design but on perceived accessibility, follow-through, and organisational responsiveness in everyday practice.

The psychological support paradox is especially policy-relevant: psychological assistance was rated the most effective measure (65.7%), yet utilisation among victimised officers was low (10.5%), suggesting barriers at the level of access, trust or organisational culture. WHO explicitly notes that workplace mental health supports are often underused when confidentiality

is doubted, stigma is present, or support is not embedded in a broader organisational approach to psychosocial risk reduction (World Health Organization, 2022). In the Lithuanian context, psychological support is institutionally formalised through statutory-institution psychologist regulations and broader internal service support guarantees (Ministry of the Interior, 2023; Republic of Lithuania, 2003/2024). The discrepancy between perceived value and actual use therefore points less to a deficit of formal availability than to implementation obstacles: low psychological safety for disclosure, uncertainty about pathways, and limited confidence that engagement will remain confidential or produce meaningful relief.

The pronounced non-reporting pattern provides further evidence that implementation conditions are central. Most victimised respondents reported not informing a supervisor/responsible person (56.1%), and many justifications reflected normalisation ("such incidents are frequent") and low expectations of organisational response. International third-party violence and harassment guidance identifies underreporting as a predictable outcome when incidents are treated as "part of the job" or when reporting does not lead to timely, visible action, thereby weakening organisational learning and prevention (European Multi-sectoral Social Partners, 2025). This is particularly consequential in a policing environment where external victimisation is frequent and can escalate. From an OSH governance perspective, persistent underreporting undermines risk assessment, prevention planning and the feedback loops required for continuous improvement (European Commission, 2021; Chief State Labour Inspector, 2024).

The absence of differences in effectiveness evaluations between officers with and without victimisation experience is a noteworthy interpretive anchor. If scepticism were driven primarily by personal negative experiences, one would expect weaker ratings among those directly affected. Instead, the lack of statistically significant group differences implies a shared organisational perception of limited system effectiveness—a broader "collective knowledge" that may circulate through colleague experiences and informal organisational narratives. This resonates with research on the consequences of violence against police, which emphasises that organisational response and perceived support shape coping and long-term outcomes; when officers expect limited support, the victimisation burden can spread beyond direct victims to the wider organisational climate (Goormans, Verbouw and Vandeviver, 2024). In this sense, effectiveness perceptions appear to operate as an organisational-level phenomenon rather than a strictly individual response.

Officers' qualitative proposals (RQ3) closely mirror the global architecture and, importantly, identify where implementation is perceived as weakest. Respondents prioritised stronger and more inevitable accountability for external aggression, truly anonymous reporting and protection from internal victimisation, leadership accountability, and microclimate improvement—elements that map directly onto ILO requirements for effective complaint mechanisms, anti-retaliation guarantees, and integrated prevention strategies, as well as European expectations of impartial procedures and OSH-embedded prevention (International Labour Organization, 2019; European Commission, 2007; European Commission, 2021). The proposals thus function as "policy feedback": officers appear to recognise the correct architecture in principle, but they demand stronger operational credibility (real anonymity, leadership responsibility, enforceable consequences) to make the architecture work in practice.

The results also illuminate a tension between deterrence-oriented and support-oriented approaches. Respondents endorsed legal deterrence tools at a moderate level and proposed stronger sanctions, suggesting that external victimisation is frequently interpreted through a punitive or deterrent frame. This is compatible with a policing environment where criminal and administrative liability forms a visible, formal response to aggression. However, global

frameworks consistently treat deterrence as only one component of prevention; they emphasise organisational prevention, reporting infrastructure, and victim-centred remedies and reintegration as equally necessary (International Labour Organization, 2021; European Multi-sectoral Social Partners, 2025). The comparatively weaker perceived effectiveness and low use of internal support mechanisms in this study suggests that deterrence may be more visible than internal support and organisational prevention, leaving a functional imbalance in the prevention "system."

A further implication concerns organisational sustainability. International evidence links victimisation to psychological strain and occupational functioning, with organisational support moderating the severity and persistence of harm (Goormans, Verbouw and Vandeviver, 2024). In Lithuania, independent evidence indicates that workplace bullying is associated with reduced well-being and is predicted by organisational risk factors, reinforcing the idea that organisational context and resources matter for prevention (Vrublevskaja and Bagdžiūnienė, 2025). Moreover, national statutory-service survey evidence points to workload and work-organisation strain in policing, which may both increase vulnerability to victimisation and reduce willingness or capacity to engage with support mechanisms (Vileikienė, 2021). Taken together, the study's findings suggest that weakly trusted support and reporting systems may contribute to a negative cycle: victimisation and strain reduce engagement, underreporting prevents organisational learning, and unresolved problems further erode trust and retention.

Finally, several limitations should be considered. The sample was voluntary and non-probabilistic, restricting population-level generalisation and raising the possibility of self-selection (e.g., participation by those more concerned with the topic). Measures relied on self-report, which may be affected by recall error, social desirability concerns, and varying interpretations of "victimisation" episodes. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference and cannot test whether organisational measures reduce victimisation over time.

Future research would benefit from (I) organisational process evaluation of reporting and case-handling pathways (timelines, perceived independence, outcomes), (II) mixed-method designs (interviews/focus groups) to examine barriers to psychological support uptake and confidentiality perceptions, and (III) comparative perspectives incorporating supervisors and organisational decision-makers to assess alignment between formal procedures and lived practice (European Multi-sectoral Social Partners, 2025; World Health Organization, 2022).

Conclusions

This study indicates that Lithuanian police officers perceive formally established prevention and support measures for professional victimisation as only moderately effective. None of the assessed measures achieved strong endorsement, and effectiveness ratings did not differ between officers with and without victimisation experience, implying that perceived shortcomings reflect a broader system-level assessment rather than the views of a narrowly affected subgroup. The most credible measure was access to psychological support, whereas mechanisms requiring organisational trust (e.g., confidential reporting and internal/peer-support arrangements) were evaluated less favourably, consistent with a prevention system that is formally developed but unevenly translated into practice.

Recommendations follow directly from this gap between formal provision and perceived practical utility. Priority should be given to strengthening implementation capacity and credibility: (I) clarify and publicise reporting pathways, ensure robust confidentiality/anonymity safeguards, and standardise timely case-handling with transparent follow-up; (II) increase the accessibility and normalisation of psychosocial support through

low-threshold entry points, proactive outreach, and clear confidentiality guarantees; and (III) embed violence/harassment prevention within psychosocial risk management and leadership accountability, linking prevention to workload management and organisational climate indicators.

References

1. British Psychological Society (2021) *Code of Human Research Ethics*. Leicester: British Psychological Society.
2. Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods*. 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. Chief State Labour Inspector (2024) *Smurto ir priekabiavimo darbe prevencijos priemonių aprašas* [Description of Prevention Measures for Violence and Harassment at Work] (Order EV-221, 17 December). Vilnius: State Labour Inspectorate.
4. Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, J.D. (2018) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
5. Dillman, D.A., Smyth, J.D. and Christian, L.M. (2014) *Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. 4th edn. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
6. Dursun, S. and Aytac, S.S. (2021) 'Workplace Violence Against Police Officers and the Effect of Workplace Violence on Mental Health', *Pakistan Journal of Medical & Health Sciences*, 15(12), pp. 3491–3493.
7. Elo, S. and Kyngäs, H. (2008) 'The qualitative content analysis process', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), pp. 107–115.
8. European Commission (2007) *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament transmitting the European framework agreement on harassment and violence at work* COM(2007) 686 final. Brussels: European Commission.
9. European Commission (2021) *EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021–2027: Occupational safety and health in a changing world of work* COM(2021) 323 final. Brussels: European Commission.
10. European Multi-sectoral Social Partners (2025) *Guidelines to prevent and tackle third-party violence and harassment related to work (Updated 2025)*. Brussels: European social partners.
11. European Parliament and Council (2016) *Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation)*. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L119, pp. 1–88.
12. Field, A. (2018) *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics*. 5th edn. London: SAGE.
13. Goormans, I., Verbouw, A. and Vandeviver, C. (2024) 'More Than Just a Scratch: A scoping review on physical and psychological consequences of violence against police', *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 25(3), pp. 2535–2551.
14. Government of Lithuania (2004/2014) *Nelaimingų atsitikimų darbe tyrimo ir apskaitos nuostatai* [Regulations on the Investigation and Accounting of Accidents at Work] (approved by Government Resolution No. 1118; consolidated version). Vilnius: Government of the Republic of Lithuania.
15. International Labour Organization (2019) *Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)* and *Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206)*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.

16. International Labour Organization (2021) *Violence and harassment in the world of work: A guide on Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
17. Lithuanian Police (2022/2024) *Smurto ir priekabiavimo prevencijos politikos ir jos įgyvendinimo policijos įstaigose tvarkos aprašas* [Procedure for Implementing the Violence and Harassment Prevention Policy in Police Institutions] (approved by Order No. 5-V-1229; consolidated version from 26 March 2024). Vilnius: Police Department under the Ministry of the Interior.
18. Lithuanian Police (2024) *2023 m. policijos veiklos apžvalga* [Police Activity Review 2023]. Vilnius: Lithuanian Police.
19. Lithuanian Police (2025) *2024 m. policijos veiklos apžvalga* [Police Activity Review 2024]. Vilnius: Lithuanian Police.
20. Ministers of Health and Social Security and Labour (2019) *Psichosocialinių profesinės rizikos veiksnių tyrimo metodiniai nurodymai* [Methodological Guidelines for the Assessment of Psychosocial Occupational Risk Factors] (Order V-699/A1-241; consolidated version). Vilnius: Republic of Lithuania.
21. Ministers of Social Security and Labour and Health (2012/2022) *Profesinės rizikos vertinimo bendrieji nuostatai* [General Provisions on Professional Risk Assessment] (joint order; consolidated version). Vilnius: Republic of Lithuania.
22. Ministry of the Interior (2023) *Psichologo praktinės veiklos vidaus reikalų ministro valdymo srities statutinėse įstaigose tvarkos aprašas* [Procedure for Psychologists' Professional Practice in Statutory Institutions under the Ministry of the Interior] (Order 1V-410, 29 June). Vilnius: Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania.
23. Ministry of the Interior (2023) *Medicininės ekspertizės atlikimo tvarka vidaus tarnybos sistemoje* [Procedure for Conducting Medical Expertise in the Internal Service System] (regulatory document; consolidated version). Vilnius: Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania.
24. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979) *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
25. Pallant, J. (2020) *SPSS Survival Manual*. 7th edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
26. Pritz, T. and Chou, S. (2025) 'External workplace violence towards police officers: A scoping review', *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 81, 102036.
27. Republic of Lithuania (1998/2024) *Lygių galimybių įstatymas* [Law on Equal Opportunities] (consolidated version). Vilnius: Republic of Lithuania.
28. Republic of Lithuania (1999/2023) *Nelaimingų atsitikimų darbe ir profesinių ligų socialinio draudimo įstatymas* [Law on Social Insurance for Accidents at Work and Occupational Diseases] (consolidated version). Vilnius: Republic of Lithuania.
29. Republic of Lithuania (2003/2024) *Darbuotojų saugos ir sveikatos įstatymas* [Law on Safety and Health at Work] (consolidated version). Vilnius: Republic of Lithuania.
30. Republic of Lithuania (2003/2024) *Vidaus tarnybos statutas* [Statute of the Internal Service] (consolidated version). Vilnius: Republic of Lithuania.
31. Republic of Lithuania (2016/2024) *Lietuvos Respublikos darbo kodeksas* [Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania] (Article 30; consolidated version). Vilnius: Republic of Lithuania.

32. Republic of Lithuania (2017/2025) *Pranešėjų apsaugos įstatymas* [Law on Whistleblower Protection] (consolidated version). Vilnius: Republic of Lithuania.
33. Schreier, M. (2012) *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. London: SAGE.
34. State Labour Inspectorate (2022) *Metodinės rekomendacijos psichologinio smurto darbe prevencijai užtikrinti* [Methodological Recommendations for the Prevention of Psychological Violence at Work]. Vilnius: State Labour Inspectorate.
35. State Labour Inspectorate (n.d.) *Metodinė medžiaga dėl smurto ir priekabiavimo prevencijos ir Darbo kodekso 30 straipsnio taikymo* [Guidance Materials on Violence and Harassment Prevention and the Application of Article 30 of the Labour Code]. Vilnius: State Labour Inspectorate.
36. Tourangeau, R. and Yan, T. (2007) 'Sensitive questions in surveys', *Psychological Bulletin*, 133(5), pp. 859–883.
37. van Reemst, L., Fischer, T. and Weerman, F. (2022) 'Aggression Against Police Officers and Behavior Toward Citizens: Reciprocal Influence or Common Causes?', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 866923.
38. Vileikienė, E. (2021) *VRM statutinių tarnybų darbuotojų pasitenkinimo darbu tyrimas* [Survey of Job Satisfaction among Statutory Service Employees of the Ministry of the Interior] (report/presentation based on a 2020 survey). Vilnius: Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania.
39. Vrublevskaja, I. and Bagdžiūnienė, D. (2025) 'The links between police officers' workplace bullying, organizational bullying risk factors, psychological capital, and well-being', *Psichologija*, 73, pp. 8–25.
40. World Health Organization (2022) *WHO guidelines on mental health at work*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS REGARDING DECISIONS BY THE AGENCY FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Birutė PRANEVIČIENĖ
Mykolas Romeris University
Maironio str. 27, LT 44211 Kaunas, Lithuania
E-mail: praneviciene@mruni.eu
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-7122-6005

Kristina MIKALAUSKAITĖ-ŠOSTAKIENĖ
Mykolas Romeris University
Maironio str. 27, LT 44211 Kaunas, Lithuania
E-mail: k_m_sostakiene@mruni.eu
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2056-137X

Gabrielė GINTAUTAITĖ
Mykolas Romeris University
Maironio str. 27, LT 44211 Kaunas, Lithuania
E-mail: gintautaite@mruni.eu
ORCID ID: 0009-0004-3808-215X

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-11

Abstract. *This article analyzes the system for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in Lithuania, with a particular focus on its practical implementation following the 2024 reform. The aim of the article is to examine the system for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in Lithuania, with a primary focus on disputes regarding decisions made by the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as to assess the effectiveness of the pre-trial dispute resolution procedure and the appropriateness of the dispute resolution mechanisms in use.*

The scope of the study includes an analysis of legal regulation, institutional changes, and administrative practice. The research questions focus on how the 2024 disability reform changed the dispute resolution model and to what extent the new mechanism ensures a more effective opportunity for legal redress through administrative procedures.

The study employs comparative, systematic, analytical-critical, and statistical analysis methods. To analyze legal and administrative practice, case study and generalization methods are utilized. The empirical section is based on data from the activities of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission for 2024–2025.

The results show that the 2024 reform fundamentally restructured the system by establishing a model for assessing participation levels and a mandatory pre-trial review procedure. Although this improved the organization of the system and increased its formal accessibility, certain problems persist in practice. Some complaints are not examined on their merits due to non-compliance with procedural requirements, and the review of decisions is often limited to a formal assessment. There also remains a reliance on medical and social expert opinions.

Thus, while the reform has strengthened the legal framework, its effectiveness depends on practical implementation.

Keywords: *Lithuania disability law reform, Rights of persons with disabilities, Administrative justice, Pre-trial dispute resolution, Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Lithuanian administrative dispute commission*

Introduction

The development of disability rights in Lithuania reflects a broader transition from a medical and charity-based approach to a human rights paradigm, in which disability is understood as the result of interaction between individuals and societal barriers. Within this framework, the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities is recognized as a legal obligation of the state rather than an act of benevolence.

The 2024 Lithuanian disability reform introduced several important changes, including the establishment of the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the introduction of a more comprehensive "participation level" assessment system, and the implementation of mandatory pre-trial dispute resolution procedures aimed at improving access to administrative justice. However, a number of challenges remain. In particular, the reliance on specialized medical and social expertise continues to raise concerns, as such assessments are difficult for legal institutions to fully evaluate. Moreover, the review of decisions adopted by the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter – the Agency) highlights issues related to the effectiveness of pre-trial dispute resolution, the accessibility of administrative justice, and the reliability of expert assessments. These challenges reveal a gap between the formal human rights framework and its practical implementation.

The purpose of this article is to examine the system for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in Lithuania by focusing on complaints against decisions adopted by the Agency, paying particular attention to the effectiveness of pre-trial dispute resolution and the adequacy of current dispute resolution mechanisms.

This study contributes to the existing body of scholarship by offering a focused analysis of complaints against decisions of the Agency, an area that has received limited academic attention following the 2024 reform. In contrast to previous research, which has largely concentrated on theoretical or policy-oriented aspects of disability rights, this article explores the practical functioning of administrative and pre-trial procedures. It thereby provides insights into the application of legal norms in individual cases and identifies systemic shortcomings in the protection of rights.

The research is based on a combination of comparative, systemic, analytical-critical, and statistical methods. In addition, case analysis and generalization methods are employed to examine the relevant legal and administrative practices.

Literature review: theoretical and procedural dimensions of disability rights in Lithuania

The evolution of disability rights in Lithuania reflects a broader global shift from a paternalistic, medicalized approach toward a human rights-based paradigm. This transformation is analyzed in contemporary legal and sociological literature through three interrelated dimensions: the paradigm shift in the disability concept, the practical implementation of legal capacity and advocacy, and the procedural efficiency of administrative justice.

A fundamental contribution to the theoretical discourse in Lithuania is provided by J. Ruškus (Ruškus, 2014, pp. 143–145), who emphasizes the transition from the "charity" or "medical" model to the "human rights" model, as mandated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). Ruškus (Ruškus, 2023) argues that disability is not an inherent individual deficit but a result of the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers. From this perspective, the

assurance of social rights is not merely a matter of state goodwill, but a legal obligation to ensure personal autonomy and de-institutionalization (Ruškus, 2021, pp. 153–157). U. Grigaitė, K. Levickaitė, D. Juodkaitė, and N. Goštautaitė-Midttun carried out the study 'Promoting human rights-based deinstitutionalization in Lithuania by applying the World Health Organization's Quality Rights Assessments', concluding that despite ongoing reforms, systemic human rights violations and significant practical gaps persist within Lithuania's social care and mental health facilities (Grigaitė et al., 2025) Complementing the theoretical framework, Ruškus, J., Kiaunytė, A., Zaturskis, G. and Juodkaitė D. focused on the practical and political implementation of these rights, particularly concerning the reform of legal capacity (Ruškus et al., 2020).

While the aforementioned authors define the "what" and "why" of disability rights, E. Bilevičiūtė provides a detailed analysis of the "how"—the procedural mechanisms for legal defense (Bilevičiūtė, 2024). The literature focuses on the 2024 disability reform, which introduced several critical changes:

- Institutional Optimization**:** The establishment of the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the transition to "participation level" (Lith. *dalyvumo lygis*) assessments mark a shift toward a more holistic evaluation.
- Pre-trial Dispute Resolution: Bilevičiūtė emphasizes the mandatory pre-trial procedure involving the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (LADC). This is framed as a crucial mechanism for enhancing the accessibility of justice, providing a faster and more specialized alternative to court proceedings.
- The Problem of Specialized Knowledge: A key challenge identified is the reliance on specialized (medical and social) knowledge within the administrative process. Since courts and quasi-judicial bodies primarily perform legal oversight, their ability to verify the accuracy of expert assessments is a central theme in ensuring substantive justice (Bilevičiūtė, 2023).

A positive trend is evident in recent literature: the expansion of non-judicial mediation (Milius, 2025). This allows persons with disabilities and the state institution (the Agency) to reach an agreement without lengthy litigation. Upon receiving a complaint through the LADC, the Agency may itself conduct a re-evaluation of the person's level of participation and correct the error, thereby ensuring the person's rights more efficiently (Tvaronavičienė and Milius, 2020).

In summary, the Lithuanian academic discourse suggests that while the legislative framework has been aligned with international standards (Ruškus), and advocacy efforts have paved the way for policy reforms (Juodkaitė), the final guarantee of these rights lies in the efficiency of administrative procedures and the quality of evidentiary standards (Bilevičiūtė). A positive development is the possibility to use alternative disputes resolution methods, such as mediation, allowing disputes to be resolved more efficiently and sometimes without court involvement.

Developments in legislation and recent changes in the field of disability assessment

Over more than three decades, not only have the terms, definitions, and names of institutions changed, but also the very concept of disability and the state's approach to the rights of persons with disabilities. After the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Lithuania (1990), the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities developed gradually, moving from a model of social care to a system based on the principles of individual rights.

During the period from 1990 to 2000, legal regulation in this area was mainly focused on ensuring social support and pension provision, while disability was assessed primarily from a medical perspective. The Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities of the Republic of Lithuania, adopted in 1991, was the first legal act regulating the situation of persons with disabilities after the restoration of independence in Lithuania. This law defined the concept of disability, divided it into three groups (I, II, III), specified the percentage of loss of working capacity, and established the procedure for determining disability, which was carried out by state medical and social expert commissions (The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 1991).

The law broadly regulated medical, professional, and social rehabilitation, education for persons with disabilities, employment, work quotas, social guarantees, pensions, and benefits. Employers were required to establish quotas for the employment of persons with disabilities, with subsidies and additional contributions provided for failure to comply. The Lithuanian Council for Disability Issues under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Disability Fund also coordinated the implementation of the policy (The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 1991). This model was focused on medical disability assessment and the social security system, while in practice, disability was assessed according to functional impairments and loss of working capacity in percentages.

In 2004–2005, amendments to Lithuanian disability legislation introduced a significant conceptual shift by replacing the term *"invalid"* with *"person with a disability"* and renaming the legislation accordingly. This terminological change reflected a broader transformation in societal and legal attitudes toward disability, emphasizing the status of persons with disabilities as full members of society entitled to equal opportunities and participation. The revised law provided formal definitions of key concepts, including *disability*, *person with a disability*, and *degree of disability*, while placing greater emphasis on special needs, social and vocational rehabilitation, labour market integration, and participation in community life. It also established an institutional framework in which disability assessment, vocational rehabilitation, and the provision of social services were assigned to specific state and municipal authorities (The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 2004).

A further and more comprehensive reform was adopted through the Law Amending the Law on Social Integration of the Disabled of the Republic of Lithuania No. I-2044 (Law No. XIV-1722 of 20 December 2022), which entered into force on 1 January 2024. This reform renamed the legislation as the Law on the Fundamentals of the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the Republic of Lithuania and replaced the previous disability framework with a rights-based approach. The new model introduced concepts related to participation and individual support needs, strengthening the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and aligning Lithuanian legislation more closely with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Consequently, the development of Lithuanian disability law demonstrates a gradual transition from a predominantly medical understanding of disability toward a social and human-rights-based model focused on inclusion, participation, and equality.

International commitments also had a significant impact on national legislation. In 2010, Lithuania ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). This Convention called for a shift from a medical model to a social and human rights model. The Convention also established the state's obligation to ensure equality, non-discrimination, and full participation in society for persons with disabilities.

Further changes in legal regulation were made in order to implement the principles of this convention. With the amendments adopted in 2023 (effective from January 1, 2024), the name

of the law was changed once again – from the "Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities of the Republic of Lithuania" to the "Law on the Fundamentals of the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the Republic of Lithuania" (TAR 2023-01-04, i. k. 2023-00135). This amendment represents a conceptual shift, as the term "persons with disabilities" is now used instead of "disabled persons." This new term emphasizes the person rather than their condition and gives priority to the dignity, individuality, and equal status of the person in society. The title of the law no longer emphasizes "social integration" but highlights the principles of protection of rights. The law introduces definitions of terms such as "person with a disability," "level of participation," "disability," and "easy-to-understand language."

One of the key innovations is the disability reform. On January 1, 2024, the disability assessment reform began to be implemented, following the entry into force of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the Republic of Lithuania, adopted at the end of 2022, and accompanying legislation. The reform fundamentally changed the disability assessment model, reducing the importance of medical criteria and placing greater emphasis on individual needs and environmental barriers (Seimas Ombudsmen's Office, 2025, p. 61). The reform established a new definition of disability, introduced new concepts such as "easy-to-understand language" and "accessible means of communication," and replaced some of the terms previously used with new ones. Instead of the terms "disabled person," "level of working capacity," and "special needs," the terms "person with a disability," "level of participation," "disability," and "individual assistance needs" were established, thus emphasizing human dignity (The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 1991).

Along with legal changes, institutional reforms also took place – in 2024, following the reorganisation of the Department of Disability Affairs and the Disability and Work Capacity Assessment Service, the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (ANTAA). This institution organizes the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, coordinates the implementation of policies and projects in this area, and organizes the preparation of individual assistance plans and monitors their implementation. In addition, the Agency makes decisions on the level of disability, level of participation, nature of work, and other issues related to the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities (Seimas Ombudsmen's Office, 2025, p. 61).

It should be noted that the reform that came into force on January 1, 2024, was a major turning point in the system for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, but in the subsequent period, the legal regulation in this context was essentially improved, but its direction remained unchanged. The current legal regulation is based on the Law on the Fundamentals of the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the Republic of Lithuania and its implementing secondary legislation, which set out and detail the determination of the level of participation, assessment of individual assistance needs, the preparation of assistance plans, and the mechanisms for their implementation (The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 1991). The system has been streamlined in recent years, but the main direction of the reform has remained unchanged.

Particular importance for the present analysis is attributed to the Law on the Fundamentals of the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the Republic of Lithuania (The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 1991), as well as the Description of the Criteria and Procedure for Determining the Level of Participation (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2023).

The Description of Criteria and Procedures regulates the procedure for preparing and submitting the documents required to determine the level of participation, as well as the procedure for determining the cause, time of occurrence, and duration of the level of participation; it establishes the criteria used to determine the level of participation (paragraph 1). The level of participation is determined by the Agency (paragraph 2). The criteria for the baseline level of participation are set forth in Annex 1 to the Description of Criteria and Procedures.

The level of participation is determined through a comprehensive assessment of baseline participation and the need for individual assistance, except in the cases specified in Chapter IV of the Description of Criteria and Procedures. When determining the level of participation, the Participation Level Assessment Report, in the form approved by the Director of the Agency, is completed (point 17).

The procedures for determining the level of participation, as set forth in paragraph 18 of the Description of Criteria and Procedures, are followed by the Agency's regional office when determining the level of participation. This includes completing the Individual Assistance Needs Questionnaire (Appendix 3), which assesses the individual's need for assistance in various areas of life and the impact of environmental factors on the individual's independence, and determines the extent of the need for individual assistance on a point scale (subparagraph 18.2); evaluates the data provided in clinical electronic records or in the submission to the Agency and in medical records, and determines the individual's baseline participation (the Participation Level Assessment Report is completed) (subparagraph 18.4); if necessary, submits a written request to the healthcare facility where the attending physician prepared the clinical electronic records or the referral to the Agency (subparagraph 18.5.1), other institutions or agencies regarding the submission of additional documents (information) necessary to determine the person's level of participation (subparagraph 18.5.2), a tertiary-level healthcare facility for an additional medical examination (subparagraph 18.5.3).

Paragraph 8 of the Description of Criteria and Procedures stipulates that a person is referred for the determination of the level of participation only after all possible treatment and/or rehabilitation measures have been exhausted and functional impairments remain, i.e., the treating physician, having established a diagnosis and taking into account that, following the applied treatment and/or medical rehabilitation, functional impairments of the body remain, which are confirmed by instrumental, clinical laboratory, and/or other examinations.

As already mentioned, in Lithuania, the assessment of disability has long been based primarily on medical criteria. As an example, we can mention people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, where the determination of their disability is based more on an assessment of their health condition, and it often happens that their disability is recognized as mild, even though these individuals require significant support in both employment and social independence. In other words, the assessment of disability lacked accuracy.

Under the revised legal framework, the concepts of "health status" and "level of participation" are related but are not, and cannot be, identical; and the Agency assesses not the level of health, but the level of participation, which is fundamentally influenced not by a diagnosed illness or an injury sustained by the person, but by the resulting functional impairments of the body; the extent of these impairments determines the criteria used to establish a higher or lower level of participation. Even with the same diagnosed condition, the level of participation may either increase or decrease, as it is determined by assessing not only medical criteria—i.e., the individual's baseline level of participation—but also their individual need for assistance (age, acquisition of work experience and job skills, and the ability to apply them, etc.). For this reason, if there are grounds for a reassessment of the level of participation,

the level of participation is not extended based on the medical data already in the case file, but is reassessed in accordance with newly submitted documents attesting to the person's current functional impairments.

According to case law, the Disability and Work Capacity Assessment Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labor (effective January 1, 2024 – the Agency) is not bound by the work capacity percentages previously determined for an individual. The legislation governing the determination of the level of work capacity (effective January 1, 2024—the level of participation) specifically establishes the terms for the level of work capacity so that changes in a person's health condition can be objectively reassessed during a re-evaluation. Therefore, each time they conduct a reassessment of the level of work capacity (in this case, the level of participation), the Agency's specialists rely on newly submitted medical documents confirming the person's current state of health at the time of the assessment. Previously adopted decisions regarding the level of work capacity (level of participation) do not affect the reassessment (Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, 2021).

It is important to note that the Agency is not a healthcare institution and is not authorized by law to establish a person's diagnosis(es), conduct a comprehensive examination of a person's health condition, administer treatment, etc. The diagnosis(es) is/are made by the treating physician, who also provides objective data on the individual's current health status along with the referral to the Agency. In accordance with the provisions of the Criteria and Procedures, the attending physician is responsible for the accuracy of the referral submitted to the Agency (Section 68 of the Description of Criteria and Procedures), and the specialist physician who provided the consultation and prepared the conclusion is responsible for the accuracy of the specific consultation conclusion (point 69 of the Description of Criteria and Procedures). The legislation does not authorize the Agency to identify and/or assess a person's illnesses or conditions that are not specified in the documents received and collected by the Agency, nor does it authorize the Agency to review medical records prepared by treating physicians or to comment on their validity. During the assessment of the level of participation, the Agency's specialists conduct a systematic analysis of the documents in the case file; therefore, they base their decision on the data contained in the submitted medical records. The Agency has been granted the authority to resolve issues requiring specialized (medical) knowledge, based on medical examinations and the data in the documents (Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, 2012).

In essence, when determining disability, the Agency takes into account:

1) medical criteria (health condition);
2) the individual's need for assistance, in order to ensure the necessary support and services in all areas of personal and social life.

The aforementioned legal framework implies that determining the level of participation involves a comprehensive assessment of a person's functional impairments and environmental factors, the purpose of which is—taking into account the degree of diagnosed functional impairments, the course of the disease, and the treatment applied, to determine the extent to which a person is able and capable of participating fully and effectively in social life. The assessment of the level of participation is assigned to the Agency, based on the data provided in the documents prepared by physicians. When assessing baseline participation, the Agency evaluates the functional impairments remaining in the individual's body following treatment, as confirmed by the body of medical data submitted to and collected by the Agency.

In cases where a person disagrees with the Agency's decision regarding the determination of the participation level (most often when the person's health condition is considered poor but the participation level is assessed as 0 points), they first have the right to appeal the decision to

the Director of the Agency. In such a case, pursuant to paragraph 58 of the Description of Criteria and Procedures, the Agency's Decision Control Division must conduct a reassessment of the level of participation in accordance with the procedure set forth in subparagraph 57.1 of the the Description of Criteria and Procedures. If a person disagrees with the decision of the Agency's Decision Control Division, they have the right to appeal the decision to the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission. Pursuant to Article 5(1) of the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Procedure for the Pre-trial Examination of Administrative Disputes, the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission is required to examine, in a pre-trial procedure, complaints (petitions) regarding the legality of the Agency's individual administrative acts and actions (or inaction) (Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, n.d.).

A legal framework for decision-making and appeals at the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under the Ministry of Social Security and Labor of the Republic of Lithuania (ANTA) is the primary institution in Lithuania responsible for implementing policies to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, assessing disability, and determining individual assistance needs. The Agency makes decisions regarding the level of participation, individual assistance needs, and other issues related to a person's social guarantees; therefore, its decisions have a direct impact on the realization of a person's rights (Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2026).

The disability reform implemented in 2024 fundamentally changed both how disability is determined and how related disputes are resolved. One of the most significant changes was the shift from a disability assessment based on medical criteria to a model focused on an individual's needs, opportunities for participation, and environmental barriers (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2026). At the same time, the system for handling complaints was revised to ensure more effective protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Prior to the reform, the system for handling complaints was fragmented – different disputes were handled by different agencies, so people often did not know exactly where to turn. To ensure clarity and greater accessibility, this model was abandoned and a unified system was established. Starting in 2024, all disputes between individuals, institutions that pay benefits or pensions, and the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are examined by the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (LADC). This commission operates throughout Lithuania, making services more accessible, and complaints must be resolved within twenty working days (Ministry of Social Security and Labour, 2024).

Under current procedures, a person who disagrees with a decision by the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities must first appeal the decision to the Agency itself – that is, to its director or a higher-level authority. Only after this appeal has been reviewed by the Agency may a person turn to an external dispute resolution body (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, 2024).

The next step is to file a complaint with the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, which is required to hear such disputes in a pre-trial proceeding. Both individuals and legal entities, as well as public administration bodies, may file a complaint with the Commission if they believe their rights have been violated (The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 1999). A complaint must generally be filed within one month of receiving the contested decision, or within two months if the authority delays in making a decision. The

complaint may be submitted in writing – by electronic means, by mail, or in person. If the complaint does not meet the formal requirements, the complainant is given the opportunity to correct the deficiencies (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, 2024).

The Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission examines the appeal on its merits – assessing whether the Agency's decision or failure to act is lawful and well-founded. The Commission may overturn the decision or order the adoption of a new decision that complies with the law. The decision also specifies the procedure for appealing it (The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 1999).

It is important to note that individuals with disabilities have additional opportunities to receive legal aid. Certain groups of people, such as those with a high level of disability or a low participation rate, may be eligible for state-guaranteed secondary legal aid – which includes assistance in preparing a complaint and representation during the proceedings. It is also possible to contact the municipality for ~~a~~ free initial legal consultation. Additionally, a simplified complaint form has been developed to make the process easier (State Guaranteed Legal Aid Service, 2024).

If a person is dissatisfied with the Commission's decision, he/she has the right to appeal it to the Regional Administrative Court within one month. Subsequently, if necessary, the decision may be appealed to the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, 2025).

In summary, the procedure for appealing decisions of the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is consistent and consists of several stages. First, the decision is appealed to the Agency itself, i.e., to its director or a higher authority, and subsequently – through a mandatory pre-trial procedure – to the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission. If the individual is dissatisfied with the Commission's decision, it may be appealed to the Regional Administrative Court, and the final stage is an appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania. This legal model for appeals makes it possible to correct any potential shortcomings in decisions at the pre-trial stage and ensures broader opportunities to protect the rights of individuals that have been violated.

The practice of examining disputes regarding decisions made by the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

When assessing the practical application of legislation governing the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, it is important to examine how the system for resolving disputes regarding decisions made by the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities actually functions. Although the legal framework provides for a clear and consistent dispute resolution procedure, only practical data allow for a more accurate assessment of whether this system effectively ensures the protection of individuals' rights.

In this regard, the activity reports of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission can be considered one of the most significant sources of information. These reports allow for an assessment not only of the scale of disputes, but also of the outcomes of their examination, the problems that emerge, and general trends. When evaluating the practice of examining disputes regarding the decisions of the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it is advisable to analyze not only data from a single year but also its dynamics. The 2024-2025 period is particularly significant in this context, as it was during this time that the new mandatory pre-trial dispute resolution system was implemented, allowing for an assessment of its initial results.

According to the 2024 Activity Report of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, in 2024 the Commission received 331 complaints regarding the Agency's actions,

of which 226 were examined on their merits, 114 complaints were upheld, 100 complaints were dismissed as unfounded, and 12 cases were terminated following the conclusion of a settlement agreement. Additionally, 141 complaints were submitted with deficiencies – the complainants were given the opportunity to correct them, but 57 complaints were ultimately deemed not to have been filed. No complaints were received regarding the Agency's inaction. The Commission refused to accept 31 complaints because the applicants had not followed the mandatory appeal procedure (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, 2024, p. 11). These numbers show that a stream of disputes emerged already in the first year of the reform, which may indicate that the decisions made by the Agency are being actively contested.

According to data from the 2025 Activity Report of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, the Commission received 225 complaints regarding the Agency's actions, of which 163 were examined on their merits, 54 were upheld, 92 were dismissed as unfounded, 14 cases were discontinued following the conclusion of settlement agreements, in 2 cases the complainants withdrew their complaints, and 1 complainant died during the proceedings. Additionally, 82 complaints were submitted with deficiencies – complainants were given the opportunity to remedy them, but 15 complaints were deemed not to have been filed. The Commission refused to accept 22 complaints due to failure to follow the mandatory appeal procedure. No complaints regarding the Agency's inaction were submitted to the Commission. A total of 54 decisions to uphold complaints were issued during the year (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, 2025, p. 12). Compared to 2024, 2025 saw a lower number of complaints received, and a smaller proportion of them were upheld.

Table 1. Mandatory pre-trial review of appeals against the Agency's decisions, 2024–2025
Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the 2025 Annual Report of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, 2025, p. 12).

Indicator	2024	2025
The complaint is deemed not to have been filed (unless the deficiencies are remedied)	57	15
The complaint was rejected (the mandatory appeal procedure was not followed)	31	22
The case was examined on its merits following the adoption of the final decision	226	160

The data in the table show that in 2025, compared to 2024, the volume of all key complaint handling indicators decreased. In particular, there was a decrease in the number of complaints deemed not filed due to unresolved deficiencies (from 57 to 15), as well as a decrease in the number of complaints refused (from 31 to 22). At the same time, the number of complaints examined on the merits also decreased (from 226 to 160), which reflects the overall downward trend in the number of complaints received and may be linked to the stabilization of the system following the start of the implementation of the disability reform.

Table 2. Mandatory pre-trial review of appeals regarding the Agency's decisions, 2024–2025
Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the 2025 Annual Report of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, 2025, p. 13).

Indicator	2024	2025
The complaint was upheld	114	54
The complaint was dismissed	100	92
Settlement Agreement Approved	12	14

An analysis of the results of complaint reviews presented in Table 2 shows that in 2024, more than half of the complaints reviewed on their merits were upheld (114 cases), while 100 complaints were dismissed. This indicates that some of the Agency's decisions were found to be unfounded. Meanwhile, the situation changes in 2025 – the number of upheld complaints decreases to 54, while the number of dismissed complaints increases to 92. These figures may indicate an improvement in the quality of the Agency's decisions.

It is also worth noting that the number of settlement agreements concluded has increased – from 12 cases in 2024 to 14 cases in 2025. This suggests that alternative dispute resolution methods are gradually becoming more common and that cooperation between the parties is improving.

To better understand the statistical data, it is useful to briefly review the cases examined by the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, which illustrate the types of disputes that most frequently arise in practice and the legal issues addressed by the Commission.

In one of the cases examined in 2024, the Klaipėda Regional Division of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission reviewed a dispute regarding a decision by the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities concerning the determination of the level of participation. The case involved a situation where the Agency, after reviewing the applicant's complaint, issued several decisions that substantially altered the previous decision of the territorial branch, including the established level of participation (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, 2024, p. 14).

The Commission found that the Agency had improperly applied the procedures for correcting errors in decisions and for reconsideration, as the same complaint had been reconsidered without legal basis. Therefore, it was concluded that the contested decision did not comply with the provisions of the Public Administration Act (The Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, 1999). In view of this, the Commission annulled the Agency's decision and ordered it to adopt a new decision that complies with the requirements of the law (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, 2024, p. 14).

This practice shows that a significant number of disputes concern not only the determination of the level of participation itself, but also procedural violations, the validity of decisions, and the application of principles of public administration. It is also important to note that in these disputes, the Commission assesses only procedural and legal issues and does not evaluate medical aspects, which may be one of the reasons why only a portion of the complaints are upheld (Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission, 2024, p. 14).

In summary, data from the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission for 2024–2025 indicate that the system for adjudicating disputes regarding the Agency's decisions is still evolving but is already functioning consistently. Although a large proportion of complaints are examined on their merits, some still do not reach this stage due to non-compliance with procedural requirements or violations of the mandatory appeal procedure, which highlights the practical challenges in applying the system. It is also evident that a significant proportion of complaints are upheld, but a considerable number are dismissed, and settlement agreements are not yet widely used. Furthermore, practical cases reveal that the assessment of procedural legality is paramount in the Commission's activities. This indicates that the new dispute resolution system not only resolves individual disputes but also contributes to a more uniform application of public administration principles.

Conclusions

The transformation of the legal framework for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in Lithuania reflects a substantial normative shift from a medically oriented system toward a human rights-based model. The 2024 reform introduced important structural and conceptual changes, including a participation-based assessment model, the reorganization of institutional responsibilities, and a unified system of mandatory pre-trial dispute resolution. These developments formally align national regulation with international human rights standards and strengthen the legal foundations for ensuring the autonomy and social inclusion of persons with disabilities.

However, the analysis reveals that the practical implementation of these reforms remains uneven and, in some aspects, problematic. The relatively high number of complaints in the initial phase of the reform indicates not only active use of legal remedies but also signals deficiencies in the quality and consistency of administrative decision-making. Although the decrease in complaints and the lower proportion of upheld cases in 2025 may suggest a degree of institutional adaptation, this trend should be interpreted cautiously, as it may also reflect procedural barriers or limited accessibility rather than a purely qualitative improvement.

A key structural challenge lies in the continued reliance on specialized medical and social expertise. While the reform aims to reduce the dominance of medical criteria, in practice, the determination of participation levels remains heavily dependent on medical documentation. At the same time, neither the Agency nor dispute resolution bodies are fully equipped to critically assess the substance of such expert evaluations, which creates a risk of formal rather than substantive review and may limit the effective protection of individual rights.

Furthermore, the mandatory pre-trial dispute resolution mechanism, although designed to improve accessibility and efficiency, introduces additional procedural layers that may be difficult for individuals with disabilities to navigate without adequate legal support. The fact that a portion of complaints is rejected or not examined due to procedural deficiencies highlights ongoing issues related to the accessibility and user-friendliness of the system.

These issues become apparent when analyzing dispute resolution practices. Empirical data from the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission for 2024–2025 confirm these trends. Although the number of complaints filed with deficiencies and those deemed not filed is decreasing, there remains a significant number of cases where disputes are not examined on the merits due to non-compliance with procedural requirements. Furthermore, the declining number of upheld complaints and the relatively higher proportion of dismissed complaints suggest that, despite the improving quality of administrative decisions, the dispute resolution system still faces challenges regarding accessibility and efficiency.

In this context, the Lithuanian model can be characterized as a system in transition, where progressive legal norms coexist with practical limitations in their implementation. While the reform has established a modern and conceptually advanced framework, its effectiveness ultimately depends on the quality of administrative practice, the ability to ensure meaningful review of expert assessments, and the real accessibility of dispute resolution mechanisms. Ensuring the effective protection of the rights of persons with disabilities therefore requires not only formal compliance with human rights standards but also their consistent and meaningful implementation in administrative practice, where individual outcomes ultimately determine the real value of the reform. If the identified structural and procedural shortcomings are not adequately addressed, the current system may inadvertently reproduce the very barriers it seeks to eliminate, thereby undermining the transformative potential of the human rights-based approach.

References

1. Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2026) *Appeal Procedure*. Available at: https://anta.lrv.lt/lt/apskundimo-tvarka/ (Accessed: 28 April 2026).
2. Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (n.d.) *Human Rights Guide*. Available at: https://www.zmogausteisiugidas.lt/temos/organizacijos-kurios-gali-padeti/valstybes-institucijos/asmens-su-negalia-teisi-apsaugos-agentura (Accessed: 28 April 2026).
3. Bilevičiūtė, E. (2023) 'Specialiųjų žinių taikymas nagrinėjant administracinius ginčus dėl neįgalumo ir darbingumo nustatymo', in *Quo vadis, kriminalistika?*, pp. 325–345.
4. Bilevičiūtė, E. (2024) 'Ginčų dėl asmenų su negalia teisių pažeidimų nagrinėjimas administraciniame procese', in *Lietuvos teisė 2024: esminiai pokyčiai*.
5. Grigaitė, U., Levickaitė, K., Juodkaitė, D. and Goštautaitė-Midttun, N. (2025) 'Promoting human rights-based deinstitutionalization in Lithuania by applying the WHO QualityRights Assessments', *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 37(1), mzae118. https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzae118
6. Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (2024) *Examination of Complaints*. Available at: https://lagk.lrv.lt/en/examination-of-complaints/ (Accessed: 28 April 2026).
7. Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (2024) *Information on the Activities of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission 2024*. Available at: https://lagk.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1741003899/1222/VEIKLOS_ATASKAITA_2024.pdf (Accessed: 04 May 2026).
8. Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (2024) *Persons with Disabilities Provided Easier Access to Apply to the Commission*. Available at: https://lagk.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/asmenims-su-negalia-sudaroma-galimybe-lengviau-kreiptis-i-komisija/ (Accessed: 28 April 2026).
9. Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (2025) *Decision No. 21RE-805 (AG-43405-2025)*. Available at: https://lagk.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1763442006/1982/2025-09-12%20sprendimas%2021RE-805%20(AG-43405-2025).pdf (Accessed: 28 April 2026).
10. Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission (2025) *Information on the Activities of the Lithuanian Administrative Disputes Commission 2025*. Available at: https://lagk.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1772463221/2334/VEIKLOS_ATASKAITA_2025.pdf (Accessed: 04 May 2026).
11. Milius, V. (2025) *Mediacijos taikymo administracinėje justicijoje teoriniai ir praktiniai aspektai*. Doctoral dissertation, Mykolo Romerio universitetas.
12. Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania (2023) *Dėl Dalyvumo lygio nustatymo kriterijų ir tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo*. TAR (Register of Legal Acts). Available at: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.D1F619C285A0/asr (Accessed: 06 May 2026).
13. Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania (2026) *Frequently Asked Questions*. Available at: https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/duk/?query=Negalios+reforma&search=%C2%A0\ (Accessed: 28 April 2026).

14. Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania (2024) *Disability Reform: Frequently Asked Questions*. Available at: https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/negalios-reforma-dazniausiai-uzduodami-klausimai/ (Accessed: 28 April 2026).
15. Republc of Lithuania (1991) *Law on the Fundamentals of the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. TAR (Register of Legal Acts). Available at: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.199156E4E004/mLpRHUmSWa (Accessed: 02 March 2026). (Consolidated version: 1996-01-01 – 1996-11-01)
16. Republic of Lithuania (1991) *Law on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. TAR (Register of Legal Acts). Available at: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.199156E4E004/hakuuMeKAy (Accessed: 03 March 2026). (Consolidated version: 2024-01-01 – 2025-12-23)
17. Republic of Lithuania (1991) *Law on the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. TAR (Register of Legal Acts). Available at: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.199156E4E004/asr (Accessed: 03 March 2026). (Consolidated version: 2026-05-01 – 2026-06-30)
18. Republic of Lithuania (1991) *Law on the Social Integration of the Disabled*. TAR (Register of Legal Acts). Available at: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.199156E4E004/ksmvRgmAFA (Accessed: 02 March 2026). (Consolidated version: 2005-07-01 – 2005-10-26)
19. Republic of Lithuania (1999) *Law on Pre-Trial Administrative Disputes*. TAR (Register of Legal Acts). Available at: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.594F129CE9AD/asr (Accessed: 28 April 2026).
20. Republic of Lithuania (1999) *Law on Public Administration*. TAR (Register of Legal Acts). Available at: https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/TAR.0BDFFD850A66/asr (Accessed: 04 May 2026).
21. Ruškus, J. (2014) 'Jungtinių Tautų neįgaliųjų teisių konvencija keičia pasaulį', *Socialinis darbas. Patirtis ir metodai*, 13, pp. 143–145.
22. Ruškus, J. (2021) 'Negalia yra žmogaus teisių tema. Ką įsipareigojo mūsų valstybė', *Socialinis darbas. Patirtis ir metodai = Social work. Experience and methods*, pp. 153–157.
23. Ruškus, J. (2023) 'Transformative Justice for Elimination of Barriers to Access to Justice for Persons with Psychosocial or Intellectual Disabilities', *Laws*, 12(3), 51. https://doi.org/10.3390/laws12030051
24. Ruškus, J., Kiaunytė, A., Zaturskis, G. et al. (2020) 'On the role conflict of social workers in Lithuania dealing with the issue of legal capacity of persons with disabilities', *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 5, pp. 108–117. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-020-00119-z
25. Seimas Ombudsmen's Office of the Republic of Lithuania (2025) *2024 Human Rights Situation in Lithuania: Monitoring Report*. Vilnius. Available at: https://www.lrski.lt/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2024-metu-zmogaus-teisiu-padeties-Lietuvoje-stebesenos-ataskaita-ISSN-3030-1343.pdf (Accessed: 03 March 2026).
26. State Guaranteed Legal Aid Service of the Republic of Lithuania (2024) *Possibility to Apply for Secondary Legal Aid Challenging Decisions of the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Available at: https://vgtpt.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/galimybe-kreiptis-i-valstybes-garantuojamos-teisines-

pagalbos-tarnyba-su-prasymu-teikti-antrine-teisine-pagalba-gincijant-asmens-su-negalia-teisiu-apsaugos-agenturos-sprendimus/ (Accessed: 28 April 2026).

27. Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania (2012) Order of 30 April 2012, Case No. A146-328/2012.
28. Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania (2021) Judgment of 17 February 2021, Case No. eA-438-552/2021.
29. Tvaronavičienė, A. and Milius, V. (2020) 'Mediacijos taikymas ikiteisminio administracinių ginčų nagrinėjimo stadijoje: prielaidos ir sąlygos taikesniam procesui', in *Lietuvos teisė 2020: esminiai pokyčiai*, Vol. 2. Vilnius: Mykolo Romerio universitetas.
30. United Nations (2006) *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities (Accessed: 06 May 2026).

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

CRIME PREVENTION OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING AS A PREMISE FOR HUMAN SECURITY. CASE-STUDY: ROMANIA

Aura Marcela PREDA
"Spiru Haret" University / Romanian Academy
E-mail: aura.preda@spiruharet.ro
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6192-2020

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-12

Abstract. *In the context of the current dynamics of human mobility (mainly generated by conflict situations - wars, or by a low standard of living - poverty) the phenomenon of migration has taken on an unprecedented scale. Migrant smuggling is a dangerous phenomenon, but also profitable. The article aims to underline the specific of migrant smuggling in Romania, the legal framework at different levels, also the activities of national agencies in this field.*
In September 2025, the Council presidency and the European Parliament negotiators finalized a provisional agreement on the strengthening of Europol to assure better support for Member States in their fight against migrant smuggling. As such, crime prevention, at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary) would significantly contribute to ensuring human security, especially individual and community security. The presentation will attempt to analyze current statistics in the field and highlight European and national measures taken in Romania to prevent migrant smuggling, to ensure a better level of human security.

Keywords: *human security, theoretical approaches, crime prevention, migrant smuggling, European and national measures.*

Introduction

When discussing crime, victimization, penitentiary system, or probation system, human security is obviously involved (Preda, 2025).

Human security and the prevention of victimization are closely connected also with migrant smuggling, which is sometimes transformed into human trafficking, but both are also correlated with organized crime. Social control and crime prevention measures are very important at many levels: the individual level, the community level, as well as the regional and global levels. Furthermore, human security impacts the evolution of each person, the development of the community, and the evolution of humanity as a whole system.

A final mention: the content will refer more to a theoretical approach rather than a practical view. Shortly, the purpose of this paper is to show that crime prevention, especially on migrant smuggling cases, could be an approach aimed at contributing to human security, by presenting the main actors (institutions and NGOs involved in this field), their efforts, and their results.

As for the *methodology* utilized, we can mention the comparative method, the historical method, relevant statistics and the document analysis technique, alongside reviewing the Romanian specialized literature in the field.

Conceptual Delimitations

In the context of a globalized world, human security has become a crucial topic that can be approached both from a theoretical and a practical point of view. From a theoretical perspective, human security is a multifaceted concept because it may be analyzed from various angles, such as the perspective of stakeholders (policymakers, scholars, practitioners, and civil

society), geographical scales (national, regional, European, international level), and prevention frameworks (Istrate, 2013).

Regarding the definition of this notion, the simplest approach uses opposite terms; thus, we can affirm that the concept of security can be perceived through the absence of danger, just as the concept of insecurity can be assimilated through the existence of danger. From a linguistic point of view, security is defined as the absence of danger, protection, and safety. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* proposes another approach to security, viewing it as a system of protection (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). This implies the existence of various means designed to protect people and property from a wide range of dangers, meaning that security is not only a state but also implies an active system of protective measures.

These protective measures should start at the individual level, meaning the absence of physical or psychological harm, or threats to an individual's security which can generate fear or anxiety. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Article 3, stipulates that all human beings have the right to what the UN calls the "security of person" (UN General Assembly, 1948). The simplest and most common forms of protection are the legal structures that protect individuals from threats to their security, including, but not limited to, laws against crime, physical and psychological harm, theft, etc. The state must assume responsibility for creating and implementing this type of regulation.

The next level, community security, introduces the idea that the realistic security dilemma can best be overcome not by the balance of power and self-help, but by establishing collective commitments by which each state assumes the duty to join others against those who threaten the territorial integrity or political independence of one of the members (Boucher & Kelly, 2008).

Taking into consideration the announced title, we must mention that in specialized literature, different authors refer to the classification of human security depending on what kind of values are protected (Pirnea, 2005). Therefore, we can delineate between military security, economic security (food security, energy security, security of communications and transport), information security, environmental security, medical security, and social security. All these types of security are highly interconnected and, as a system, contribute to a sense of safety reflected in the quality of human life.

Legal and Institutional Framework regarding migrant smuggling

In our opinion, the most important way to ensure human security is a balanced legal framework that protects different categories of people, including migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, alongside the legal structures mentioned before. Likewise, accessible, supple, adapted, and flexible legislation allows for the establishment of bodies at different levels and provides the framework for efficient cooperation between national structures, especially in cases of cross-border crime.

International Level

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), as part of the United Nations System, is the leading intergovernmental organization in charge of promoting human and orderly migration for the benefit of all parties involved. As a main aim, the IOM puts effort into ensuring the dignity, safety, and safeguard of people during the most challenging times, offering an efficient and contextual response to crises. The IOM is involved in many areas of migration management, such as migration and development, facilitating migratory fluxes, regulating

migration, and addressing forced migration. In Romania, the IOM has maintained a continuous presence since 1998.

European Level

Migration has become a common phenomenon in human history, probably forever ongoing and never truly finished. Every day, numerous migrants and refugees try to reach the EU in search of protection, stability, and peace. They look for a better, safer life-employment, higher education, family reunification, etc. In this context, we must address the vulnerability of migrants, especially regarding irregular migration. Migrant smuggling is a phenomenon as dangerous as it is profitable (Stoica, 2014).

Furthermore, even upon arrival in host countries or during the journey, they may face difficult situations such as gender-based violence, human trafficking, harassment at work, hate crimes, or various forms of discrimination. At a time when discrimination, prejudice, racism, and xenophobia are increasing, it is our duty to fight for fundamental rights, values, and freedoms to foster more united societies. Migrants often deal with biases and discrimination that tend to diminish later, particularly with the second generation (Ghuneim et al., 2025).

Migrants in an irregular status often refrain from reporting crimes they witness or fall victim to because they fear deportation, as contact with police forces could trigger expulsion procedures (Vaughan et al., 2021). Due to this issue, safe reporting was researched in a survey conducted in Spain. As an example of good practice, Barcelona implemented measures-resulting from academic research partnering the University of Barcelona, the Institut de Seguretat Pública de Catalunya (ISPC), and Migra Studium-to encourage irregular migrants to report crimes without fear of expulsion.

The most prominent legal acts applying to migrant smuggling cases include:

- **Directive 2008/115/EC (Return Directive):** Sets common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals, establishing the return order generally for irregular stays, sometimes because of migrant smuggling.
- **Directive 2012/29/EU (Victims' Rights Directive):** Establishes minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of crime victims, featuring a non-discrimination clause applicable to individuals with irregular administrative status. Implementation reports recognize that victims with an irregular migration status are less likely to report crimes due to deportation fears.

In September 2025, the Council presidency and European Parliament negotiators reached a provisional agreement to strengthen Europol, enabling it to better support Member States in combating the illegal entry of migrants and human trafficking. The deal emphasizes improving information-sharing between Member States and Europol to enhance EU-level cooperation, reinforcing the agency's role in assisting national law enforcement against organized crime and terrorism.

National Level (Romania)

Romania possesses a complex system of normative acts regulating the regime of foreigners, obvious for the illegal migrants. The most relevant include:

-Law no. 28/2024: Amends and supplements certain normative acts regarding foreigners, generated by EU regulations (such as the EU Blue Card) and new social realities stemming from irregular migration flows.

-The Romanian Criminal Code: Outlines state border offenses in a specialized chapter, including Article 262 (fraudulent crossing of the state border), Article 263 (migrant smuggling), Article 264 (facilitating illegal stay in Romania), and Article 265 (evasion from removal measures). Additionally, Article 367 regulates the formation of an organized criminal group.

Migrant smuggling, as regulated by Article 263 of the Romanian Criminal Code, is punished by imprisonment from 2 to 7 years for basic acts (recruitment, guidance, transportation, or harboring for fraudulent border crossing). The penalty increases to 3 to 10 years if the act is committed to obtain a patrimonial benefit, endangers the life of the migrant, or subjects them to inhuman or degrading treatment.

Entities Involved in Social Control and Migration Prevention

Public Authorities in Romania

General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII)

The GII is a specialized structure of the central public administration with legal personality, subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs under Law no. 118/2012. Among its competences, it accommodates vulnerable individuals in its centers, provided they do not require specialized assistance. For justified motives, the GII may approve an extension of the integration program for these individuals beyond the standard one-year limit, housing them free of charge. Victims of trafficking (who are frequently migrants) are included within these vulnerable categories.

National Agency Against Human Trafficking (NAAHT)

Subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, NAAHT fulfills the role of national rapporteur, collecting data from governmental and non-governmental actors. Annual reports from the agency note that the potential for human trafficking is heightened by massive migration flows for labor and the establishment of single-nationality communities abroad (National Agency Against Human Trafficking [NAAHT], 2022).

Romanian authorities must actively prevent, detect, and support foreign victims given Romania's imminent transformation into a destination country for trafficking originating from third countries. Labor migration from third countries has been stimulated primarily to address deficits in the Romanian market, a trend that persisted into subsequent years (NAAHT, 2023). Authorities maintain a proactive focus on vulnerable groups, whether arriving as refugees or as a foreign workforce.

Romanian Border Police (RBP)

Subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the RBP supervises and controls state border crossings, managing social control and the prevention of illegal migration. It handles a border expanse of approximately 3,150 kilometers, frequently countering challenges ranging from illicit migration and smuggling to weapon and drug trafficking.

In the first six months of 2025, the RBP operated in a distinct context: the complete integration of Romania into the Schengen area. Following the opening of air and sea borders on March 31, 2024, controls at land borders with Schengen member states were eliminated on January 1,

2025. The RBP focused on strengthening surveillance at external EU borders and adapting internal missions, achieving a significant 73% decrease in illegal migration compared to the same period in 2024.

Operationally, since January 2025, the Border Police detected over 16,400 illegal acts, consisting of 9,300 minor offenses and over 7,100 criminal acts. Most detected migrants originated from Iraq, Syria, Bangladesh, Turkey, and Iran, primarily utilizing green border crossings or hiding in transport vehicles. Additionally, around 4,000 Ukrainian citizens were detected entering illegally during the first half of 2025, a decrease from the 5,550 cases registered in the first half of 2024.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Romanian National Council for Refugees (RNCR)

The RNCR is a non-governmental organization of public utility that promotes and defends the rights of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. It provides legal assistance throughout all phases of the asylum procedure and collaborates closely with Frontex. In 2024, the RNCR provided information and counseling to 17,200 individuals at border points with Ukraine and Moldova, as well as the Bucharest North Railway Station, alongside supporting thousands more through GII reception centers and specialized call centers.

Federation of non-Governmental organizations for social services (FONSS)

Registered under civil sentence no. 2915/13.08.2014, FONSS comprises 44 member NGOs providing social services to vulnerable groups. It focuses on enhancing the capacity of these organizations to influence policy changes, promote sustainable community development, and raise citizen awareness to combat poverty and foster social inclusion.

Comparative approaches: migrant smuggling vs. human trafficking

Although frequently conflated in public discourse, the Romanian Criminal Code treats migrant smuggling and human trafficking as fundamentally different offenses protecting distinct legal values (Stoica, 2014).

Table 1: Critical Differentiation Criteria

Criterion	Migrant Smuggling (Art. 263)	Human Trafficking (Art. 210)
Consent	Exists initially — voluntary payment for services.	Invalid — obtained through force, coercion, or deception.
Main Purpose	Facilitating illegal border crossing.	Continuous exploitation of the person (labor, sexual, etc.).
Border Crossing	Mandatory — inherently transnational.	Optional — can occur entirely domestically within Romania.
Duration	Transactional — relationship ends upon arrival and payment.	Ongoing — long-term control to continuously extract profit.

Criterion	Migrant Smuggling (Art. 263)	Human Trafficking (Art. 210)
Protected Value	State security, public order, and border integrity.	Fundamental human rights, individual liberty, and dignity.

Crime prevention regarding migrant smuggling

To prevent illegal entry, residence, and smuggling, EU countries must first gather and share detailed statistics regarding refusals of entry, individuals found in irregular situations and executed return orders. Crime prevention across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels significantly safeguards individual and community security.

A primary preventive measure includes continuous trans-disciplinary training for professional groups in direct contact with vulnerable groups, including teachers, social workers, judges, prosecutors, and Ministry of Internal Affairs personnel (Romanian Police, Border Police, and GII). Specking about vulnerable groups, we taking into consideration the secondary prevention level.

A recognized good practice is the national campaign *"Inform yourself correctly to be safe on Romanian territory,"* implemented by NAAHT, GIRP, and GII, which produced 1,000 posters and 20,000 leaflets translated into Pashto, Arabic, and English to warn foreign citizens of trafficking risks. Furthermore, we must underline the role of social media in primary prevention; unfortunately, documentaries reveal that smugglers frequently exploit platforms like TikTok or Facebook to stream polished videos, framing dangerous journeys as safe "travel services".

Data from 2024 indicates a rising trend of Romania becoming a destination country, with foreign victims of exploitation increasing from 8 to 24, primarily originating from third countries such as Bangladesh, Colombia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Republic of Moldova (NAAHT, 2024).

Criminological literature utilizes various schools of thought to explain these subcultures and migratory trends, underlining the need to prepare populations for a multicultural society from an early age (Conklin, 2004; Leerkes et al., 2025; Schmalleger, 1999; Siegel, 2005).

Strategic recommendations for reducing migrant smuggling in Romania

With Romania's full integration into the Schengen Area—including the lifting of internal land border checks in early 2025—the country has transitioned from a buffer zone to a direct entry point into the wider European borderless space. This shift inherently makes the territory more attractive to transnational smuggling networks.

To effectively address the future of the migrant smuggling problem, Romania must focus on a blend of high-tech external border hardening, intelligence-led internal policing, and swift legal processing. Here are strategic recommendations to manage this challenge:

a. Hardening External Borders with Advanced Technology by expanding AI and drone surveillance and deepening Frontex integration.

Romania oversees the longest continuous external land border in the EU. Expanding the use of autonomous drone fleets, thermal imaging cameras, and AI-powered motion sensors along the borders with Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Black Sea is crucial for detecting irregular crossings early.

Romania should maximize the hosting capacity of the Frontex Standing Corps and leverage joint intelligence networks like EUROSUR. Maintaining aerial surveillance and utilizing Mobile Surveillance Vehicles will help anticipate sudden shifts in migratory pressure, particularly from the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes.

b. Adapting internal security post-Schengen through two directions: intelligence-led mobile policing and real-time data verification.

Without systematic checks at internal land borders (such as with Hungary and Bulgaria), Romania must rely heavily on intelligence-led policing. Expanding joint "HOTSPOT" and "BLITZ" mobile operations in border regions will help intercept smugglers without disrupting the free flow of legal traffic.[1]

Equip law enforcement with broader access to the eDAC application and other biometric tools. Cross-referencing national and European databases in real-time allows mobile units to instantly verify the legal status of individuals intercepted inland or at transport hubs.

c. Dismantling organized smuggling networks

Smuggling networks operate as lucrative, transnational businesses, so law enforcement need *to target financial infrastructure.* Also, law enforcement must collaborate closely with Europol and financial intelligence units to track illicit money flows, target undeclared cash, and freeze the assets of organized crime groups.

Migrant smuggling rarely happens in isolation. It frequently overlaps with document fraud, weapons smuggling, and contraband trafficking. Romania should aggressively participate in European multidisciplinary platforms (EMPACT) to prosecute these networks on multiple fronts simultaneously, *to tackle the criminal nexus*.

Advocate for and apply targeted *horizontal sanctions* regimes against specific entities, companies, and individuals known to facilitate human trafficking and smuggling, restricting their ability to operate across jurisdictions could be another direction to act.

d. Streamlining asylum and return procedures include two main reactions: *operationalize the EU migration pact and regular contingency stress-testing*

Building on past pilot projects, Romania must ensure swift, merits-based processing of asylum applications. The goal is to quickly distinguish between individuals needing legitimate international protection and those using smuggling networks for economic migration, ensuring immediate return procedures for rejected applicants.

Following the successful inter-agency simulations (like the April 2026 ICMPD exercises in Galați county), Romania should continue to run live simulations. Testing coordination among the General Inspectorate for Immigration, Border Police, and emergency services ensures the state is prepared for sudden surges that could otherwise overwhelm reception centers.

e. Humanitarian Standards and Capacity Building

Continuously train border guards to identify sophisticated document fraud, counter evolving smuggling tactics, and—crucially—spot vulnerable individuals who are victims of human trafficking rather than willing participants. So, it is needed to do *specialized screening training for the professionals.*

Also, *NGOs and IOM/ national agencies partnerships could be a huge advantage.* Maintain strong operational partnerships with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and local NGOs. Providing clear legal pathways, adequate material assistance, and

[1] www.politiadefrontiera.ro/en/main/i-the-romanian-border-polices-balance-sheet-for-the-first-semester-of-2025-six-months-since-full-integration-into-the-schengen-area-9299.html#:~:text=Romania's%20external%20border%2C%20the%20longest,along%20the%20entire%20green%20border.

integration support for processed asylum seekers reduces their vulnerability to exploitation by underground smuggling networks.

Conclusions

Crime prevention on organized crime (transnational) including migrant smuggling remains an indispensable premise for human security by reducing victimization risks and fostering a stable environment where individuals enjoy daily life and work (Preda, 2025). Moving forward, robust international judicial collaboration—leveraging European Investigation Orders, Eurojust, and Joint Investigation Teams—is paramount.

Concurrently, a comprehensive national strategy must develop anti-trafficking messages across physical and virtual environments, utilizing social networks to discourage demand and reduce vulnerabilities.

Finally, the efforts of professionals in the field of human security (practitioners, researchers, teachers, etc.) must be addressed through interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary frameworks and build networks on different European projects, such as CA 22106 - Migrant Disaster Victim Identification (MDVI) or CA 24154- Networking European Security Knowledge (NetSec). These types of communities tend to bring together scientifical efforts from EU's state members to increase their ability to respond effectively to complex security challenges.

References

1. Boucher, D., & Kelly, P. (2008). *Great political thinkers from Socrates to the present*. Ed. ALL.
2. Conklin, J. E. (2004). *Criminology* (8th ed.). Pearson Education, Inc.
3. Encyclopedia Britannica. (n.d.). Security. In *Encyclopedia Britannica online*. Retrieved June 14, 2026, from https://www.britannica.com
4. Ghuneim, L., Eisner, M., & Ribeaud, D. (2025). *Attitudes toward violence against women among second–generation refugee, migrant and native Swiss adolescent in Zurich*, Switzerland. *European Journal of Criminology*, *22*(3).
5. Istrate, M. (2013). Securitatea concept multidimensional. *Drepturile Omului Journal*, *23*(2).
6. Leerkes, A. S., Fokkema, T., Bening, J., & Bezemer, W. E. (2025). Community multiculturalism and self-reported immigrant crime: Testing three theoretical mechanisms. *European Journal of Criminology*, *22*(3).
7. National Agency Against Human Trafficking. (2022). *Annual report on the fight against human trafficking in Romania*. Ministry of Internal Affairs.
8. National Agency Against Human Trafficking. (2023). *Annual report on the fight against human trafficking in Romania*. Ministry of Internal Affairs.
9. National Agency Against Human Trafficking. (2024). *Annual report on the fight against human trafficking in Romania*. Ministry of Internal Affairs.
10. Pirnea, V. (2005). *Dimensiunea de securitate și apărare a Uniunii Europene*. Editura Centrului Tehnic-Editorial al Armatei.
11. Preda, A. M. (2025). *Criminologie*. Editura Fundația România de Mâine.

12. Schmalleger, F. (1999). *Criminology today: An integrative introduction* (2nd ed.). Prentice Hall.
13. Siegel, L. J. (2005). *Criminology: The core* (2nd ed.). Thomson Learning Inc.
14. Stoica, A. (2014). *Migrația ilegală la confluența cu traficul de persoane*. Editura Pro Universitaria.
15. UN General Assembly. (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights* (Resolution 217 A).
16. Vaughan, J. M., Camarota, S. A., & Zeigler, K. (2021). *Are immigrants less willing to report crime? Data from the National Crime Victimization Survey says "No."* Center for Immigration Studies.

Website sourses

1. https://www.iom.int/
2. https://romania.iom.int/ro/node/107163
3. https://www.cadmusjournal.org/node/975
4. https://www.safereporting.eu/safe-barcelona/
5. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2008/115/oj/eng
6. https://youth.europa.eu/get-involved/your-rights-and-inclusion/situation-of-migrants-and-refugees-europe_ro
7. https://www.safereporting.eu/
8. https://danish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/council-and-parliament-agree-to-strengthen-europol-in-the-fight-against-migrant-smuggling-and-trafficking/
9. https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/279587
10. https://igi.mai.gov.ro/en/
11. https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/139467
12. https://igi.mai.gov.ro/en/vulnerable/
13. https://www.politiadefrontiera.ro/ro/main/pg-informatii-generale-24.html
14. https://www.google.com/search?q=prganizatii+non+guvernamentael+din+Romania+pentru+migranti&rlz
15. https://codurilepenale.ro/app/articol/art-263-traficul-de-migranti_465
16. https://www.cnrr.ro/en
17. https://fonss.ro/en/despre-noi/
18. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/RO/legal-content/summary/migration-statistics.html
19. https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/eu-external-borders-irregular-crossings-fall-22-in-the-first-10-months-of-2025-XvrGB3
20. https://www.europol.europa.eu

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

Mykolas Romeris University
ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE OFFICERS DEPENDING ON THE VISIBILITY OF THEIR WEAPONS

Verena STUMM
Hochschule Fresenius
Im Media Park 4c, 50670 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: verena.stumm@hs-fresenius.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-7423-9790

Alexander BAUMGARTL
Hochschule Fresenius
Im Media Park 4c, 50670 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: baumgartl.alexander@stud.hs-fresenius.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0003-3881-4800

Charlotte KÖNIG
Charlotte Fresenius Hochschule
Im Media Park 4d, 50670 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: koenig.charlotte@stu.charlotte-fresenius-uni.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0006-9423-7173

Antonia BLIND
Charlotte Fresenius Hochschule
Im Media Park 4d, 50670 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: blind.antonia@stud.charlotte-fresenius-uni.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-2569-792X

Mona EL MAMCHOUK
Hochschule Fresenius
Im Media Park 4c, 50670 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: el_mamchouk.mona@stud.hs-fresenius.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0005-9741-2638

Mara NEUGEBAUER
Charlotte Fresenius Hochschule
Im Media Park 4d, 50670 Cologne, Germany
E-mail: neugebauer.mara@stud.charlotte-fresenius-uni.de
ORCID ID: 0009-0007-8099-4162

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-13

Abstract. *Perceptions of police officers are influenced by a variety of visual and situational factors, with the visibility of weapons and the context of the perception playing a central role. The aim of this study was to systematically investigate the influence of these variables and to capture both implicit and explicit perception processes. To this end, a 2 × 2 between-subjects experimental design was implemented, combining eye-tracking data for the analysis of visual attention with questionnaire data for the collection of subjective ratings. The results show significant main effects of both context and armament on gaze behaviour. Furthermore, an interaction effect was observed, indicating that the effect of armament is context-dependent. Whilst demonstration contexts led to increased attention to the background, visible armament significantly directed attention to the corresponding area of the image. The results underscore the importance of context-sensitive perceptual processes and provide important insights for social psychological research on the perception of state authority.*

Keywords: police perception; visible weaponry; situational context; eye tracking; visual attention; police legitimacy; social cognition

Introduction

The perception of police officers is a central focus of social psychological research, as it is closely linked to issues of trust, legitimacy and social order. The police presence in public spaces is not assessed solely on the basis of specific actions, but is significantly influenced by visual characteristics, individual experiences and situational context.

A particularly striking feature is the visible carrying of weapons. This not only fulfils functional roles in terms of self-protection and the enforcement of the state's monopoly on the use of force, but also acts as a symbolic stimulus capable of eliciting various emotional and cognitive reactions. Whilst some members of the public associate an armed police presence with security and order, others perceive it as intimidating or potentially conducive to escalation. This ambivalent perception makes the visibility of armament a particularly relevant subject of research.

Empirical findings suggest that perceptual processes are highly context-dependent. The behaviour of police officers is interpreted differently depending on the situational context, with conflict-laden situations such as demonstrations in particular having the potential to alter perceptions of authority and legitimacy. Against this background, the present study aims to systematically investigate the influence of the visibility of police weaponry and the situational context on the perception of police officers, taking into account both implicit attentional processes and explicit evaluations.

Theoretical approach

The perception of social stimuli is the result of complex cognitive processes that are influenced by both the characteristics of the stimulus and situational and individual factors. In this context, weapons represent particularly salient stimuli, as they convey symbolic aspects such as power, control and potential threat far beyond their functional significance.

From a social-psychological perspective, weapons can be understood as discriminative cues that automatically trigger certain associations. The so-called 'weapons effect' describes how the mere perception of weapons can foster aggressive cognitions and interpretations of social situations (Berkowitz & LePage, 1967; Anderson et al., 1998). These effects occur independently of the actual use of the weapon and highlight its role as a symbolic stimulus.

In a policing context, this effect is further reinforced by institutional meanings. Here, the weapon functions as a visible expression of state authority and the legitimate use of force. Consequently, whilst it can convey a sense of security, it can also reinforce power asymmetries and evoke feelings of threat.

In addition to the presence of firearms, the situational context plays a decisive role in perception. Demonstrations represent socially charged situations characterised by heightened emotional arousal, potential conflicts and complex social dynamics. In such contexts, visual stimuli are processed more intensely, which can alter perceptions of authority and threat.

Based on these theoretical considerations, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1 (H1):

The situational context has a significant influence on the perception of police officers.

Hypothesis 2 (H2):

The visibility of firearms significantly influences the perception of police officers.

Hypothesis 3 (H3):

There is an interaction effect between situational context and the visibility of weapons on the perception of police officers.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)
Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative laboratory design using a cross-sectional, 2×2 factorial between-subjects structure to investigate how contextual information and the visibility of police weaponry influence visual attention and subjective evaluations of police officers.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions (Figure 1), resulting from the manipulation of two factors: the context of the depicted scene (neutral vs. demonstration) and the visibility of the officer's weaponry (visible vs. not visible). Each participant viewed a single stimulus image corresponding to their assigned condition for a duration of ten seconds.

Eye-tracking data were collected using *Tobii Pro Lab* (Tobii AB, 2023). Three visual attention indicators were recorded: the number of fixations, the total duration of fixations, and the average duration of fixations. Areas of Interest (AOIs) were defined for the background context and the weaponry. In unarmed conditions, the AOI equivalent to the weapon location was used to ensure comparability across conditions. This procedure enabled a systematic assessment of attention allocation toward contextual versus weapon-related information.



Figure 1. Experimental Stimuli.

Following the eye-tracking task, participants completed a questionnaire comprising demographic variables (age and gender) and several subjective perception measures, including perceived threat, authority, trustworthiness, sympathy, professionalism, aggressiveness, general trust in the police, and previous experiences with law enforcement or political activity. These self-report measures served as exploratory predictors for visual attention patterns. The sample consisted of N = 66 participants (M_age = 22.75, SD = 4.22), predominantly university students, who were evenly distributed across the four experimental conditions.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)
Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

Results

The results of the two-way analysis of variance provide detailed insights into the participants' visual attention as a function of context and weapon status. Firstly, a significant main effect of situational context on gaze behaviour was found for the first hypothesis. Specifically, it was found that participants in the demonstration context fixated on the background for significantly longer than in the neutral context.

This effect was significant both for total fixation duration, $F(1, 62) = 11.79$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .157$, and for average fixation duration, $F(1, 62) = 7.87$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .088$, as well as for the number of fixations, $F(1, 62) = 21.12$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .243$.

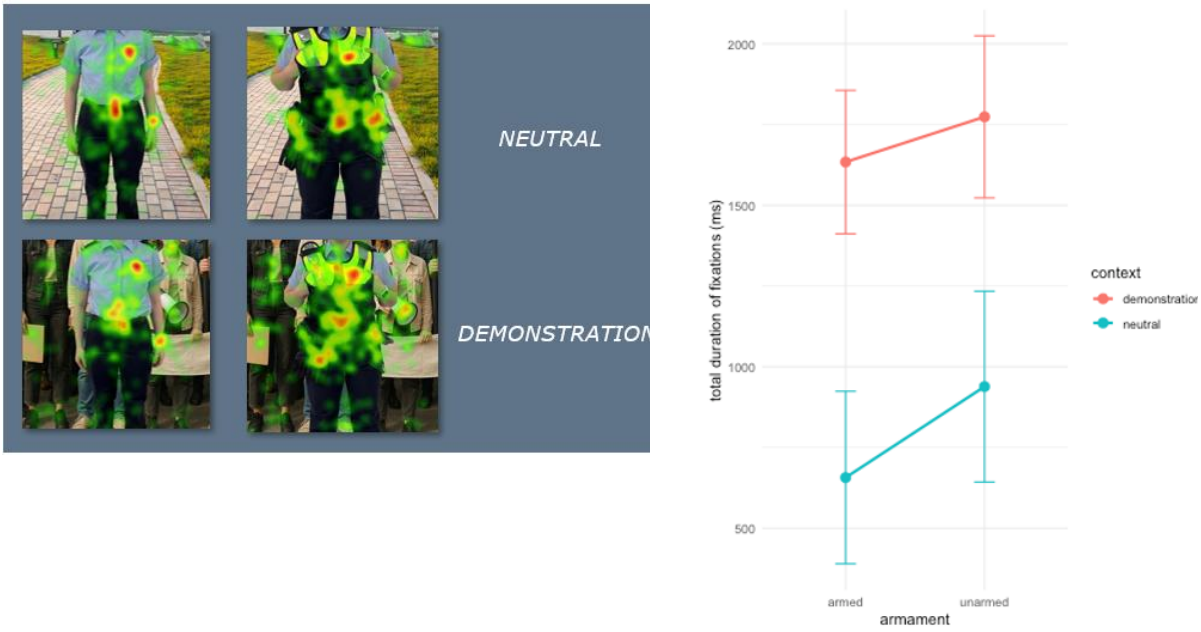


Figure 2. Heatmaps (context) and main effect of the context on the total fixation on the background.

These consistent effects across multiple gaze parameters suggest that demonstration situations are perceived as visually and cognitively more complex and thus attract greater attention. The background in such scenes contains more social information, such as crowds of people, symbols or potential signs of conflict, which stimulates more intensive visual processing.

With regard to the second hypothesis, a significant main effect of armament on gaze behaviour was observed in relation to the corresponding Area of Interest (AOI). Participants fixated on the area of armament significantly more frequently when a weapon was visible, $F(1, 62) = 8.83$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .016$. Similarly, the total fixation duration on the armament was significantly increased, $F(1, 62) = 6.41$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)
Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

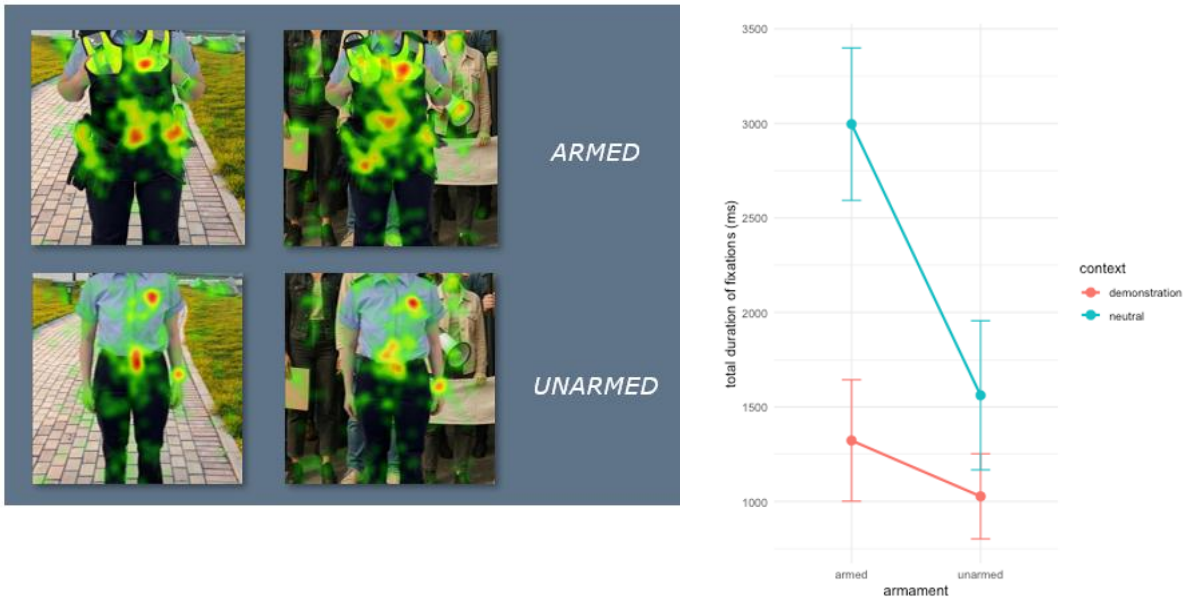


Figure 3. Heatmaps (armament) and main effect of armament on the number of fixations on the AOI (armed).

However, no significant effect was found for the average fixation duration, $F(1, 62) = 0.66$, $p = .42$. These results illustrate that visible weapons act as attention-grabbing stimuli that trigger, in particular, initial and repeated eye movements.

The lack of significance in the average fixation duration could indicate that, although attention is directed towards the weapon more frequently, it is not necessarily directed there for longer per fixation.

For the third hypothesis, an interaction effect between context and armament was examined. Here, a significant interaction effect was found for the number of fixations on the weapon, $F(1, 62) = 4.42$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .001$. This finding suggests that the influence of arming on visual attention is not independent of context, but is modulated by the situation. In demonstration contexts, the weapon appears to take on a different meaning than in neutral scenes, which is reflected in altered attentional bias. With regard to the interaction effects for fixation duration and average fixation duration, however, no significant effects were found, $F(1, 62) = 2.68$, $p = .11$ and $F(1, 62) = 0.08$, $p = .78$ respectively. This suggests that the interaction effect is primarily evident in the frequency of attention, but not in its duration.

The supplementary linear regression analyses examining the relationship between subjective ratings and gaze behaviour did not, on the whole, reveal a consistent pattern of significant correlations. Although individual variables, particularly perceived authority, showed significant effects on gaze behaviour in relation to the background (e.g. $b = -302$, $p < .05$ for fixation duration), these effects did not withstand Bonferroni or Holm corrections. Variables such as trust in the police or prior experiences also showed no stable correlations with gaze behaviour regarding the display of weapons. Overall, this suggests that visual attention can only be predicted to a limited extent by explicit attitudes and is possibly determined more strongly by automatic, stimulus-driven processes.

Discussion

The present findings provide important insights into the perception of police officers and confirm key assumptions of social psychological theories. In particular, it is evident that both the situational context and visual characteristics such as the presence of weapons exert a significant influence on visual attention.

The significant main effect of context illustrates that demonstrations, as socially charged and potentially conflict-prone situations, elicit heightened attention. Participants paid significantly more attention to the background in such scenes, suggesting that complex social environments are processed more intensively. This finding is consistent with assumptions in social-cognitive research, according to which visual attention is directed in particular towards information-rich and emotionally significant stimuli.

The effects of being armed can also be well explained theoretically. The increased attention to weapons confirms the assumption that they function as particularly salient stimuli. This is consistent with the 'weapons effect', which describes how weapons automatically trigger attention and cognitive activation (Berkowitz & LePage, 1967). The results suggest that weapons have particular relevance for perception regardless of context, as they symbolise potential danger and power.

Particular emphasis should be placed on the interaction effect found between context and armament. This shows that the effect of armament cannot be considered in isolation, but must always be interpreted in conjunction with situational factors. In demonstration contexts, armament appears to take on a different meaning than in neutral situations. This could be due to the fact that, in conflict-laden contexts, the weapon is perceived more strongly as a potential means of escalation, whereas in neutral contexts it is interpreted more as part of standard equipment.

The results of the regression analyses provide further evidence of the relationship between implicit and explicit perceptual processes. The largely absent correlations between questionnaire data and eye-tracking measures suggest that these capture different levels of perception. Whilst eye-tracking measures immediate, often unconscious attentional processes, questionnaires reflect reflected and consciously accessible evaluations. This discrepancy was also interpreted within the study itself as an indication of the importance of methodological triangulation.

However, alongside these findings, the limitations of the study must also be taken into account. The use of a predominantly student sample restricts the generalisability of the results. Furthermore, static image stimuli were used, which can only represent real-life police situations to a limited extent. Dynamic aspects such as interaction, movement or situational escalation are not taken into account, which limits the ecological validity.

At the same time, however, the study also has several strengths. Of particular note is the experimental design, which allows for a clear separation of conditions and supports the investigation of causal relationships. Furthermore, the combination of eye-tracking and questionnaire data represents a methodological strength, as both implicit and explicit processes are captured. This triangulation enhances the validity of the results and allows for a nuanced examination of the perception of police officers.

In summary, the results show that the perception of police officers is a complex process determined by the interplay of visual characteristics and situational factors. The study thus makes an important contribution to the understanding of social perception processes in the context of state authority and highlights the significance of context-dependent interpretations.

Limitations of the study

The present study has several methodological limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting the results. A key limitation stems from the cross-sectional study design. As all data were collected at a single point in time, no conclusions can be drawn regarding temporal developments or long-term effects. Whilst the experimental design allows for the analysis of relationships between variables, conclusions regarding causal processes over time are only possible to a limited extent.

Another critical aspect concerns the composition of the sample. The study was based on a predominantly student sample, which is relatively homogeneous in terms of age, education and social experiences. This limits the generalisability of the results to the general population, as attitudes towards the police can be strongly influenced by individual life experiences, social backgrounds and political convictions. Furthermore, the use of static image stimuli represents a methodological limitation. Whilst these allow for a high degree of experimental control, they only partially reflect real-life police situations.

Dynamic aspects such as movement, interaction or escalation processes are not taken into account, which limits the ecological validity of the study. Another limiting factor is the restriction to a female police officer in all stimuli. This approach was chosen to control for gender effects and increase internal validity. At the same time, however, this limits the generalisability of the results, as the gender of police officers has been shown to influence perceptions of authority, threat and trust. The measurement methods used also have specific limitations. Whilst eye-tracking enables the objective measurement of visual attention, this method does not provide direct information about underlying cognitive evaluations or emotional processes. Conversely, questionnaire data may be influenced by social desirability or conscious bias. The interpretation of the results therefore requires a careful integration of both data sources.

Conclusions & recommendations

The study's findings can be applied to several areas of practical relevance and provide valuable insights into managing police presence in public spaces. A key implication concerns the design of police visibility. As the results show that visible weaponry automatically attracts attention and may potentially be interpreted as threatening, the manner in which police equipment is presented should be carefully considered. Particularly in sensitive situations, a less dominant display of weapons could help to reduce perceptions of escalation.

Furthermore, the results highlight the importance of the situational context. Police behaviour is not assessed in isolation, but is always interpreted in the context of the situation at hand. In protest contexts, which are already characterised by heightened emotional arousal, visible weaponry can have a different effect than in neutral situations.

This suggests that police strategies should be designed to be more context-sensitive. A further practical implication arises for police communication and public relations. As perception is shaped not only by behaviour but also by visual impressions, police authorities should pay particular attention to how they present themselves in public. This applies to both real-life operations and media portrayals.

Furthermore, the results highlight the relevance of implicit perceptual processes. As visual attention does not always align with conscious evaluations, training programmes for police officers should also take into account the impact of non-verbal and visual signals. This can help to make their conduct in public spaces more conscious. Finally, there are implications

for the further development of empirical research. The study shows that the combination of eye-tracking and questionnaire data provides valuable insights into perceptual processes. Future studies could expand on these approaches, for example by using dynamic stimuli or realistic simulations, to further improve the generalisability of the results.

The present study clearly demonstrates that the perception of police officers is determined by a complex interplay of visual and situational factors. Both the visibility of weaponry and the context of perception exert significant influences on visual attention. The results illustrate that weapons function as particularly salient stimuli that automatically attract attention, whilst socially charged contexts such as demonstrations trigger more intensive processing of the environment. The demonstrated interaction effect underscores that the significance of weaponry cannot be considered in isolation, but is always interpreted within context.

Furthermore, the lack of agreement between implicit and explicit measures indicates that perception occurs at different levels of processing. This highlights the importance of methodological triangulation and underscores the need to combine different measurement approaches to enable a comprehensive understanding of social perception processes. Overall, the study makes an important contribution to our understanding of the perception of state authority and demonstrates that both visual design and situational context are decisive factors in the assessment of police presence.

References

1. Barrett, L. F. (2017). *How emotions are made: The secret life of the brain*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
2. Becker, J. C., Hartwich, L., & Radke, H. R. M. (2025). The effect of apparent police power at demonstrations against right-wing populism on protestors' resistance using a virtual reality experiment. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 64*(2), Article e12809. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12809
3. Anderson, C. A., Benjamin, A. J., & Bartholow, B. D. (1998). *Does the gun pull the trigger? Automatic priming effects of weapon pictures and weapon names*. Psychological Science, 9(4), 308–314. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00061
4. Berkowitz, L., & LePage, A. (1967). Weapons as aggression-eliciting stimuli. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 7*(2), 202–207. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0025008
5. Bickman, L. (1974). The social power of a uniform. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 4*(1), 47–61. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1974.tb00623.x
6. Birkel, C., Guzy, N., Hummelsheim, D., Oberwittler, D., & Pritsch, J. (2014). *Der Deutsche Viktimisierungssurvey 2012: Erste Ergebnisse zu Opfererfahrungen, Einstellungen gegenüber der Polizei und Kriminalitätsfurcht* (Arbeitsbericht A7/2014). Max-Planck-Institut für ausländisches und internationales Strafrecht.
7. Bradford, B., & Jackson, J. (2010). Trust and confidence in policing. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 4*(3), 241–248. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paq024
8. Bradley, M. M., & Lang, P. J. (2007). Emotion and motivation. In J. T. Cacioppo, L. G. Tassinary & G. G. Berntson (Eds.), *Handbook of psychophysiology* (3rd ed., pp. 581–607). Cambridge University Press.
9. Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
10. Cohen, J., Cohen, P., West, S. G., & Aiken, L. S. (2003). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences* (3rd ed.). Lawrence

Erlbaum Associates.

11. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.
12. Denzin, N. K. (2012). Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 6*(2), 80–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689812437186
13. Döring, N., & Bortz, J. (2016). *Forschungsmethoden und Evaluation in den Sozial- und Humanwissenschaften* (5. Aufl.). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-41089-5
14. Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review, 109*(3), 573–598. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573
15. Eckstein, M. K., Guerra-Carrillo, B., Singley, A. T. M., & Bunge, S. A. (2016). Beyond eye gaze: What else can eye tracking reveal about cognition and cognitive development? *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, 25*, 69–91. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcn.2016.11.001
16. Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). Sage.
17. Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (2013). *Social cognition: From brains to culture* (2nd ed.). Sage. 22
18. Flick, C., Schweitzer, K., & Revels-Strother, O. (2025). Public perceptions of police use of force encounters: Demographic, attitudinal, and situational predictors. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 40*(4), 902–919. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-025-09777-z
19. French, J. R. P., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in social power* (pp. 150–167). University of Michigan Press.
20. Geise, S. (2011). Eye tracking as a method for analyzing visual attention in media research. *Studies in Communication Sciences, 11*(2), 1–26.
21. Geise, S., Heck, A., Panke, D., & Schlote, K. (2024). Visual politics and emotional responses to protest imagery. *Political Communication*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2024.xxxxx
22. Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Houghton Mifflin.
23. Holmqvist, K., Nyström, M., Andersson, R., Dewhurst, R., Jarodzka, H., & van de Weijer, J. (2011). *Eye tracking: A comprehensive guide to methods and measures*. Oxford University Press.
24. Howell, D. C. (2012). *Statistical methods for psychology* (8th ed.). Cengage Learning.
25. Liebl, K. (2005). Vertrauen zur Polizei – Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme und neue Untersuchungsergebnisse. In H. Groß & P. Schmidt (Hrsg.), *Innen- und Außenansicht(en) der Polizei: Empirische Polizeiforschung VI* (S. 151–178). Verlag für Polizeiwissenschaft.
26. Loftus, E. F., Loftus, G. R., & Messo, J. (1987). Some facts about "weapon focus". *Law and Human Behavior, 11*(1), 55–62. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01044839
27. Nassauer, A. (2015). Theoretische Überlegungen zur Entstehung von Gewalt in Protesten: Eine situative mechanismische Erklärung. *Berliner Journal für Soziologie, 25*(4), 491–518. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11609-016-0302-6
28. Petersen, M. B. (2015). *Evolutionary political psychology: On the origins and structure of heuristics and biases in politics*. Oxford University Press.

29. Ray, J. J. (1976). Do authoritarians hold authoritarian attitudes? *Human Relations, 29*(4), 307– 325. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872677602900401
30. Rayner, K. (1998). Eye movements in reading and information processing: 20 years of research. *Psychological Bulletin, 124*(3), 372–422. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.124.3.372
31. R Core Team (2025). R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing. R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, Austria. https://www.R-project.org/
32. Ross, L., & Nisbett, R. E. (1991). *The person and the situation: Perspectives of social psychology*.McGraw-Hill.
33. Simpson, R., & Radford, S. (2021). The use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by police during a public health crisis: An experimental test of public perception. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 18*(2), 297–319. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-020-09451-w
34. Stephan, W. G., & Stephan, C. W. (2000). An integrated threat theory of prejudice. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), *Reducing prejudice and discrimination* (pp. 23–45). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
35. Sunshine, J., & Tyler, T. R. (2003). The role of procedural justice and legitimacy in shaping public support for policing. *Law & Society Review, 37*(3), 513–548. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5893.3703002
36. Tobii AB. (2023). *Tobii Pro Lab* [Computer software]. https://www.tobii.com/
37. Tyler, T. R. (2006). Psychological perspectives on legitimacy and legitimation. *Annual Review of Psychology, 57*, 375–400. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.57.102904.190038
38. Yesberg, J. A., Bradford, B., & Dawson, P. (2021). An experimental study of responses to armed police in Great Britain. *Journal of Experimental Criminology, 17*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-019-09408-8

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

COMPENSATION FOR DAMAGE RESULTING FROM THE DEATH OF A PERSON: LEGAL REGULATION AND JUDICIAL PRACTICE IN LITHUANIA

Eglė ŠTAREIKĖ
Mykolas Romeris University
Ateities str. 20, 08303 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: egle.stareike@mruni.eu
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7992-991X

Aleksas ZEBLECKIS-ŠEPUTIS
Mykolas Romeris University
Ateities str. 20, 08303 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: a.l.seputis@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-1233-8039

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-14

Abstract. *The right to compensation for damage is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania and further regulated by the Civil Code. Where a person dies as a result of unlawful conduct, compensation may be awarded for both pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage. Although Lithuanian law establishes general criteria for assessing non-pecuniary damage, it neither defines the relative importance of these criteria nor sets minimum or maximum compensation amounts. As a result, the assessment of non-pecuniary damage largely depends on judicial discretion and the development of case law. Due to its intangible nature, determining appropriate compensation remains one of the most complex issues in cases involving the death of a person.*
This article examines the legal framework governing compensation for damage resulting from the death of a person and analyses Lithuanian judicial practice between 1 January 2020 and 1 September 2025. The study is based on an analysis of 101 court cases and 102 individual claims. The latter number reflects situations in which several claimants sought compensation within the same proceedings. To evaluate the individual relationship between each claimant and the deceased, every claimant was examined separately. Particular attention is paid to the criteria applied by courts when assessing non-pecuniary damage, including the relationship between the claimant and the deceased, the defendant's financial situation, and the circumstances surrounding the death. The findings identify the main trends in Lithuanian judicial practice and the factors influencing the determination of compensation in cases involving the death of a person. They also identify the compensation amounts most commonly awarded by courts and the factors that most significantly influence judicial decision-making in such cases.

Keywords: *compensation for damage, death of a person, pecuniary damage, non-pecuniary damage.*

Introduction

The right to compensation for damage is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, which is the supreme legal act within the Lithuanian legal system. Article 30 of the Constitution provides that any person whose constitutional rights or freedoms have been violated has the right to apply to a court for their protection. The Constitution further establishes that compensation for pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage shall be regulated by law.

The institution of compensation for damage was further developed in Lithuanian private law with the entry into force of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania in 2001. Although this legal institution is not new, it remains one of the principal mechanisms through which individuals protect violated rights and legitimate interests. Consequently, its interpretation and application require continuous analysis and reassessment in order to ensure legal certainty and the consistent application of legal norms.

The relevance of this study is determined by several factors. Although Lithuanian law establishes general criteria for assessing non-pecuniary damage, it does not define the relative importance of these criteria. Nor does it provide minimum or maximum compensation amounts. As a result, the determination of non-pecuniary damage largely depends on judicial discretion and the development of case law. Therefore, the practical significance of the criteria applied by courts and the compensation amounts typically awarded can be identified only through a systematic analysis of both the legal framework and judicial practice.

Compensation for damage resulting from the death of a person is a particularly complex area of civil liability. This is especially true in relation to non-pecuniary damage, which includes emotional suffering, grief, emotional shock, distress, inconvenience, and other non-material consequences. Such damage cannot be objectively measured or precisely quantified in monetary terms. Consequently, determining an appropriate amount of compensation presents significant legal and practical challenges.

The importance of analysing compensation for damage resulting from the death of a person is further reinforced by the close relationship between legal regulation and judicial practice. While legislation establishes the general legal framework, courts play a decisive role in interpreting and applying legal provisions in individual cases. Accordingly, a comprehensive understanding of this area of law requires an examination of both legal regulation and judicial practice.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What amounts of compensation do Lithuanian courts typically award in cases involving damage resulting from the death of a person?
2. Which factors have the greatest influence on the determination of non-pecuniary damage in such cases?

The object of this study is the legal regulation and judicial practice concerning compensation for damage resulting from the death of a person, with particular emphasis on the determination of pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage.

The aim of this study is to analyse the legal regulation and judicial practice concerning compensation for damage resulting from the death of a person and to identify the principal factors influencing the determination of compensation, with particular emphasis on non-pecuniary damage.

Research Methodology and Organisation. To achieve the aim of the study and identify the principal factors influencing the determination of compensation, with particular emphasis on non-pecuniary damage, an empirical study was conducted using qualitative and quantitative case-law analysis.

The object of the empirical research consisted of judicial decisions adopted by Lithuanian courts in cases concerning compensation for damage resulting from the death of a person.

Chronological scope of the research. The study covers the period from 1 January 2020 to 1 September 2025. This period was selected to identify recent developments in judicial practice, changes in the interpretation of legal norms, and current tendencies in the assessment of damages.

Data collection and search strategy. Judicial decisions were identified using the Infolex legal information database. The search was conducted using keywords related to Article 6.284 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania concerning liability for damage resulting from the deprivation of life.

Sample and selection criteria. The final sample consisted of 101 court cases comprising 102 individual claims. These cases were decided by the Lithuanian Regional Courts, the Court of Appeal of Lithuania, and the Supreme Court of Lithuania.

The following inclusion criteria were applied:

(a) the case was decided between 1 January 2020 and 1 September 2025;

(b) the reasoning section of the judgment, verdict, or ruling addressed the issue of non-pecuniary damage and referred to Article 6.284 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania;

(c) neither the claimant nor the defendant was an entity engaged in insurance activities;

(d) the claim was upheld either fully or partially. This criterion also included cases involving multiple claims where at least one claim was upheld.

In cases involving multiple claimants, each claim was analysed separately in order to assess the significance of the claimant's relationship with the deceased.

Data analysis. The selected judicial decisions were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Particular attention was paid to: (1) the legal arguments relied upon by the courts; (2) the factual circumstances influencing the amount of compensation awarded; (3) the relationship between the claimant and the deceased; (4) the defendant's financial situation; (5) the circumstances surrounding the death; and (6) the amount of compensation awarded.

The findings were systematised and compared to identify recurring patterns in judicial practice and the principal factors influencing the determination of damages.

The analysis covers cases involving different causes of death, including criminal offences, traffic accidents, medical malpractice, and other situations giving rise to civil liability. Consequently, the compensation ranges identified in this study should be understood as general tendencies in Lithuanian judicial practice rather than as cause-specific compensation standards.

Particular attention was also paid to differences in the assessment of non-pecuniary damage depending on the circumstances giving rise to liability. Where relevant, the study considers specific statutory compensation mechanisms, including the points-based system applicable in cases involving harm caused to a patient's health.

The Legal Concept of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Damage Resulting from the Death of a Person

The Concept of Pecuniary Damage

In contemporary legal doctrine, pecuniary damage is generally understood as financial or material loss suffered by a natural or legal person. It includes the loss of or damage to property, expenses incurred (direct losses), and loss of income resulting from unlawful acts. In criminal law, pecuniary damage encompasses losses directly caused by a criminal offence, such as property lost as a result of theft or robbery. It also covers losses suffered as a consequence of the offence, including lost income where a person is unable to work due to injury or illness, as well as losses arising from the death of a provider, for example where a child loses a parent or a dependant loses a source of maintenance (Gutauskas, 2026).

Pecuniary damage further includes expenses incurred in addressing the consequences of unlawful conduct, such as medical treatment costs, rehabilitation expenses, and funeral costs.

The Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania provides a statutory definition of pecuniary damage: *"Damage shall mean the loss of or damage to property, expenses incurred (direct losses), as well as loss of income that a person would have received had the unlawful acts not occurred. The monetary expression of damage is loss. Where a party is unable to prove the exact amount of loss, the amount shall be determined by the court."* (Article 6.249 of the Civil Code)

The statutory concept of pecuniary damage has been further developed through the case law of the Supreme Court of Lithuania. According to the Court, damage consists of expenses

incurred, property lost, or property damaged as a result of a debtor's unlawful act or omission, that is, losses that would not have occurred in the absence of such unlawful conduct. The amount of damage is not presumed and must therefore be proven by the claimant in each individual case. Courts must be satisfied that the claimed amount has been properly calculated and substantiated.

The Supreme Court has consistently emphasised that compensation must correspond to the actual loss suffered by the injured person. Only compensation reflecting the real extent of the loss fulfils the compensatory function of civil liability. An award exceeding the actual loss would result in unjust enrichment of the injured party (Supreme Court of Lithuania, ruling of 23 December 2024 in civil case No. e3K-3-242-421/2024).

Legal doctrine adopts a broader understanding of pecuniary damage. According to V. Mikelėnas, pecuniary damage may be regarded as any adverse effect on a person's economic interests (Mikelėnas, 2003, p. 342). From this perspective, damage may be classified according to the protected interest affected, namely damage to property or damage to the person. Examples include the destruction, loss, or deterioration of property, as well as bodily injury, impairment of health, disability, or death (Mikelėnas, 2003, p. 342).

Accordingly, pecuniary damage represents a measurable financial loss affecting a person's property or personal interests. In most cases, it can be calculated with relative precision on the basis of the value of lost or damaged property, incurred expenses, or lost income. For this reason, claims for pecuniary damage are typically supported by objective evidence, such as invoices, receipts, contracts, accounting records, or other financial documents.

Pecuniary damage also includes loss of income. According to the Supreme Court of Lithuania, lost income is determined by calculating the income that could reasonably have been expected and deducting the expenses necessary to generate that income (Supreme Court of Lithuania, ruling of 17 October 2024 in civil case No. e3K-3-192-1120/2024).

The analysis of legal doctrine and judicial practice demonstrates that pecuniary damage is generally capable of objective assessment because it is linked to identifiable financial losses. Consequently, disputes concerning pecuniary damage most often arise not from the existence of damage itself, but from the calculation of its amount.

The Concept of Non-Pecuniary Damage

In legal doctrine, non-pecuniary damage is generally understood as any adverse impact on an individual's emotional, psychological, or social well-being. It encompasses harm that exceeds the ordinary inconveniences and concerns of everyday life and arises as a consequence of another person's unlawful conduct. Such harm cannot be precisely measured or expressed through an objective material equivalent, as it affects a person's subjective experiences and emotional state (Volodko, 2010, p. 69-70).

The current legal definition of non-pecuniary damage is provided in Article 6.250 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania. According to this provision, non-pecuniary damage consists of physical pain, emotional suffering, inconvenience, emotional shock, emotional depression, and other forms of harm assessed in monetary terms by a court. Non-pecuniary damage may arise in two principal situations: first, where a person's non-material values or interests are infringed; and second, where pecuniary damage results in emotional suffering, distress, inconvenience, emotional depression, or similar consequences for the injured person.

This understanding is reflected in contemporary judicial practice. Lithuanian courts recognise that non-pecuniary damage arises where unlawful conduct infringes legally protected personal or non-material interests. Compensation may also be awarded through the direct

application of the Constitution or international legal instruments where no specific statutory provision exists, as well as in other cases provided for by law (Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania). When assessing claims for non-pecuniary damage, courts apply Articles 6.250 and 6.251(2) of the Civil Code together with other relevant legal provisions and established judicial practice.

Article 6.250(2) of the Civil Code establishes the principal criteria for determining the amount of compensation for non-pecuniary damage:

1. The consequences of the non-pecuniary damage;
2. The fault of the person who caused the damage;
3. The financial situation of the person who caused the damage;
4. Where pecuniary damage has also been caused, the amount of pecuniary damage;
5. Other circumstances relevant to the case, as well as the principles of fairness, justice, and reasonableness.

Importantly, this list is not exhaustive. Depending on the circumstances of a particular case, courts may take into account additional factors when determining the amount of compensation. These factors may include the age, profession, and social status of the injured person, particularly cynical treatment of the victim, the victim's gross negligence contributing to the occurrence or increase of the damage, the conduct of the person who caused the damage after the unlawful act, and other circumstances relevant to the individual case.

When determining the amount of compensation, courts must assess the nature of the value infringed by the unlawful conduct and identify the specific personal or property-related interest affected. Human life occupies a unique position within the legal system as an absolute and inherent non-material value. Consequently, violations resulting in the death of a person generally cause exceptionally severe emotional suffering and distress to close relatives and dependants. For this reason, compensation awarded in such cases is typically higher than in cases involving the infringement of other legal interests.

Judicial practice also plays a significant role in determining the amount of compensation for non-pecuniary damage. When deciding such claims, courts commonly consider compensation awarded in comparable cases in order to promote consistency and legal certainty (Court of Appeal of Lithuania, ruling of 6 March 2025 in case No. 1A-60-851/2025). At the same time, previous awards do not constitute binding legal rules, since the factual circumstances relevant to the assessment of non-pecuniary damage are rarely identical across different cases (Court of Appeal of Lithuania, ruling of 10 July 2024 in criminal case No. 1A-210-579/2024).

In summary, non-pecuniary damage is inherently abstract in nature. Unlike pecuniary damage, it cannot be directly observed, measured, or quantified with precision. Instead, it reflects an individual's subjective experience of emotional and psychological suffering. Unlike pecuniary damage, non-pecuniary damage cannot be established through objective financial criteria. As a result, courts are required to balance statutory criteria with the specific circumstances of each case, which explains the significant role of judicial discretion in this area.

Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Damage Resulting from the Death of a Person

In cases concerning compensation for damage resulting from the death of a person, courts generally distinguish between two categories of damage: pecuniary damage and non-pecuniary damage. Pecuniary damage is intended to compensate measurable financial losses, whereas

non-pecuniary damage seeks to compensate the emotional and psychological suffering caused by the death.

In such cases, pecuniary damage usually consists of two main components: (a) funeral expenses and (b) the loss of financial support that the claimant received or was entitled to receive from the deceased during the deceased's lifetime.

Funeral expenses may include the costs of acquiring a coffin, flowers, clothing, transportation, funeral services, funeral receptions, and grave maintenance. These expenses are assessed in accordance with the principle of reasonableness (Vilnius Regional Court, judgment of 21 May 2024 in criminal case No. 1-91-1036/2024). Claims for funeral expenses must be supported by financial documents, such as invoices, receipts, or similar evidence.

The second component of pecuniary damage relates to maintenance. This type of compensation is awarded to persons who were financially dependent on the deceased, including minor children, employed spouses (Vilnius Regional Court, ruling of 20 August 2020 in civil case No. e2-1504-866/2020), spouses earning lower incomes (Vilnius Regional Court, ruling of 22 April 2025 in civil case No. 2A-719-661/2025), unemployed spouses, incapacitated parents, and other dependants who were unable to support themselves independently (Supreme Court of Lithuania, ruling of 30 May 2024 in criminal case No. 2K-102-511/2024).

Judicial practice demonstrates two principal approaches to calculating maintenance-related pecuniary damage. First, compensation may be determined on the basis of a reasonable and proportionate amount of income and the period during which maintenance would have been required. For example, compensation may be awarded in the amount of the minimum monthly wage until the deceased's children reach the age of majority. Second, compensation may be calculated on the basis of the income, or part of the income, that the deceased could reasonably have been expected to earn in the future. For instance, when assessing the pecuniary damage suffered by a surviving spouse as a result of the loss of the deceased's income, courts take into account the income earned by the deceased prior to death, typically one-half of such income, together with the deceased's statistical life expectancy (Court of Appeal of Lithuania, ruling of 3 March 2022 in civil case No. e2A-117-798/2022).

The above analysis demonstrates that pecuniary damage resulting from the death of a person is generally capable of objective calculation. It is linked to identifiable financial losses and can usually be substantiated through documentary evidence.

By contrast, non-pecuniary damage is significantly more difficult to assess. As discussed in the previous section, it consists of physical pain, emotional suffering, inconvenience, emotional shock, emotional depression, and other forms of harm assessed in monetary terms by a court.

Although the loss of a close relative is inherently traumatic and, by its nature, provides grounds for compensation for non-pecuniary damage, the claimant is not relieved of the burden of proof. The claimant must establish the existence and significance of an emotional relationship with the deceased. Consequently, determining the amount of non-pecuniary damage is predominantly a question of fact rather than a question of law. Claimants may rely on all forms of evidence permitted by law, while courts must assess the totality of the evidence and the factual circumstances of the individual case.

This distinction between pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage is particularly important for the purposes of the present study. While pecuniary damage can generally be calculated on the basis of objective financial criteria, the assessment of non-pecuniary damage depends to a much greater extent on judicial discretion and the circumstances of the individual case. For this reason, the determination of non-pecuniary damage remains one of the most complex issues in

Lithuanian judicial practice. The criteria and circumstances influencing such assessments are examined in greater detail in the following section.

Challenges in Awarding Compensation for Damage Resulting from the Death of a Person: An Analysis of Judicial Practice

While pecuniary damage can generally be assessed on the basis of objectively verifiable criteria, non-pecuniary damage is inherently more difficult to quantify. In determining the amount of non-pecuniary damage, courts rely on the general, non-exhaustive list of criteria set out in Article 6.250(2) of the Civil Code. Accordingly, the present analysis seeks to identify the factors considered by courts in assessing non-pecuniary damage, their relative significance, and the levels of compensation typically awarded in cases involving the death of a person.

The Assessment of Non-Pecuniary Damage in Cases Involving the Death of a Person

Unlike pecuniary damage, non-pecuniary damage cannot be assessed on the basis of objective financial criteria. It encompasses emotional suffering, grief, psychological distress, and other consequences that do not have a direct monetary value. Consequently, the assessment of non-pecuniary damage raises a fundamental question: whether and to what extent emotional suffering resulting from the death of a person can be compensated through monetary awards.

The Supreme Court of Lithuania has recognised that non-pecuniary damage affects values that do not have a direct monetary expression. Therefore, the principle of full compensation cannot be applied in the same manner as in cases involving pecuniary damage. Since emotional suffering cannot be completely eliminated or restored, fair compensation must be understood as monetary satisfaction that, to the greatest extent possible, reflects and alleviates the emotional distress, physical suffering, or other infringements of non-material interests experienced by the injured person (Supreme Court of Lithuania, ruling of 10 June 2020 in civil case No. e3K-3-181-611/2020).

The Civil Code does not establish minimum or maximum limits for compensation for non-pecuniary damage. Instead, it provides courts with a non-exhaustive list of criteria that must be assessed in the circumstances of each individual case. This approach reflects the understanding that emotional suffering cannot be measured precisely and that compensation must therefore be determined through an individualised assessment of the specific circumstances of the case.

Since emotional suffering cannot be measured objectively, courts must balance the statutory criteria established by the Civil Code with the specific circumstances of each case. Consequently, judicial discretion plays a central role in determining the amount of compensation. The absence of minimum and maximum compensation limits further increases the importance of judicial practice in ensuring consistency and fairness in awards of non-pecuniary damage.

This approach is also reflected in the Recommended Quality Standards for Judicial Decisions, which emphasise that judges should avoid moralising or imposing personal ethical, religious, or philosophical views in judicial decisions (Resolution on the Approval of the Recommended Quality Standards for Judicial Procedural Decisions, 2016). Consequently, judicial decisions concerning non-pecuniary damage focus primarily on legally relevant facts and circumstances rather than on abstract ethical considerations.

The significance of this approach becomes particularly evident in cases involving the death of a person. Since neither legislation nor judicial practice provides a precise formula for

assessing emotional suffering, courts must determine compensation through the application of statutory criteria and the evaluation of the individual circumstances of each case.

Accordingly, the following sections analyse the principal factors considered by Lithuanian courts when determining compensation for non-pecuniary damage, with particular attention to the claimant's relationship with the deceased, the defendant's status, and the circumstances of death.

The Defendant's Financial Situation

One of the criteria considered when determining the amount of non-pecuniary damage is the defendant's financial situation. Compensation for non-pecuniary damage constitutes a form of monetary satisfaction that the injured party may legitimately expect to receive. However, where a court awards an amount that, for objective reasons, cannot realistically be recovered, the purpose of compensation may be undermined. In such circumstances, the court's decision may fail to satisfy the legitimate expectations of the injured party (Kaunas Regional Court, ruling of 19 June 2020 in criminal case No. N1-68-317/2020).

Accordingly, where it is established that the defendant is objectively incapable of satisfying the claimant's claim, the amount awarded may be reduced. In such cases, courts seek to maintain a balance between the injured party's right to compensation and the legitimate interests of the person who caused the damage. This consideration is particularly relevant where the defendant was a minor at the time of committing the offence or where other circumstances significantly limit the defendant's financial capacity.

A difficult financial situation may arise in a variety of circumstances; however, it is most commonly encountered among individuals at the extremes of age, namely young persons and elderly individuals. Younger persons may find themselves in such a situation because they have not yet had sufficient time to accumulate assets, obtain education, or secure qualified and well-remunerated employment. Elderly individuals, on the other hand, may experience financial hardship because they are no longer able to engage in qualified employment, may have lost their capacity to work, have retired, or face similar circumstances.

Judicial practice reveals cases in which defendants are not only objectively unable to compensate the claimant at the time the court renders its decision because they have no employment and possess no personal assets, but are also serving lengthy terms of imprisonment, thereby lacking realistic opportunities to acquire assets or satisfy the claim in the foreseeable future. The results of the present study did not reveal any precise limits regarding the reduction of pecuniary or non-pecuniary damage awards on the basis of the defendant's difficult financial situation. Nevertheless, it was consistently observed that the amount awarded is not reduced to zero solely because of the defendant's financial difficulties.

The findings of the present study further indicate that this criterion is applied primarily in cases where the defendant is a natural person. Similar considerations are encountered considerably less frequently where the defendant is a legal entity, which is generally characterised by greater financial stability and broader opportunities to satisfy the claimant's claim.

It should be noted that a finding that the defendant is in a poor financial situation does not deprive the claimant of the possibility of obtaining compensation. Where the accused person or those civilly liable for his or her actions lack sufficient resources to compensate the damage, compensation may, in cases and according to the procedure established by law, be paid from state funds designated for that purpose (Article 118 of the Code of Criminal Procedure). Such

compensation is awarded in accordance with the procedure established by the Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Compensation for Damage Caused by Violent Crimes.

Where a court has rendered a judgment awarding pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage and the defendant's difficult financial situation has been established in the proceedings, an application may be submitted to the administrator of the Programme of the Fund for Victims of Crime seeking compensation for damage caused by a violent crime. Upon assessing the factual circumstances and determining a fair amount of compensation that does not exceed the limits established in Article 7 of the aforementioned Law, the administrator adopts a reasoned decision. Such a decision may be challenged before a court of first-instance administrative jurisdiction in accordance with the procedure established by law (Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Compensation for Damage Caused by Violent Crimes, 2005).

The existence of this compensation mechanism demonstrates that Lithuanian law seeks to balance the defendant's financial limitations with the injured party's right to compensation. Consequently, although a difficult financial situation may justify a reduction in the amount awarded, it does not eliminate the claimant's possibility of obtaining compensation.

Therefore, both the applicable legal framework and judicial practice demonstrate that the defendant's financial situation constitutes a relevant factor when determining the amount of pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage. However, the results of the present study suggest that this criterion is generally secondary in nature. While it may influence the final amount awarded, it does not outweigh factors directly related to the claimant's suffering, such as the relationship with the deceased or the circumstances surrounding the death. Nevertheless, judicial practice confirms that the defendant's financial situation remains relevant in ensuring that compensation awards are realistic, enforceable, and consistent with the principles of fairness, justice, and reasonableness.

Other Circumstances Relevant to the Assessment of Non-Pecuniary Damage

In addition to the criteria expressly identified in Article 6.250(2) of the Civil Code, courts may take into account other circumstances relevant to the case, as well as the principles of fairness, justice, and reasonableness. This category encompasses a broad range of factual circumstances that may be relevant to the assessment of non-pecuniary damage. Such circumstances often include the individual characteristics of the victim, such as age, profession, and social status, the conduct of the person who caused the damage before or after the offence, and other case-specific considerations (Klaipėda Regional Court, ruling of 8 July 2025 in criminal case No. 1A-58-635/2025).

The broad nature of this criterion allows courts to assess each case individually and to take account of circumstances that cannot be exhaustively defined in legislation. Judicial practice demonstrates that this category frequently includes the risky conduct of the deceased, the circumstances surrounding the death, the legal nature of the defendant, and situations in which compensation is recovered not from the defendant personally but from his or her successors in rights and obligations.

In judicial practice, risky conduct is generally understood as conduct characterised by negligence or recklessness rather than intentional provocation. In such situations, the victim fails to appreciate the potential consequences of his or her actions, despite being objectively capable of foreseeing them. Although such conduct is not necessarily offensive or deliberately provocative, it may create conditions that facilitate the commission of a criminal offence. Examples include imprudent behaviour during a conflict, reckless conduct in a violent environment, or disregard for the possibility of an aggressive response. The essence of risky

conduct therefore lies in the fact that the victim, through his or her own behaviour, contributes to the circumstances that lead to the criminal act (Court of Appeal of Lithuania, ruling of 4 March 2025 in criminal case No. 1A-17-1020/2025).

Where the risky conduct of the deceased contributed to the circumstances leading to death, not only may the offender's sentence be reduced, as such conduct is recognised as a mitigating circumstance in criminal law (Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania, 2000), but the amount of compensation awarded may also be reduced. The results of the present study suggest that courts generally treat the contribution of the deceased to the events leading to death as a factor justifying a reduction in compensation rather than a refusal to award compensation altogether.

The individual characteristics of the victim and the offender are often described only briefly in judicial decisions or are not discussed at all. Such circumstances frequently play an important role in determining pecuniary damage, particularly in relation to claims for maintenance, where courts must consider the person's age, profession, social status, and income earned prior to death. However, these factors rarely have a significant influence on the assessment of non-pecuniary damage, as they are generally unrelated to the emotional and personal significance of the deceased to the claimants.

The circumstances surrounding the death may, however, play a significant role in determining the amount of non-pecuniary damage. For example, in its judgment of 20 January 2025 in criminal case No. 1-90-634/2025, the Kaunas Regional Court established that the deceased had been murdered in a particularly violent manner that posed a danger to other individuals. The killing had also been commissioned and motivated by personal reasons. Having regard to these circumstances, the court concluded that the death caused exceptionally severe emotional suffering, distress, and shock to the claimants and justified a departure from the range of compensation typically awarded in similar cases. As a result, each claimant was awarded EUR 50,000 in compensation for non-pecuniary damage.

The legal nature of the defendant may also influence the assessment of damages. The results of the present study demonstrated that where a difficult financial situation was established, the defendant was almost invariably a natural person. Legal entities are generally more financially stable and, unlike natural persons, cannot be sentenced to long-term imprisonment. Consequently, their ability to satisfy a claimant's claim is not affected by the same limitations. Although the legal nature of the defendant is rarely analysed as a separate criterion, the differences between natural and legal persons may indirectly influence the final amount of compensation awarded.

Another circumstance that may affect the assessment of damages arises where compensation is recovered not from the person who caused the damage but from his or her successors in rights and obligations. In its ruling of 14 January 2020 in civil case No. e2A-82-934/2020, the Vilnius Regional Court established that the person responsible for the death of the claimant's close relative had died. Consequently, the obligation to compensate the claimant for non-pecuniary damage fell upon the heirs of the defendant's estate. The court considered this circumstance sufficient to justify a reduction in the amount awarded. It emphasised that the heirs had no connection with the unlawful acts that caused the damage and bore no responsibility for the claimant's emotional suffering. Accordingly, the direct participation, or objective inability to participate, of the person responsible for the damage may influence the final assessment of compensation.

In conclusion, the criterion of “other circumstances relevant to the case” is inherently broad and flexible. The results of the present study demonstrate that factors such as the conduct of the deceased, the circumstances surrounding the death, the legal nature of the defendant, and

the involvement of successors in rights and obligations may all influence the amount of compensation awarded. In exceptional cases, these circumstances may become decisive factors justifying either an increase or a reduction in the amount of non-pecuniary damage.

Assessment of Non-Pecuniary Damage in Cases Involving Harm Caused to a Patient

Unlike the general approach applied by courts in cases involving the death of a person, compensation for non-pecuniary damage arising from harm caused to a patient's health is determined according to a statutory points-based system established by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on the Approval of the Description of the Procedure for Compensation of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Damage Arising from Harm Caused to a Patient's Health (hereinafter - the Description).

Under this system, the Commission for the Determination of Damage Caused to Patients' Health assesses the circumstances of the case and determines the amount of non-pecuniary damage by awarding points for specific criteria. The total number of points is multiplied by the value assigned to a single point, which currently amounts to EUR 100 (Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on the Approval of the Description of the Procedure for Compensation of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Damage Arising from Harm Caused to a Patient's Health, 2020).

In cases involving the death of a patient, the Commission evaluates several criteria, including the claimant's relationship with the deceased, the closeness of that relationship, the existence of material maintenance provided by the deceased, emotional suffering and its consequences, the impact of the death on the claimant's social life, the patient's health condition prior to death, pecuniary damage, and other relevant circumstances.

The most significant criteria are the claimant's relationship with the deceased, the emotional and social consequences of the death, and the existence of maintenance provided by the deceased (Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on the Approval of the Description of the Procedure for Compensation of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Damage Arising from Harm Caused to a Patient's Health, 2020).

Where the maximum number of points is awarded, compensation may reach EUR 24,400. Following the Commission's decision, compensation is paid by the institution authorised by the Government. Where a court subsequently awards a higher amount of compensation, the claimant is entitled to receive the difference between the amount awarded by the court and the amount already paid pursuant to the Commission's decision.

The existence of this points-based system distinguishes cases involving medical liability from the general judicial approach analysed in the present study. While courts typically determine compensation through an individual assessment of statutory criteria and case-specific circumstances, compensation for harm caused to a patient's health is based on a predefined methodology designed to ensure greater consistency and predictability in compensation awards.

The Relationship Between the Claimant and the Deceased as a Criterion for Determining Non-Pecuniary Damage

The relationship between the claimant and the deceased is one of the most significant factors influencing the amount of non-pecuniary damage awarded in cases involving the death of a person. The results of the present study demonstrate a clear tendency: the closer the familial relationship, the higher the amount of compensation generally awarded.

Table 1 presents the typical amounts of compensation for non-pecuniary damage awarded in judicial practice, categorised according to the claimant's relationship with the deceased.

Table 1. Typical Amounts of Compensation for Non-Pecuniary Damage Resulting from the Death of a Person

Relationship to the Deceased	Typical Amounts of Compensation for Non-Pecuniary Damage Awarded (EUR)	Cases
Father	EUR 10,000-35,000	e2A-154-464/2025; e2A-680-464/2023; e2-937-392/2023; 1-113-526/2022; 1-44-744/2022; 1A-168-606/2022; 1-37-795/2022; 1-30-255/2021; 1-37-593/2021; N1-68-317/2020
Mother	EUR 15,000-25,000	1-24-354/2024; 1-66-744/2023; 1-160-317/2020
Spouse	EUR 8,500-30,000	e2A-154-464/2025; 2K-102-511/2024; e2A-680-464/2023; 1A-168-606/2022; e2-506-642/2020; N1-68-317/2020
Child (son or daughter)	EUR 10,000-35,000	1-67-1036/2024; 1-157-813/2022; 1-216-530/2022; 1-44-744/2022; 1-37-795/2022; 1-30-255/2021; N1-43-768/2021; 1-37-593/2021; 1-24-354/2024; e2A-227-790/2023
Sibling (brother or sister)	EUR 5,000-20,000	e2A-154-464/2025; 2K-102-511/2024; 1-216-530/2022; 1-44-744/2022; 1A-168-606/2022; 1-37-795/2022; 1-30-255/2021; N1-43-768/2021; 1-37-593/2021; 1-91-1036/2024; 1-66-744/2023; 1-288-634/2022; 1-160-317/2020

Source: *Compiled by the authors based on an analysis of judicial practice concerning compensation for damage resulting from the death of a person during the period from 1 January 2020 to 1 September 2025. Table 1 demonstrates a clear correlation between the closeness of the claimant's relationship with the deceased and the amount of non-pecuniary damage awarded by the courts.*

As shown in Table 1, the closest family members of the deceased - parents, spouses, and children - generally receive the highest amounts of compensation for non-pecuniary damage. More distant relatives, such as siblings, tend to be awarded lower amounts. This confirms that courts attach considerable importance not only to the formal legal status of the claimant, but also to the closeness of the actual relationship with the deceased.

The amounts presented in Table 1 reflect cases in which no exceptional circumstances substantially affected the assessment of damages. In other words, the courts established that the claimant had standing to bring the claim, maintained a relationship with the deceased, and that no circumstances such as the defendant's difficult financial situation, the risky conduct of the deceased, or other unusual factors justified a significant increase or reduction in compensation.

The results of the study demonstrate that, during the period under examination, judicial practice generally established an upper threshold of approximately EUR 30,000-35,000 for compensation for non-pecuniary damage resulting from the death of a person. This threshold was exceeded only in exceptional circumstances. Conversely, the lowest amount commonly observed in judicial practice was approximately EUR 5,000, with lower amounts awarded only where specific circumstances justified a reduction.

Judicial practice also shows that, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, courts often justify compensation amounts by referring to previous case law. A typical form of reasoning is the statement that an analysis of the case law of the Supreme Court of Lithuania, the Court of Appeal of Lithuania, and regional courts during a specified period demonstrates that

compensation for non-pecuniary damage in similar death-related cases usually ranges between certain amounts. This method of reasoning was frequently observed during the period analysed.

When assessing the claimant's relationship with the deceased, courts first determine the nature of the familial relationship, such as parent-child, child-parent, sibling, or spouse. They then assess the actual closeness of that relationship. Several criteria are applied across different categories of relationships, including cohabitation, continuous and uninterrupted communication with the deceased before death, the closeness of the relationship established through witness testimony, and, in cases involving very young claimants, the claimant's ability to form a meaningful relationship with the deceased (Court of Appeal of Lithuania, ruling of 18 February 2025, No. e2A-48-516/2025).

The results of the study indicate that where these criteria were not satisfied, the amounts awarded were consistently reduced. Courts consider cohabitation and continuous communication before death to be strong evidence of a particularly close relationship. Conversely, where such circumstances are absent, courts tend to conclude that the relationship was less close, which may justify a lower award of non-pecuniary damage.

Courts also consider the claimant's ability to establish a relationship with the deceased where the claimant is very young. In its ruling of 18 February 2025 (No. e2A-48-516/2025), the Court of Appeal of Lithuania examined the claim of a girl who was nine months old at the time of her brother's death. The court held that, due to her age, she had been unable to develop a close relationship with her brother and expressed doubt as to whether she could retain any memory of him. The panel of judges concluded that it was objectively impossible to determine the extent of emotional suffering caused by the loss and awarded EUR 2,000 out of the EUR 20,000 claimed. The court's reasoning suggests that, in such cases, compensation is awarded not for the loss of an existing relationship, but rather for the loss of a genuine opportunity to develop a close relationship with the deceased in the future.

Judicial practice also identifies another specific factor relevant to the assessment of family closeness: whether the claimant has established his or her own family (Kaunas Regional Court, ruling of 9 April 2025 in civil case No. e2A-607-587/2025). Courts have reasoned that claimants who have lost a parent but have married, had children, and established their own household are generally less dependent on and less closely connected to their parents than those who continue to live with or rely on them. Accordingly, where the claimant's own family life indicates a reduced level of dependence or daily emotional connection with the deceased, the amount of non-pecuniary damage may be reduced.

The results of the study further indicate that Lithuanian courts regard the disruption of the parent-child relationship as the most significant and emotionally severe form of family loss. The Supreme Court of Lithuania has held that the death of a child severs a connection that links parents to their past, present, and anticipated future. Children constitute an exceptionally important part of their parents' lives, and the loss of a child irreversibly changes and profoundly affects the parents' world. Where the loss occurs unexpectedly, the emotional suffering is particularly severe and complex (Supreme Court of Lithuania, ruling of 16 March 2009 in civil case No. 3K-3-119/2009).

Conversely, the loss of a parent, regardless of the intensity of the emotional bond, causes evident harm to a child's emotional, intellectual, and social development, as well as to the child's sense of personal well-being and fulfilment (Kaunas Regional Court, ruling of 27 August 2024 in civil case No. e2A-1033-343/2024). These findings are supported both by the recurring reasoning in judicial decisions and by the comparatively higher amounts awarded in cases involving parent-child relationships.

In conclusion, the results of the study demonstrate that the relationship between the claimant and the deceased is the primary and most significant factor in determining the amount of non-pecuniary damage. Under ordinary circumstances, judicial practice during the period examined established a generally recognised upper threshold of EUR 30,000-35,000 and a lower threshold of approximately EUR 5,000, both of which are exceeded only in exceptional cases. Courts consistently evaluate the nature and closeness of the relationship, including cohabitation, continuous communication before death, witness evidence concerning the relationship, and the claimant's ability to establish a meaningful relationship with the deceased. In cases involving the loss of a parent, courts may also consider the claimant's own family life and its impact on the closeness of the relationship with the deceased. Overall, judicial practice confirms that the most significant and emotionally painful disruption of a family relationship occurs between parents and children. For this reason, claims arising from the loss of a child or parent tend to result in the highest awards of compensation for non-pecuniary damage, commonly reaching approximately EUR 35,000.

Conclusions

The findings of the study reveal that the determination of pecuniary damage in cases involving compensation for damage resulting from the death of a person rarely gives rise to significant difficulties in practice. Compensation for funeral expenses is generally awarded in full where the claimed amount is reasonable and supported by appropriate financial evidence, while maintenance-related claims are calculated according to well-established approaches developed in judicial practice, namely a reasonable and proportionate share of the deceased's income assessed against either the period until dependent children reach the age of majority or the deceased's statistical life expectancy. For legal practitioners, this indicates that pecuniary claims are most effectively substantiated through comprehensive documentary evidence, such as invoices, receipts, and income records, since disputes generally concern the reasonableness and proof of the amount claimed rather than the existence of the entitlement itself.

By contrast, the principal challenge in cases involving compensation for damage resulting from the death of a person is the determination of non-pecuniary damage. Unlike pecuniary damage, non-pecuniary damage is inherently abstract and cannot be objectively quantified. Consequently, courts enjoy a broad margin of discretion and determine compensation by assessing the circumstances of each individual case in light of the criteria established in Article 6.250 of the Civil Code and further developed through judicial practice. By identifying the typical amounts awarded and the relative significance of particular criteria during the period examined, this study provides an empirical reference point that may assist claimants, defendants, and courts in assessing the reasonableness of compensation claims and awards. In this respect, the study contributes to greater predictability and consistency in an area largely governed by judicial discretion.

The results of the study demonstrate that the relationship between the claimant and the deceased constitutes the primary and most significant factor influencing the amount of non-pecuniary damage awarded. The circumstances surrounding the death and the defendant's financial situation also influence the assessment of damages, although their significance is generally secondary. Judicial practice developed between 2020 and 2025 indicates that, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, Lithuanian courts tend to award compensation for non-pecuniary damage within a relatively consistent range of EUR 5,000-35,000. More specifically, the closest family members - parents, spouses, and children - generally receive the highest awards, while more distant relatives, such as siblings, are typically awarded lower amounts.

The closeness of the relationship is assessed through factors such as cohabitation, continuous communication with the deceased prior to death, witness testimony, and, in the case of very young claimants, the ability to establish a meaningful relationship with the deceased. The absence of these factors consistently results in lower awards of non-pecuniary damage.

The findings further demonstrate that exceptional circumstances may justify a departure from the compensation ranges typically observed in judicial practice. Factors such as particularly violent circumstances surrounding the death, the risky conduct of the deceased, the defendant's financial situation, or the recovery of compensation from successors in rights and obligations may lead courts to increase or reduce the amount awarded. Nevertheless, the study revealed that even where compensation is reduced due to the defendant's difficult financial situation, courts do not reduce compensation to zero solely on that basis.

The practical value of the study extends beyond the description of existing judicial practice. The relationship-based compensation ranges identified in Table 1 may serve as an orientation tool for legal practitioners when formulating or contesting claims and for courts when assessing compensation by reference to comparable cases. Furthermore, the findings suggest that greater consistency and predictability in the assessment of non-pecuniary damage could be achieved through the development of indicative compensation ranges or more detailed judicial guidelines for cases involving the death of a person. In this respect, the points-based system currently applied in the compensation of damage arising from harm caused to a patient's health may serve as a useful example of a structured approach to the assessment of non-pecuniary damage. Although such a model could not be transferred directly to all cases involving the death of a person, its underlying objective of promoting consistency, transparency, and predictability may provide valuable guidance for the further development of judicial practice in this area.

References

1. Court of Appeal of Lithuania. Ruling of 3 March 2022 in Civil Case No. e2A-117-798/2022. Accessed 1 July 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2064951.
2. Court of Appeal of Lithuania. Ruling of 18 February 2025 in Civil Case No. e2A-48-516/2025. Accessed 26 August 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2297048.
3. Court of Appeal of Lithuania. Ruling of 4 March 2025 in Criminal Case No. 1A-17-1020/2025. Accessed 9 October 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2330647.
4. Gutauskas, Aurelijus. “Pecuniary Damage (Turtinė žala).” *Visuotinė Lietuvių Enciklopedija*. Accessed 16 March 2025. https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/turtine-zala/.
5. Kaunas Regional Court. Judgment of 20 January 2025 in Criminal Case No. 1-90-634/2025. Accessed 9 October 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2299310.
6. Kaunas Regional Court. Ruling of 19 June 2020 in Criminal Case No. N1-68-317/2020. Accessed 8 October 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/1953750.
7. Kaunas Regional Court. Ruling of 9 April 2025 in Civil Case No. e2A-607-587/2025. Accessed 26 August 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2307998.
8. Kaunas Regional Court. Ruling of 27 August 2024 in Civil Case No. e2A-1033-343/2024. Accessed 20 September 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2264934.
9. Klaipėda Regional Court. Ruling of 8 July 2025 in Criminal Case No. 1A-58-635/2025. Accessed 9 October 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2325606.
10. Mikelėnas, Valentinas. 2003. *Commentary on the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania. Book Six: Law of Obligations*. Vilnius: Justitia.

11. Republic of Lithuania. Civil Code (Lietuvos Respublikos civilinis kodeksas). Accessed 8 April 2026. https://www.infolex.lt.
12. Republic of Lithuania. Code of Criminal Procedure (Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamojo proceso kodeksas). Accessed 8 April 2026. https://www.infolex.lt.
13. Republic of Lithuania. Criminal Code (Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamasis kodeksas). Accessed 8 April 2026. https://www.infolex.lt.
14. Republic of Lithuania. Law on Compensation for Damage Caused by Violent Crimes (Lietuvos Respublikos smurtiniais nusikaltimais padarytos žalos kompensavimo įstatymas). Accessed 9 April 2026. https://www.infolex.lt/ta/48832.
15. Republic of Lithuania. Law on Courts (Lietuvos Respublikos teismų įstatymas). Accessed 9 April 2026. https://www.infolex.lt/ta/122442.
16. Republic of Lithuania. Resolution of the Government on the Approval of the Description of the Procedure for Compensation of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Damage Arising from Harm Caused to a Patient's Health (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės nutarimas dėl Turtinės ir neturtinės žalos, atsiradusios dėl paciento sveikatai padarytos žalos, atlyginimo tvarkos aprašo patvirtinimo). Accessed 9 April 2026. https://www.infolex.lt/ta/566963.
17. Republic of Lithuania. Resolution on the Approval of the Recommended Quality Standards for Judicial Procedural Decisions (Dėl rekomenduojamų teismų procesinių sprendimų kokybės standartų patvirtinimo). Accessed 9 April 2026. https://www.infolex.lt/teise/Default.aspx?id=7&item=doc&AktoId=362398.
18. Supreme Court of Lithuania. Ruling of 16 March 2009 in Civil Case No. 3K-3-119/2009. Accessed 20 September 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/114696.
19. Supreme Court of Lithuania. Ruling of 10 June 2020 in Civil Case No. e3K-3-181-611/2020. Accessed 8 October 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/1892104.
20. Supreme Court of Lithuania. Ruling of 30 May 2024 in Criminal Case No. 2K-102-511/2024. Accessed 1 July 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2248645.
21. Supreme Court of Lithuania. Ruling of 17 October 2024 in Civil Case No. e3K-3-192-1120/2024. Accessed 7 July 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2273413.
22. Supreme Court of Lithuania. Ruling of 23 December 2024 in Civil Case No. e3K-3-242-421/2024. Accessed 7 July 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2287015.
23. Vilnius Regional Court. Judgment of 21 May 2024 in Criminal Case No. 1-91-1036/2024. Accessed 1 July 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2280968.
24. Vilnius Regional Court. Ruling of 14 January 2020 in Civil Case No. e2A-82-934/2020. Accessed 9 October 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/1797926.
25. Vilnius Regional Court. Ruling of 20 August 2020 in Civil Case No. e2-1504-866/2020. Accessed 1 July 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/1955722.
26. Vilnius Regional Court. Ruling of 22 April 2025 in Civil Case No. 2A-719-661/2025. Accessed 1 July 2025. https://www.infolex.lt/tp/2311063.
27. Volodko, Renata. 2010. *Compensation for Non-Pecuniary Damage in Lithuania: Theory and Practice*. Vilnius: Registrų centras.

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

ISSN 2029-1701
ISSN 2335-2035 (Online)

Research Journal
PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER
2026, Vol. 38, Nr. 1

DUOMENŲ KULTŪROS ĮTAKA ORGANIZACIJOS INOVATYVUMUI

Justina VAITIEKŪNĖ
Kauno technologijos universitetas
Gedimino g. 50, LT 44092 Kaunas, Lietuva
E-mail: justina.vaitiekune@ktu.edu
ORCID ID: 0009-0004-6832-3532

Inga STANKEVIČĖ
Kauno technologijos universitetas
Gedimino g. 50, LT 44092 Kaunas, Lietuva
E-mail: inga.stankevice@ktu.lt
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-5569-6901

DOI: 10.13165/PSPO-25-38-01-15

Anotacija. *Didėjant duomenų kiekiui ir organizacijų investicijoms į analitinius sprendimus, vis dažniau pastebima, kad duomenys organizacijose naudojami ribotai – dažniausiai veiklos stebėsenai ir ataskaitoms, tačiau rečiau tampa inovacijų inicijavimo ar naujų sprendimų kūrimo pagrindu. Tai rodo, kad vien duomenų prieinamumas ar technologinis išvystymas savaime neužtikrina organizacijos inovatyvumo, o duomenų panaudojimas priklauso nuo organizacinio konteksto, kuriame jie yra interpretuojami ir taikomi. Šiame kontekste vis didesnis dėmesys skiriamas duomenų kultūrai, apibrėžiančiai organizacijoje vyraujančias nuostatas, vertybes ir praktikas, susijusias su duomenų naudojimu, tačiau mokslinėje literatūroje duomenų kultūra ir organizacijos inovatyvumas dažniausiai analizuojami atskirai, o jų tarpusavio sąsajos išlieka fragmentiškai paaiškintos ir dažnai apribojamos iki technologinių ar analitinių aspektų. Straipsnio tikslas – teoriškai pagrįsti duomenų kultūros įtaką organizacijos inovatyvumui bei paaiškinti, per kokius organizacinius mechanizmus šis ryšys pasireiškia. Analizei pasitelkiama prasmės kūrimo teorija (angl. sensemaking theory), leidžianti organizacinę veiklą interpretuoti kaip nuolat vykstantį informacijos įprasminimo procesą, ir dinaminių gebėjimų perspektyva, paaiškinanti, kaip organizacijos šias interpretacijas paverčia sprendimais ir organizaciniais pokyčiais. Remiantis šių teorinių prieigų integracija, formuojamas konceptualus modelis, kuriame duomenų kultūra konceptualizuojama kaip kontekstinė sąlyga, daranti įtaką tam, kaip organizacijoje identifikuojami reikšmingi duomenys, kaip jie interpretuojami ir kaip šios interpretacijos transformuojamos į veiklą. Modelis leidžia paaiškinti, kad organizacijos inovatyvumas formuojamas per nuoseklų procesą, apimantį duomenų identifikavimą, jų interpretaciją ir šių interpretacijų pavertimą sprendimais bei pokyčiais, taip atskleidžiant, kad inovacijos kyla ne iš pačių duomenų, bet iš organizacijos gebėjimo juos įprasminti ir įveiklinti. Straipsnis išplečia esamą literatūrą, siūlydamas procesinį požiūrį į duomenų kultūros ir organizacijos inovatyvumo sąsajas ir parodydamas, kad šis ryšys pasireiškia ne tiesiogiai, o per interpretacijos ir veikimo mechanizmų sąveiką, todėl duomenų kultūra gali būti interpretuojama ne kaip izoliuotas organizacinis atributas, bet kaip esminė sąlyga, per kurią formuojasi organizacijos gebėjimas kurti inovacijas.*

Pagrindinės sąvokos: *duomenų kultūra, organizacijos inovatyvumas, duomenimis grįsti sprendimai, prasmės kūrimo teorija, dinaminiai gebėjimai.*

Įvadas

Šiuolaikinėje organizacijų veiklos aplinkoje duomenys vis dažniau įvardijami kaip strateginis išteklius, galintis prisidėti prie organizacijos konkurencingumo ir inovatyvumo didinimo (George ir kt., 2021; Verhoef ir kt., 2021). Organizacijos inovatyvumas dažniausiai apibrėžiamas kaip gebėjimas kurti, diegti ir įtvirtinti naujus ar reikšmingai patobulintus produktus, procesus ar organizacines praktikas (OECD ir Eurostat, 2018). Sparčiai augant duomenų kiekiui ir organizacijų investicijoms į analitinius sprendimus, tikimasi, kad duomenimis grįstas sprendimų priėmimas taps vienu pagrindinių inovacijų šaltinių. Vis dėlto praktikoje neretai pastebima, kad duomenų naudojimas organizacijose apsiriboja veiklos

stebėsena ir ataskaitų rengimu, o jų potencialas naujų idėjų generavimui ir inovacinių sprendimų kūrimui išlieka neišnaudotas (Joergensen ir Zaggl, 2024).

Ši situacija atskleidžia problemą – duomenų prieinamumas ar technologinis išvystymas savaime neužtikrina organizacijos inovatyvumo. Kitaip tariant, duomenys organizacijoje savaime nevirsta veiksmu ar inovacija. Vis dažniau pabrėžiama, kad lemiamą vaidmenį atlieka ne patys duomenys, o tai, kaip jie yra suvokiami, interpretuojami ir naudojami organizacijos viduje (Grover ir kt., 2018; Mikalef ir kt., 2020). Tai leidžia daryti prielaidą, kad duomenų panaudojimas yra ne tik techninis, bet ir organizacinis bei interpretacinis procesas. Ši problema yra ypač reikšminga, nes organizacijų gebėjimas efektyviai panaudoti duomenis tampa vienu iš pagrindinių konkurencinio pranašumo šaltinių dinamiškoje aplinkoje.

Šiame kontekste aktuali tampa duomenų kultūros samprata, apibrėžianti organizacijoje vyraujančias vertybes, nuostatas ir praktikas, susijusias su duomenų naudojimu. Duomenų kultūra leidžia paaiškinti, kodėl organizacijose, turinčiose panašų technologinį išsivystymą ir prieigą prie duomenų, šie duomenys naudojami skirtingai. Vis dėlto mokslinėje literatūroje duomenų kultūra ir organizacijos inovatyvumas dažniausiai analizuojami atskirai, o jų tarpusavio sąsajos išlieka fragmentiškai paaiškintos ir dažnai susiaurinamos iki analitinių gebėjimų ar technologinių sprendimų poveikio (Mikalef ir kt., 2020; Nudurupati ir kt., 2024).

Dėl šios priežasties išlieka neatsakytas klausimas – per kokius organizacinius procesus duomenų kultūra daro įtaką organizacijos inovatyvumui? Kitaip tariant, kaip duomenys organizacijoje įgyja prasmę ir tampa inovatyvių sprendimų pagrindu? Šie klausimai rodo poreikį procesinei perspektyvai, leidžiančiai analizuoti ne tik pačius reiškinius, bet ir jų sąveikos mechanizmus.

Siekiant paaiškinti šį procesą, straipsnyje pasitelkiama prasmės kūrimo teorija (angl. *sensemaking theory*), leidžianti organizacinę veiklą interpretuoti kaip nuolat vykstantį informacijos įprasminimo procesą. Ši teorija suteikia pagrindą aiškinti, kaip organizacijoje identifikuojami reikšmingi duomenys, kaip jie interpretuojami ir kaip įtvirtinami organizacinėje veikloje. Vis dėlto vien interpretacijos paaiškinimo nepakanka, siekiant suprasti, kaip organizacijoje kuriamos ir įgyvendinamos inovacijos. Dėl šios priežasties prasmės kūrimo teorija papildoma dinaminių gebėjimų perspektyva, kuri leidžia paaiškinti, kaip organizacijos šias interpretacijas paverčia sprendimais ir organizaciniais pokyčiais (Teece, 2018). Šių teorijų integracija leidžia nuosekliai paaiškinti, kaip organizacijoje vyksta perėjimas nuo duomenų interpretacijos prie veikimo ir kaip šis procesas susijęs su inovatyvumu (Bogers ir kt., 2018; Kariv ir kt., 2024).

Straipsnio tikslas – teoriškai pagrįsti duomenų kultūros įtaką organizacijos inovatyvumui bei paaiškinti, per kokius organizacinius mechanizmus šis ryšys pasireiškia. Remiantis teorine analize, formuojamas konceptualus modelis, kuriame duomenų kultūra interpretuojama kaip kontekstinė sąlyga, daranti įtaką duomenų identifikavimo, interpretacijos ir jų transformavimo į veiklą procesams. Šis modelis leidžia paaiškinti, kaip duomenys organizacijoje prisideda prie organizacijos inovatyvumo formavimo.

Duomenų kultūros formavimo iššūkiai organizacijose

Empiriniai tyrimai rodo, kad net ir organizacijose, turinčiose prieigą prie pažangių analitinių įrankių ir didelius duomenų kiekius, duomenų panaudojimas išlieka ribotas ir dažnai neperžengia operacinio lygmens (O'Reilly, 2022). Ši situacija atskleidžia, kad duomenų kultūros formavimas susiduria su įvairiais organizaciniais ir elgsenos iššūkiais, kurie riboja duomenų potencialo išnaudojimą. Šių iššūkių analizė leidžia geriau suprasti, kodėl duomenys organizacijose ne visuomet tampa sprendimų ar inovacijų pagrindu, ir atskleidžia, kad duomenų

panaudojimas yra ne savaiminis, o priklausomas nuo organizacinių procesų bei interpretacinių praktikų.

Duomenų kultūra mokslinėje literatūroje dažniausiai apibrėžiama kaip bendrų nuostatų, vertybių, elgsenos normų ir praktikų visuma, apibrėžianti, kaip organizacijos nariai suvokia duomenų reikšmę, jais pasitiki ir naudoja juos sprendimų priėmime. Tačiau vis dažniau akcentuojama, kad vien šio koncepto apibrėžimas ar technologinių sprendimų diegimas neužtikrina realaus duomenų panaudojimo organizacijose. Priešingai, duomenų kultūros formavimas susiduria su įvairiais organizaciniais ir elgsenos iššūkiais, kurie riboja duomenų potencialo išnaudojimą.

Vienas iš esminių iššūkių yra atotrūkis tarp technologinių galimybių ir realaus duomenų panaudojimo. Nors organizacijos disponuoja vis pažangesnėmis duomenų rinkimo, analizės ir vizualizavimo priemonėmis, mokslinėje literatūroje pabrėžiama, kad technologiniai sprendimai savaime neužtikrina duomenimis grįsto sprendimų priėmimo (Szukits ir Moricz, 2024). Praktikoje dažnai susiformuoja situacija, kai duomenys yra aktyviai generuojami, tačiau jų įtaka sprendimams išlieka ribota. Tai rodo, kad pagrindinės kliūtys slypi ne technologiniame, bet organizaciniame ir elgsenos lygmenyje.

Reikšmingu veiksniu laikomas darbuotojų ir vadovų požiūris į duomenis kaip sprendimų pagrindą. Tyrimai rodo, kad daugelyje organizacijų sprendimai vis dar grindžiami intuicija, asmenine patirtimi ar hierarchine autoriteto logika, o duomenys naudojami tik kaip papildomas argumentas (Pittenger ir kt., 2023). Tokia praktika lemia, kad duomenimis grįstas sprendimų priėmimas išlieka deklaratyvus, o ne realiai įtvirtintas organizacinėje veikloje.

Ne mažiau svarbus iššūkis yra pasitikėjimo duomenimis stoka. Darbuotojai ir vadovai gali vengti remtis duomenimis, jei abejoja jų tikslumu, patikimumu ar interpretacijos pagrįstumu (Nudurupati ir kt., 2024). Tokiais atvejais duomenys suvokiami kaip galimos rizikos šaltinis, todėl sprendimų priėmėjai linkę rinktis saugesnes, jau patikrintas praktikas. Dėl to duomenų panaudojimas tampa epizodinis ir priklausomas nuo individualių nuostatų, o ne organizacinių principų.

Taip pat reikšmingą vaidmenį atlieka darbuotojų kompetencijos ir gebėjimai dirbti su duomenimis. Ribotas duomenų raštingumas ir nepakankami analitiniai gebėjimai apsunkina duomenų interpretaciją ir jų pritaikymą praktikoje (Ghodoosi ir kt., 2023). Net ir turint prieigą prie duomenų, jų panaudojimas gali būti ribotas, jei organizacijos nariai neturi pakankamų žinių ar pasitikėjimo juos interpretuoti.

Organizacinės kultūros kontekste ypatingą reikšmę įgauna vadovų elgsena. Moksliniai tyrimai rodo, kad vadovų sprendimų pagrindimas duomenimis, atvirumas analitinėms diskusijoms ir nuoseklus duomenų naudojimo skatinimas formuoja organizacijos narių elgsenos normas (O'Reilly, 2022). Priešingai, jei vadovai patys nesiremia duomenimis arba sprendimus grindžia subjektyviais argumentais, duomenimis grįsta elgsena organizacijoje neįsitvirtina, nepaisant formalių strateginių nuostatų.

Svarbus aspektas yra ir organizacinė tolerancija klaidoms bei eksperimentavimui. Duomenimis grįstas sprendimų priėmimas dažnai susijęs su hipotezių testavimu ir eksperimentavimu, kuris neišvengiamai apima ir nesėkmes. Organizacijose, kuriose vyrauja aukštas klaidų vengimo lygis, darbuotojai gali vengti sprendimų, galinčių prieštarauti nusistovėjusiai praktikai. Literatūroje pabrėžiama, kad organizacinė kultūra ir lyderystės stilius reikšmingai veikia darbuotojų toleranciją klaidoms ir jų gebėjimą mokytis iš patirties (Li ir kt., 2025). Tokia aplinka riboja ne tik duomenų naudojimą, bet ir organizacijos gebėjimą kurti inovatyvius sprendimus.

Duomenų kultūros formavimo iššūkiai yra daugialypiai ir glaudžiai susiję su organizacijos elgsenos, struktūros ir sprendimų priėmimo ypatumais. Duomenų prieinamumas

ir technologinis išsivystymas sudaro tik prielaidas, tačiau realus jų panaudojimas priklauso nuo to, kaip organizacijoje formuojamos interpretacinės praktikos ir kaip jos integruojamos į veiklą. Šie aspektai leidžia geriau suprasti, kodėl duomenų potencialas organizacijose dažnai išlieka neišnaudotas ir kodėl jo ryšys su inovatyvumu nėra savaiminis.

Be to, svarbu atkreipti dėmesį, kad šie iššūkiai dažnai yra tarpusavyje susiję ir vienas kitą stiprina. Pavyzdžiui, žemas pasitikėjimas duomenimis gali būti susijęs su ribotomis darbuotojų kompetencijomis, o šios – su nepakankamu organizacijos dėmesiu duomenų raštingumo ugdymui. Tuo tarpu vadovų elgsena gali lemti, ar duomenų naudojimas organizacijoje tampa normatyvine praktika, ar išlieka pavieniais atvejais pasireiškiantis reiškinys. Tokia tarpusavio sąveika rodo, kad duomenų kultūros formavimas negali būti suprantamas kaip vieno veiksnio stiprinimas, bet reikalauja nuoseklaus ir integruoto požiūrio, apimančio tiek organizacinius sprendimus, tiek darbuotojų elgseną ir kompetencijas.

Aptarti iššūkiai rodo, kad duomenų panaudojimas organizacijose nėra vien technologinių sprendimų rezultatas, bet formuojasi per organizacines praktikas ir sprendimų priėmimo logiką. Todėl jis gali būti interpretuojamas kaip procesinis reiškinys, atskleidžiantis, kaip duomenys organizacijoje tampa veiklos pagrindu.

Duomenų kultūros samprata ir jos reikšmė organizacijos inovatyvumui

Mokslinėje literatūroje vis dažniau pabrėžiama, kad organizacijų gebėjimas efektyviai išnaudoti duomenis priklauso ne tik nuo technologinių sprendimų ar analitinių įrankių, bet ir nuo organizacinio konteksto, kuriame šie duomenys naudojami. Šiame kontekste aktuali tampa duomenų kultūros samprata, kuri apibrėžia organizacijoje vyraujančias vertybes, normas ir elgsenos modelius, susijusius su duomenų naudojimu (Oliver ir kt., 2023).

Skirtingai nei technologiniai ar procesiniai sprendimai, duomenų kultūra apima gilesnius organizacinius sluoksnius – įsitikinimus apie duomenų patikimumą, darbuotojų gebėjimą juos interpretuoti ir praktikas, kurios lemia, ar duomenys iš tiesų tampa kasdienės veiklos dalimi. Tai leidžia ją interpretuoti ne kaip papildomą organizacijos atributą, bet kaip logiką, struktūruojančią sprendimų priėmimą ir informacijos interpretaciją. Empiriniai tyrimai rodo, kad organizacijose, kuriose vyrauja stipresnė duomenų kultūra, didėja pasitikėjimas duomenimis, stiprėja analitinis mąstymas ir dažniau priimami pagrįsti sprendimai (Chatterjee ir kt., 2021; Hussinki ir kt., 2025). Vis dėlto šie tyrimai dažniausiai apsiriboja ryšio tarp duomenų kultūros ir veiklos rezultatų konstatavimu, nepaaiškindami, kaip šis ryšys formuojasi organizacinių procesų lygmenyje.

Analizuojant duomenų kultūrą, literatūroje dažnai išskiriamos kelios pagrindinės jos dedamosios. Pirma, tai organizacijos vertybės ir nuostatos, kurios lemia, ar duomenys laikomi patikimu ir reikšmingu informacijos šaltiniu bei kiek organizacijos nariai yra linkę jais remtis. Antra, darbuotojų kompetencijos, apimančios gebėjimą suprasti, analizuoti ir interpretuoti duomenis, sudarančios prielaidas jų efektyviam panaudojimui. Trečia, organizacinės praktikos, atspindinčios, kaip duomenys realiai integruojami į sprendimų priėmimo procesus ir kasdienę veiklą. Ketvirta, organizacinė infrastruktūra ir valdymo sprendimai, apimantys technologinius sprendimus, duomenų prieinamumą bei duomenų valdymo principus, kurie sudaro sąlygas duomenų naudojimui organizacijoje. Šios dedamosios leidžia atskleisti duomenų kultūros daugialypiškumą ir parodo, kad tai apima ne tik technologinius ar kompetencijų aspektus, bet platesnę organizacinių veiksnių bei praktikų visumą (Grover ir kt., 2018; Mikalef ir kt., 2020).

Svarbu pažymėti, kad duomenų kultūra nėra tapati kitoms su duomenų naudojimu susijusioms sąvokoms. Viena iš jų – duomenimis grįstas sprendimų priėmimas, kuris dažniausiai apibrėžiamas kaip praktika, kai sprendimai grindžiami duomenų analize. Nors ši

praktika laikoma svarbiu organizacijos brandos požymiu, ji savaime nepaaiškina, kodėl organizacijoje apskritai pasirenkama remtis duomenimis ir kokiomis sąlygomis šie duomenys laikomi patikimu sprendimų pagrindu (Kurpiela ir Teuteberg, 2024; Huynh, 2025).

Taip pat duomenų kultūra skiriasi nuo analitinių gebėjimų ar analitinio brandumo, kurie dažniausiai siejami su technologiniu išvystymu ir organizacijos gebėjimu taikyti pažangius analitinius metodus. Nors šie veiksniai sudaro svarbias prielaidas duomenų naudojimui, jie neatskleidžia, kaip organizacijoje interpretuojama informacija ir kaip formuojasi sprendimai (Nudurupati ir kt., 2024). Todėl duomenų kultūra gali būti laikoma aukštesnio lygmens organizaciniu reiškiniu, kuris struktūruoja tiek sprendimų priėmimo logiką, tiek pačią informacijos interpretaciją.

Tokia perspektyva leidžia duomenų kultūrą interpretuoti kaip sąlygą, kuri formuoja organizacijos gebėjimą iš duomenų kurti prasmę ir veikti šios prasmės pagrindu. Šis aspektas ypač reikšmingas analizuojant organizacijos inovatyvumą, nes inovacijos vis dažniau siejamos ne vien su turimais ištekliais ar technologiniais sprendimais, bet su organizacijos gebėjimu interpretuoti informaciją ir ją paversti kryptingais veiksmais (Bogers ir kt., 2018; Cristofaro ir Giardino, 2025). Tai leidžia daryti prielaidą, kad duomenų kultūra gali atlikti esminį vaidmenį šiame procese, tačiau toks vaidmuo nėra tiesioginis ir reikalauja detalesnio paaiškinimo.

Organizacijos inovatyvumas dažniausiai apibrėžiamas kaip gebėjimas kurti, diegti ir įtvirtinti naujus ar reikšmingai patobulintus sprendimus, apimančius produktus, procesus ar organizacines praktikas (OECD ir Eurostat, 2018). Vis dėlto toks apibrėžimas pirmiausia nusako inovacijų rezultatą, tačiau mažiau dėmesio skiria tam, kaip šie rezultatai organizacijoje atsiranda. Šiuolaikinėje literatūroje vis dažniau pabrėžiama, kad inovatyvumas turėtų būti suvokiamas kaip nuolatinis organizacinis gebėjimas, susijęs su naujų idėjų generavimu, jų įgyvendinimu ir integravimu į organizacijos veiklą (Neudert ir kt., 2024; Kariv ir kt., 2024). Tokia perspektyva leidžia inovatyvumą interpretuoti kaip procesinį reiškinį, kuriame svarbus ne tik galutinis rezultatas, bet ir tai, kaip organizacijoje formuojasi sprendimai, kaip pasirenkamos veiklos kryptys ir kaip įgyvendinami pokyčiai.

Nepaisant augančio dėmesio duomenų kultūros ir inovatyvumo sąsajoms, esami tyrimai šį ryšį dažniausiai aiškina fragmentiškai arba sieja jį su bendrais analitiniais gebėjimais, neatskleisdami, kaip konkrečiai duomenys organizacijoje tampa inovacijų pagrindu. Dėl to išlieka neatsakytas klausimas, kokiais mechanizmais duomenų kultūra prisideda prie inovatyvumo ir kaip šis poveikis realizuojasi organizacinių procesų lygmenyje.

Tai rodo poreikį analizuoti ne tik pačius reiškinius, bet ir procesus, per kuriuos duomenys organizacijoje įgyja prasmę ir yra paverčiami veikla, leidžiančia kurti inovacinius sprendimus. Būtent šio proceso paaiškinimui reikalinga teorinė perspektyva, leidžianti konceptualizuoti informacijos interpretaciją kaip organizacinės veiklos pagrindą.

Duomenų kultūros įtaka organizacijos inovatyvumui: prasmės kūrimo perspektyva

Prieš tai išryškinta problema – duomenų kultūra negali būti paaiškinta vien per jos struktūrines dedamąsias – atskleidžia poreikį analizuoti procesus, per kuriuos duomenys organizacijoje įgyja prasmę. Šiam tikslui pasitelkiama prasmės kūrimo teorija (angl. *sensemaking theory*), leidžianti paaiškinti, kaip organizacijos interpretuoja informaciją ir kaip ši interpretacija virsta veikla.

Remiantis Karl E. Weick (1995), prasmės kūrimas yra procesas, kurio metu organizacijos nariai, susidūrę su neapibrėžta ar dviprasmiška informacija, siekia ją suprasti ir suteikti jai reikšmę. Šios teorijos požiūriu, informacija, įskaitant ir duomenis, savaime neturi aiškios prasmės – ji atsiranda tik interpretacijos procese. Tai reiškia, kad organizacijos gebėjimas veikti

remiantis duomenimis priklauso ne tiek nuo pačių duomenų, kiek nuo to, kaip jie yra suvokiami ir interpretuojami konkrečiame organizaciniame kontekste (Balasooryia ir Sedera, 2026; Canbul Yaroglu, 2025). Tokiu būdu prasmės kūrimo teorija leidžia konceptualizuoti duomenų panaudojimą kaip interpretacinį procesą, kuris duomenų kultūros literatūroje dažnai išlieka nepakankamai išplėtotas. Tai suteikia galimybę detaliau paaiškinti, kaip duomenys organizacijoje įgyja prasmę ir tampa sprendimų pagrindu.

Svarbu pažymėti, kad ši interpretacija nėra neutrali ar vienareikšmė – skirtingi organizacijos nariai tuos pačius duomenis gali suprasti skirtingai, remdamiesi turima patirtimi, vaidmenimis ar organizacinėmis nuostatomis (Pittenger ir kt., 2023). Dėl šios priežasties duomenų pavertimas sprendimais reikalauja ne tik analitinių gebėjimų, bet ir bendro interpretacinio pagrindo, leidžiančio suderinti skirtingas reikšmes ir veikimo kryptis.

Prasmės kūrimo procesas dažniausiai aprašomas kaip sudarytas iš trijų tarpusavyje susijusių fazių: situacijos suformavimo (angl. *enactment*), interpretacijos (angl. *selection*) ir reikšmės įtvirtinimo (angl. *retention*). Pirmojoje fazėje organizacija iš plataus informacijos srauto išskiria tam tikrus signalus ir juos įprasmina kaip reikšmingus. Šiame etape ypač svarbus tampa klausimas, kokie duomenys apskritai laikomi vertais dėmesio – tai priklauso nuo organizacijoje vyraujančių nuostatų ir dėmesio fokusavimo praktikų. Antrojoje fazėje šie signalai interpretuojami, siekiant suprasti jų reikšmę ir galimas veikimo kryptis. Šiame etape išryškėja skirtumai tarp duomenimis grįsto ir organizacinėmis praktikomis ar patirtimi paremto sprendimų priėmimo – net ir turint prieigą prie duomenų, interpretacijos gali būti grindžiamos skirtingomis logikomis. Trečiojoje fazėje suformuota interpretacija įtvirtinama organizacijos veikloje, procedūrose ar kolektyvinėje patirtyje, taip formuojant organizacines rutinas ir ateities sprendimų pagrindą (Panda, 2022).

Ši procesinė logika leidžia nuosekliau atskleisti duomenų kultūros vaidmenį organizacijoje. Duomenų kultūra gali būti suprantama kaip kontekstas, kuris struktūruoja visas tris prasmės kūrimo fazes – nuo to, kokie duomenys laikomi reikšmingais, iki to, kaip jie interpretuojami ir kaip jų pagrindu priimti sprendimai įsitvirtina organizacinėje praktikoje.

Vis dėlto svarbu pažymėti, kad prasmės kūrimo teorija leidžia paaiškinti, kaip organizacijoje formuojasi supratimas apie duomenis, tačiau neatskleidžia, kaip šis supratimas virsta konkrečiais veiksmais ar organizaciniais pokyčiais. Kitaip tariant, ši teorija padeda suprasti interpretacijos procesą, tačiau ne iki galo paaiškina veikimo mechanizmus.

Šis aspektas ypač svarbus analizuojant organizacijos inovatyvumą, nes inovacijos reikalauja ne tik gebėjimo interpretuoti informaciją, bet ir gebėjimo šią interpretaciją paversti sprendimais bei įgyvendinti pokyčius. Dėl šios priežasties prasmės kūrimo teorija šiame straipsnyje papildoma dinaminių gebėjimų perspektyva, leidžiančia paaiškinti, kaip organizacijos transformuoja interpretacijas į veiklą.

Dinaminių gebėjimų teorija kaip interpretacijos pavertimo veikla mechanizmas

Prasmės kūrimo teorija leidžia paaiškinti, kaip organizacijoje formuojasi duomenų interpretacijos, tačiau, kaip aptarta anksčiau, ji neatskleidžia, kaip šios interpretacijos virsta konkrečia veikla. Siekiant užpildyti šią spragą, tikslinga pasitelkti dinaminių gebėjimų perspektyvą, kuri orientuojasi į organizacijos gebėjimą reaguoti į aplinkos pokyčius ir transformuoti turimus išteklius bei žinias į veiksmus (Teece, 2020).

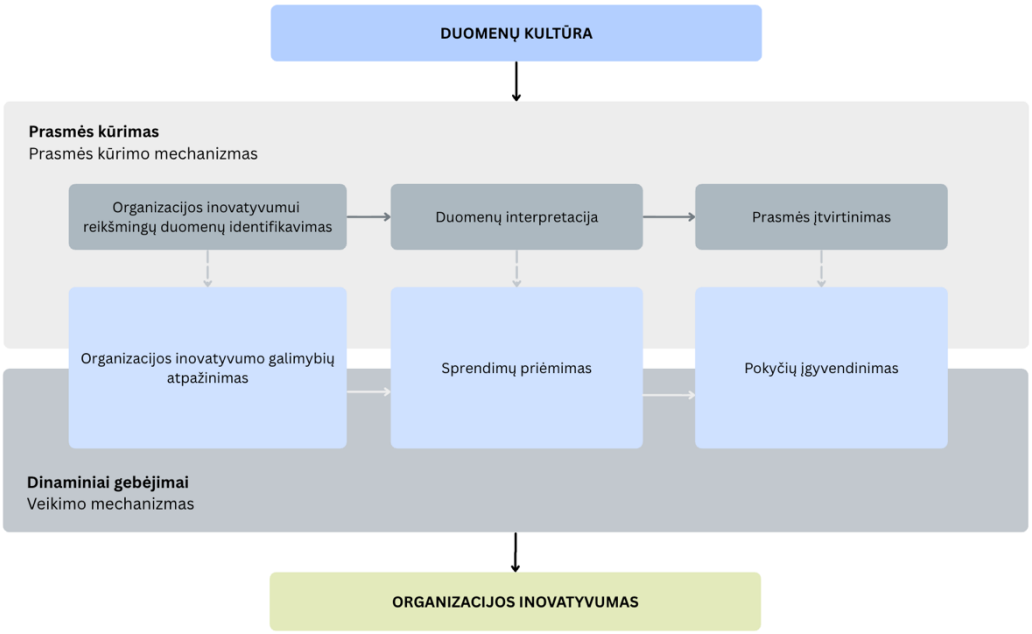
Dinaminių gebėjimų teorijoje pabrėžiama, kad organizacijos konkurencingumas priklauso ne tik nuo turimų išteklių, bet ir nuo gebėjimo juos nuosekliai atnaujinti, perkonfigūruoti ir pritaikyti kintančiomis sąlygomis. Šiame kontekste išskiriami trys pagrindiniai gebėjimai: galimybių atpažinimas (angl. *sensing*), jų įvertinimas ir sprendimų

priėmimas (angl. *seizing*) bei organizacijos veiklos transformavimas (angl. *transforming*) (Teece, 2018). Pirmasis gebėjimas – galimybių atpažinimas – siejamas su organizacijos gebėjimu identifikuoti aplinkoje atsirandančius signalus, tendencijas ir potencialias veiklos kryptis. Duomenų kultūros kontekste šis procesas glaudžiai susijęs su tuo, kokie signalai organizacijoje laikomi reikšmingais. Organizacijose, kuriose duomenys laikomi patikimu veiklos pagrindu, didesnė tikimybė, kad identifikuojami signalai bus siejami ne tik su esama veikla, bet ir su galimomis inovatyviomis kryptimis. Antrasis gebėjimas – jų įvertinimas ir sprendimų priėmimas – apima organizacijos gebėjimą pasirinkti, kuriomis identifikuotomis galimybėmis verta remtis, ir priimti sprendimus dėl konkrečių veiksmų. Šiame etape ypač svarbu tai, kaip organizacijoje naudojamos duomenų pagrindu suformuotos interpretacijos ir kaip jos integruojamos į sprendimų priėmimo procesus, ypač tais atvejais, kai siekiama inicijuoti pokyčius ar inovacijas. Trečiasis gebėjimas – organizacijos veiklos transformavimas – susijęs su gebėjimu įgyvendinti priimtus sprendimus, pertvarkyti procesus, struktūras ar išteklių paskirstymą taip, kad pasirinktos kryptys būtų realizuojamos praktikoje. Šie gebėjimai nėra izoliuoti – jie sudaro procesą, kuriame organizacija pirmiausia identifikuoja aplinkoje atsirandančius signalus, tuomet juos įprasmina ir galiausiai priima sprendimus dėl konkrečių veiksmų.

Ši seka leidžia aiškiau susieti dinaminių gebėjimų logiką su prasmės kūrimo procesu. Jei prasmės kūrimo perspektyva paaiškina, kaip organizacijoje identifikuojami ir interpretuojami signalai, tai dinaminių gebėjimų perspektyva leidžia suprasti, kaip šios interpretacijos yra įtvirtinamos per sprendimus ir organizacinę veiklą. Tai leidžia paaiškinti, kodėl organizacijose, turinčiose panašų duomenų prieinamumą, inovatyvumo rezultatai gali reikšmingai skirtis – lemiamą vaidmenį atlieka ne duomenų kiekis, o gebėjimas juos paversti veikimu.

Konceptualus duomenų kultūros įtakos organizacijos inovatyvumui modelis

Modelyje siekiama konceptualiai paaiškinti, kaip duomenų kultūra daro įtaką organizacijos inovatyvumui, išskiriant pagrindinius organizacinius procesus, per kuriuos šis ryšys pasireiškia. Siūlomas modelis leidžia struktūruotai atskleisti, kaip duomenų pagrindu formuojama informacija organizacijoje įprasminama ir kaip ši prasmė vėliau paverčiama veikla, lemiančia inovatyvumo raišką. Tokiu būdu modelis ne tik identifikuoja ryšį tarp duomenų kultūros ir inovatyvumo, bet ir paaiškina jį grindžiančią procesinę logiką (1 pav.).



1 pav. Duomenų kultūros įtakos organizacijos inovatyvumui procesas

Modelyje duomenų kultūra interpretuojama kaip organizacinė sąlyga, apibrėžianti, kokiomis nuostatomis ir praktikomis grindžiamas duomenų naudojimas organizacijoje. Ji daro įtaką tam, kiek duomenys yra laikomi patikimu veiklos pagrindu, kokiu mastu jais remiamasi kasdienėje veikloje ir kaip jie integruojami į sprendimų priėmimo procesus (Mikalef ir kt., 2020).

Svarbu pažymėti, kad duomenų kultūra modelyje nėra traktuojama kaip tiesioginis inovatyvumą lemiantis veiksnys. Ji sudaro kontekstą, kuriame vyksta duomenų įprasminimo ir jų pavertimo veikla procesai. Kitaip tariant, duomenų kultūra neapibrėžia konkrečių sprendimų ar veiksmų, tačiau daro įtaką tam, kaip organizacijoje formuojasi santykis su duomenimis ir kiek jie tampa reikšmingu pagrindu tolimesniems procesams. Tokiu būdu duomenų kultūra veikia kaip pagrindas, nuo kurio priklauso, ar duomenys organizacijoje tampa aktyviai naudojamu veiklos resursu, ar išlieka tik pasyvia informacija. Ši sąlyga lemia, kaip efektyviai organizacijoje gali vykti tiek duomenų interpretacija, tiek jų panaudojimas veikloje.

Pirmasis modelio procesinis lygmuo siejamas su tuo, kaip organizacijoje iš duomenų formuojasi prasmė. Duomenys savaime neturi aiškios reikšmės – jie tampa prasmingi tik tada, kai yra identifikuojami kaip svarbūs ir interpretuojami konkrečiame organizaciniame kontekste. Šis procesas modelyje apima organizacijos inovatyvumui reikšmingų duomenų identifikavimą, jų interpretaciją ir suformuotos prasmės įtvirtinimą.

Pirmiausia organizacijoje iš plataus informacijos srauto išskiriami tie duomenys, kurie siejami su galimomis veiklos kryptimis ar pokyčiais. Vėliau šie duomenys interpretuojami, siekiant suprasti jų reikšmę ir galimas veikimo alternatyvas. Šiame etape duomenys įgyja praktinę vertę – jie tampa ne tik informacija, bet ir pagrindu sprendimų svarstymui. Galiausiai suformuota interpretacija įtvirtinama organizacinėje veikloje, procedūrose ar kolektyvinėje patirtyje, taip formuojant bendrą supratimą, kuris daro įtaką tolimesniems sprendimams (Panda, 2022).

Šis procesas yra esminis organizacijos inovatyvumo kontekste, nes būtent jo metu duomenys įgyja veiklos prasmę ir yra susiejami su galimomis naujomis idėjomis, sprendimais ar pokyčiais. Kitaip tariant, prasmės kūrimo procesas sudaro prielaidas inovatyvumui, nes

leidžia organizacijai ne tik kaupti duomenis, bet ir juos interpretuoti kaip potencialių inovacijų pagrindą (Balasooryia ir Sedera, 2026).

Vis dėlto duomenų interpretacija savaime dar neužtikrina veikimo. Nors prasmės kūrimo proceso metu duomenys įgyja reikšmę ir yra susiejami su galimomis veiklos kryptimis, šiame etape jie vis dar išlieka interpretacinio lygmens rezultatu. Kitaip tariant, duomenys gali būti suprasti ir įprasminti, tačiau tai dar nereiškia, kad organizacijoje bus priimti konkretūs sprendimai ar inicijuoti pokyčiai.

Šis skirtumas tarp interpretacijos ir veikimo yra esminis, siekiant paaiškinti duomenų kultūros įtaką organizacijos inovatyvumui. Organizacijoje gali egzistuoti aiškus duomenų supratimas ir net bendras sutarimas dėl jų reikšmės, tačiau jei šios interpretacijos nėra paverčiamos veiksmais, jų potencialas inovatyvumui išlieka neišnaudotas (Elgendy ir kt., 2022). Dėl šios priežasties būtina papildoma teorinė perspektyva, leidžianti paaiškinti, kaip interpretacijos transformuojamos į sprendimus ir organizacinius pokyčius.

Prasmės kūrimo pavertimas veikimu modelyje siejamas su dinaminių gebėjimų lygmeniu, kuris paaiškina, kaip organizacijoje įprasminti duomenys virsta konkrečiais sprendimais ir pokyčiais (Teece, 2018). Šiame etape anksčiau suformuotos duomenų interpretacijos tampa pagrindu veiklos kryptims pasirinkti ir organizaciniams veiksmams inicijuoti.

Pirmiausia organizacija, nustačiusi jos inovatyvumui reikšmingus duomenis, identifikuoja galimas veiklos kryptis ir pasirenka, kurios iš jų yra vertos tolimesnio vystymo. Vėliau šios kryptys konkretizuojamos sprendimų priėmimo procese, kuriame, atsižvelgiant į reikšmingų duomenų interpretacijas inovatyvumo aspektu, nusprendžiama, kokių veiksmų imtis ir kaip juos įgyvendinti. Galiausiai priimti sprendimai realizuojami per organizacinius pokyčius – duomenų prasmė įtvirtinama keičiant procesus, struktūras ar išteklių paskirstymą, taip įgyvendinant pasirinktas veiklos kryptis praktikoje (Elgendy ir kt., 2022; Ciasullo ir kt., 2025). Tokiu būdu dinaminių gebėjimų lygmuo leidžia paaiškinti, kaip reikšmingų duomenų pagrindu suformuotasprasmės kūrimo mechanizmas yra transformuojamas į konkrečią organizacinę veiklą. Būtent šiame etape duomenų prasmė įgyja praktinę išraišką ir tampa veiksmais, kurie gali prisidėti prie organizacijos inovatyvumo.

Svarbu pabrėžti, kad modelyje išskirti prasmės kūrimo ir dinaminių gebėjimų lygmenys yra glaudžiai tarpusavyje susiję ir iš dalies persidengiantys procesai. Veikimo sprendimai organizacijoje remiasi suformuotomis duomenų interpretacijomis, tačiau šie procesai nėra atskiri – interpretacija ir veikimas modelyje persipina, sudarydami vientisą organizacinės veiklos logiką. Taip pat skirtingi prasmės kūrimo aspektai gali būti susiję su skirtingais sprendimų priėmimo ir pokyčių įgyvendinimo procesais. Todėl modelis atspindi persidengiančius įprasminimo ir veikimo procesus, kuriuose duomenų prasmės formavimas ir jos panaudojimas yra neatsiejami.

Organizacijos inovatyvumas modelyje atsiskleidžia kaip šių procesų sąveikos rezultatas. Jis nėra traktuojamas kaip tiesioginė duomenų ar technologinių sprendimų pasekmė, bet kaip organizacinės veiklos išraiška, kylanti iš gebėjimo įprasminti duomenis ir paversti šią prasmę konkrečiais veiksmais. Kitaip tariant, inovatyvumas formuojasi tada, kai duomenų pagrindu suformuotos interpretacijos yra ne tik suprantamos, bet ir įgyvendinamos organizacinėje veikloje. Toks požiūris leidžia inovatyvumą interpretuoti ne kaip pavienį rezultatą ar atskirą veiklą, bet kaip organizacinę dinamiką, kuri priklauso nuo to, kaip efektyviai organizacijoje susiejami duomenų interpretavimo ir veikimo procesai.

Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad siūlomas modelis paaiškina, kaip duomenų kultūra prisideda prie organizacijos inovatyvumo, atskleisdamas, kad šis ryšys pasireiškia per tarpusavyje susijusius duomenų interpretavimo ir jų pavertimo veikla procesus.

Diskusija

Šiame darbe siūlomas požiūris leidžia kitaip pažvelgti į duomenų kultūros ir organizacijos inovatyvumo sąsajas, kurios mokslinėje literatūroje dažniausiai aiškinamos akcentuojant technologinius sprendimus ir analitinius gebėjimus (Grover ir kt., 2018; Verhoef ir kt., 2021). Nors tokia perspektyva pabrėžia duomenų prieinamumo ir analitinių įrankių svarbą, ji ne visuomet atskleidžia, kaip duomenys organizacijoje tampa veiklos pagrindu (Joergensen ir Zaggl, 2024). Šiame straipsnyje parodoma, kad vien technologinis išsivystymas savaime neužtikrina inovatyvumo, nes lemiamą vaidmenį atlieka organizaciniai procesai, per kuriuos duomenys yra interpretuojami ir įveiklinami.

Tokiu būdu šiame darbe siūlomas procesinis požiūris leidžia nuosekliau paaiškinti duomenų kultūros ir organizacijos inovatyvumo sąsajas. Skirtingai nei ankstesniuose tyrimuose, kuriuose šis ryšys dažniausiai aiškinamas fragmentiškai arba siejamas su technologiniais ir analitiniais veiksniais (Chatterjee ir kt., 2021; Hussinki ir kt., 2025). Straipsnyje jis interpretuojamas per nuoseklią procesinę logiką, apimančią informacijos įprasminimą ir jos pavertimą veikla. Ši perspektyva leidžia sujungti skirtingas teorines perspektyvas ir parodyti, kad inovatyvumas formuojasi ne vien interpretacijos ar veikimo lygmenyje, bet jų sąveikoje. Dėl to duomenų kultūra gali būti interpretuojama ne kaip izoliuotas organizacinis atributas, bet kaip sąlyga, struktūruojanti organizacijos gebėjimą kurti inovacijas.

Šios įžvalgos turi ir praktinę reikšmę organizacijoms, siekiančioms didinti inovatyvumą per duomenų naudojimą. Darbo rezultatai rodo, kad vien investicijos į technologinius sprendimus ar analitinius įrankius nėra pakankamos, jei organizacijoje nėra formuojamos praktikos, leidžiančios duomenis interpretuoti ir susieti su veiklos sprendimais. Todėl organizacijos turėtų orientuotis ne tik į duomenų infrastruktūros plėtrą, bet ir į aplinkos, skatinančios kolektyvinę duomenų interpretaciją, sprendimų pagrindimą ir jų įgyvendinimą, kūrimą. Tai apima tiek vadovų elgseną, tiek organizacines normas, kurios lemia, ar duomenys tampa realiu sprendimų pagrindu, ar išlieka tik informacijos šaltiniu.

Svarbu pažymėti ir šio modelio ribotumus. Pasiūlytas modelis yra teorinio pobūdžio, todėl jo pagrįstumas dar nėra patikrintas empiriškai. Be to, šiame darbe dėmesys sutelkiamas į pagrindinius mechanizmus, todėl nėra analizuojami galimi kontekstiniai veiksniai, kurie galėtų stiprinti arba silpninti šiuos procesus skirtingose organizacijose. Atsižvelgiant į tai, ateities tyrimuose būtų tikslinga empiriškai patikrinti šiame darbe siūlomą modelį ir analizuoti, kaip skirtingi organizaciniai kontekstai veikia duomenų interpretacijos ir veikimo sąveiką. Taip pat vertinga būtų tirti, kokie konkretūs organizaciniai veiksniai padeda užtikrinti, kad duomenų pagrindu formuojamos įžvalgos būtų nuosekliai paverčiamos inovatyviais sprendimais.

Išvados

Straipsnyje išplėtojamas požiūris į duomenų kultūros įtaką organizacijos inovatyvumui, siūlant procesinę šio ryšio interpretaciją. Mokslinė vertė pasireiškia tuo, kad duomenų kultūra analizuojama ne kaip tiesioginis inovatyvumo veiksnys, bet kaip organizacinė sąlyga, struktūruojanti informacijos įprasminimo ir jos pavertimo veikla procesus.

Straipsnis prisideda prie esamos literatūros, pasiūlydamas originalų konceptualų modelį, kuriame sujungiamos prasmės kūrimo ir dinaminių gebėjimų teorijos. Skirtingai nei ankstesniuose tyrimuose, šios teorijos nėra traktuojamos kaip atskiros ar nuosekliai viena po kitos sekančios, bet integruojamos į vientisą procesinę logiką, leidžiančią paaiškinti perėjimą nuo duomenų interpretacijos prie veikimo.

Svarbus teorinis indėlis yra šių teorijų sąveikos išryškinimas, atskleidžiant jų tarpusavio sąsajas ir komplementarumą. Parodoma, kad prasmės kūrimo procesas sudaro interpretacinį pagrindą, per kurį duomenys įgyja reikšmę, o dinaminiai gebėjimai paaiškina, kaip ši reikšmė paverčiama organizacine veikla. Ypatingas dėmesys skiriamas organizacijos inovatyvumo galimybių atpažinimo etapui, kuris veikia kaip pradinė jungiamoji grandis tarp įprasminimo ir veikimo, leidžianti konceptualiai pagrįsti šių teorijų persidengimą.

Praktiniu požiūriu straipsnis parodo, kad organizacijos, siekiančios didinti inovatyvumą, turėtų orientuotis ne tik į duomenų infrastruktūros ar analitinių sprendimų plėtrą, bet ir į organizacinių praktikų, leidžiančių duomenis interpretuoti ir susieti su veiklos sprendimais, formavimą. Tai apima dėmesį tiek duomenų reikšmingumo identifikavimui, tiek interpretacijos ir veikimo sąsajų stiprinimui organizacijoje. Vis dėlto siūlomas modelis yra teorinio pobūdžio, todėl jo empirinio pagrįstumo klausimas išlieka atviras. Ateities tyrimuose būtų tikslinga įvertinti modelio taikymą skirtinguose organizaciniuose kontekstuose ir empiriškai patikrinti jame numatytų procesų sąveiką.

Literatūra

1. Balasooryia, A. & Sedera, D. (2026). Organizational Sensemaking Theory Perspective of Developing AI- Driven Strategies for Sustainability Initiatives. Business Strategy and the Environment, 0:1–16. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.70571
2. Bogers, M., Chesbrough, H., & Moedas, C. (2018). Open innovation: Research, practices, and policies. *California Management Review, 60*(2), 5–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125617745086
3. Canbul Yaroglu, A. (2025). Shaping Organizational Communication: The Impact of AI and Language through Weick's Sensemaking *Theory. International Journal of Business Communication.* https://doi.org/10.1177/23294884251327584
4. Chatterjee, S., Chaudhuri, R., & Vrontis, D. (2021). Does data-driven culture impact innovation and performance of a firm? An empirical examination. *Annals of Operations Research*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10479-020-03887-z
5. Ciasullo, M., V., Ferrara, M. & Lim, W., M. (2025). Dynamic capabilities and data-driven culture for digital transformation: evidence from agri-food SMEs. *British Food Journal*, Vol. ahead-of-print No. ahead-of-print. https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-02-2025-0119
6. Cristofaro, M. & Giardino, P. L. (2025). Human–AI synergy: finding cognitive balance in idea generation for product innovation. *European Journal of Innovation Management*. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJIM-03-2025-0312
7. Elgendy, N., Elragal, A., & Paivarinta, T. (2022). DECAS: a modern data-driven decision theory for big data and analytics. *Journal of Decision Systems*, *31*(4), 337–373. https://doi.org/10.1080/12460125.2021.1894674
8. Ghodoosi, B., West, T., Li, Q., Torrisi-Steele, G., & Dey, S. (2023). A systematic literature review of data literacy education. *Journal of Business & Finance Librarianship*, 28(2), 112–127. https://doi.org/10.1080/08963568.2023.2171552
9. Grover, V., Chiang, R. H. L., Liang, T. P., & Zhang, D. (2018). Creating strategic business value from big data analytics: A research framework. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 35(2), 388–423. https://doi.org/10.1080/07421222.2018.1451951

10. Huynh, M. (2025). *Individual Data-Driven Mindset and Decision-Making Performance: The Mediating Roles of Effort and Persistence. Information Systems Frontiers*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-025-10647-6
11. Hussinki, H., Ritala, P., Vanhala, M., Kianto, A., & Mero, J. (2025). Effects of Big Data Analytics on firm Innovativeness: The role of a Data-Driven Culture. *Knowledge and Process Management*, *32*(4), 161–173. https://doi.org/10.1002/kpm.70000
12. Joergensen, N., P., & Zaggl, M. (2024). The role of data science and data analytics for innovation: a literature review. *Journal of Business Analytics*, *7*(4), 207–223. https://doi.org/10.1080/2573234X.2024.2365917
13. Kariv, D., Krueger, N., Kashy, G. & Cisneros, L. (2024). Process innovation is technology transfer too! How entrepreneurial businesses manage product and process innovation. *The Journal of Technology Transfer* 49, 1762–1786. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10961-023-10061-7
14. Kurpiela, S., Teuteberg, F. (2024) Linking business analytics affordances to corporate strategic planning and decision making outcomes. *Information Systems and E-Business Management.* 22, 33–6. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10257-023-00661-z
15. Li, M., Wang, X., Fernandes Guzzo, R., & Guchait, P. (2025). The Impact of Workplace Multi-Foci Information on Error Tolerance: Roles of Organizational Culture and Leadership Style. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration,* 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2025.2476426
16. Mikalef, P., Boura, M., Lekakos, G., & Krogstie, J. (2020). *The role of information governance in big data analytics driven innovation. Information & Management,* 57(7), 103361. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2020.103361
17. Neudert, P., Smolka, M., & Böschen, S. (2024). Towards transformative innovation ecosystems: a systemic approach to responsible innovation. *Journal of Responsible Innovation*, *11*(1). https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2024.2414482
18. Nudurupati, S. S., Tebboune, S., Garengo, P., Daley, R., & Hardman, J. (2024). Performance measurement in data intensive organisations: resources and capabilities for decision-making process. *Production Planning & Control,* 35(4), 373–393. https://doi.org/10.1080/09537287.2022.2084468
19. O'Reilly (2022). Creating a Smart Data Culture. People & Technology. https://research.ebsco.com/c/7a7sn3/viewer/pdf/pdvals6dcr?modal=download
20. OECD/Eurostat (2018), Oslo Manual 2018: Guidelines for Collecting, Reporting and Using Data on Innovation, 4th Edition, The Measurement of Scientific, Technological and Innovation Activities, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304604-en
21. Oliver, G., Cranefield, J., Lilley, S., & Lewellen, M. J. (2023). Understanding data culture/s: Influences, activities, and initiatives: An Annual Review of Information Science and Technology (ARIST) paper. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 75(3), 201–214. https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24737
22. Panda, D., K. (2022). A Behavioural System of Strategy-as-practice for Grant Acquisition in Nonprofits: An Investigation Through the Sensemaking Theory and Systems Theory. S*ystems Research and Behavioral Science*, 40(6), 876-889. https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.2920
23. Pittenger, L. M., Glassman, A. M., Mumbower, S., Merritt, D. M., & Bollenback, D. (2023). Bounded Rationality: Managerial Decision-Making and Data. *Journal of*

Computer Information Systems, 63(4), 890–903. https://doi.org/10.1080/08874417.2022.2111380

24. Szukits, A., Moricz, P. (2024). Towards data-driven decision making: the role of analytical culture and centralization efforts. *Review of Managerial Science.* 18, 2849–2887. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-023-00694-1
25. Teece, D. J. (2018). Business models and dynamic capabilities. *Long Range Planning, 51*(1), 40–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2017.06.007
26. Teece, D. J. (2020). Dynamic capabilities and innovation management: Organizing for sustained innovation. *Strategic Management Review, 1*(1), 1–23.
27. Verhoef, P. C., Broekhuizen, T., Bart, Y., Bhattacharya, A., Dong, J. Q., Fabian, N., & Haenlein, M. (2021). Digital transformation: A multidisciplinary reflection and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research, 122*, 889–901. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.09.022
28. Weick, K., E. (1995). Sensemaking in Organizations. https://www.scribd.com/document/712205310/Sensemaking-in-Organizations-Karl-E-Weick-Z-lib-org-1

THE IMPACT OF DATA CULTURE ON ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATIVENESS

Justina VAITIEKŪNĖ, Inga STANKEVIČĖ
Kaunas University of Technology

Summary

With the increasing volume of data and growing organizational investments in analytical solutions, it is increasingly observed that data within organizations is often used in a limited manner, primarily for monitoring performance and reporting, rather than serving as a foundation for innovation or the development of new solutions. This indicates that data availability and technological sophistication alone are insufficient to ensure organizational innovativeness. Instead, the effective use of data depends on the organizational context in which it is interpreted and applied.

In this context, the concept of data culture has gained increasing attention. Data culture refers to the shared values, norms, and practices within an organization that shape how data is perceived, interpreted, and used in decision-making processes. Despite its growing relevance, existing research often treats data culture and organizational innovativeness as separate constructs, while their interrelationships remain insufficiently explained. Moreover, prior studies frequently emphasize technological or analytical capabilities, without fully addressing the organizational processes through which data contributes to innovation.

The aim of this paper is to theoretically substantiate the relationship between data culture and organizational innovativeness and to explain the mechanisms through which this relationship manifests at the level of organizational processes. To achieve this, the paper adopts a process-based perspective and integrates two complementary theoretical approaches: sensemaking theory and the dynamic capabilities perspective.

Sensemaking theory provides a framework for understanding how organizations interpret information and construct meaning in situations characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty. From this perspective, data does not inherently possess meaning; rather, meaning emerges

through interpretation. Organizational action is therefore not based on data itself, but on how data is understood within a specific context. This approach allows data use to be conceptualized as an interpretative process, which remains underexplored in the data culture literature. The sensemaking process can be described through three interrelated phases: the identification of relevant signals (enactment), their interpretation (selection), and the stabilization of meaning within organizational practices (retention).

While sensemaking theory explains how meaning is constructed, it does not fully account for how interpretations are translated into concrete actions. For this reason, the paper complements this perspective with the dynamic capabilities framework. According to Teece (2018), dynamic capabilities refer to an organization's ability to sense opportunities, seize them through decision-making, and transform its operations accordingly. This perspective provides an explanation of how organizations move from understanding to action and how interpretations become embedded in organizational change and innovation processes.

By integrating these two theoretical approaches, the paper develops a conceptual model that explains how data culture contributes to organizational innovativeness. In this model, data culture is conceptualized as a contextual condition that influences how organizations identify relevant data, interpret it, and act upon it. Sensemaking processes explain how data acquires meaning, while dynamic capabilities explain how these interpretations are transformed into decisions and organizational changes.

The proposed model suggests that organizational innovativeness emerges as the outcome of a continuous process that involves data identification, interpretation, and the transformation of interpretations into action. This implies that innovation does not result directly from data or technology, but from the organization's ability to interpret data and act upon these interpretations. Consequently, organizations with similar levels of data availability may exhibit different levels of innovativeness, depending on their interpretative practices and their capacity to translate insights into action.

This paper contributes to the existing literature by extending the understanding of the relationship between data culture and organizational innovativeness. While previous research has often focused on the existence of this relationship, the proposed model explains the underlying process through which it unfolds. In particular, the paper highlights the interaction between interpretation and action as a central mechanism linking data use to innovation. By doing so, it shifts the focus from technological capabilities to organizational processes and provides a more nuanced explanation of how data-driven innovation is formed.

In conclusion, the paper proposes that data culture should not be viewed as an isolated organizational attribute, but as a fundamental condition that shapes how organizations make sense of data and transform it into innovative outcomes. This perspective offers a deeper understanding of data-driven innovation and provides a theoretical foundation for future empirical research.

Keywords: data culture, organizational innovativeness, data-driven decision-making, sensemaking theory, dynamic capabilities theory.

This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) License.

Autorių kolektyvas
Visuomenės saugumas ir viešoji tvarka (38) Nr. 1: mokslinis žurnalas. – Kaunas: Mykolo Romerio universiteto Viešojo saugumo akademija, 2026. – 209 p.
ISSN 2029–1701 (print) ISSN 2335–2035 (online)

VISUOMENĖS SAUGUMAS IR VIEŠOJI TVARKA (38) Nr. 1
Mokslinis žurnalas

PUBLIC SECURITY AND PUBLIC ORDER (38) Nr. 1
Research Journal

Atsakingasis redaktorius – prof. dr. Rūta Adamonienė
Atsakingojo redaktoriaus pavaduotoja – prof. dr. Aurelija Pūraitė
Vykdantysis redaktorius – doc. dr. Rasa Dobržinskienė
Maketavo – Pavėl Lesko ir Nėlė Visminienė
2026-06-18
15 autorinių lankų

Išleido Mykolo Romerio universiteto Viešojo saugumo akademija
Maironio g. 27, LT- 44211, El. paštas vsa@mruni.eu
Kaunas 2026 m.
Tinklapis internete www.mruni.eu
https://www3.mruni.eu/ojs/vsvt/index