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WHAT IS THE ATTITUDE OF FUTURE POLICE OFFICERS TOWARDS THE DIVERSITY OF CITIZENS?

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Annotation. With regards to the refugee crisis in EU many questions were raised – what are the prevailing attitudes of the citizens to these challenges and how to increase their tolerance and social sensitivity of the citizens belonging to various minority groups. One of the most important factors influencing the formation of personality attitudes and humanistic values is education. Education for autonomy and open-mindedness can prepare students for citizenship in diverse society (Taylor, R.M., 2017). As researches show Lithuanians seem to have rather negative attitude toward immigrants and minority groups therefore the role of education is becoming increasingly important. So, the purpose of this study was to explore and assess the attitudes of students the future police officers towards immigrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, and other minority groups, analyzing them in the context of the general tolerance level, as well as of the acceptance of other minority groups and identifying the role of Education at the University in developing these attitudes.

Students of law enforcement university program do not consider Lithuanians as very tolerant. Females future officers consider themselves being more tolerant compared to males. Participants consider themselves as more tolerant persons compared to other Lithuanians. The concept of being tolerant does not include the attitude toward acceptance of asylum-seekers and immigrants. The level of tolerance in both gender groups is related to acceptance of persons with physical disability. Students express higher agreeableness to admission of asylum- seekers to Lithuania under such circumstances as family reunion, hunger, financial strain or natural catastrophes and the war. Only one third of the law enforcement program students stated that they discuss during the lectures the issues about asylum-seeking and immigration.

Keywords: attitudes immigrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, minority groups, future police officers, education

INTRODUCTION

The essence of European identity seems to be mainly determined by the values and traditions that define the European Union (EU), such as freedom, human rights, democracy, tolerance and the enlightenment. In addition, the basis for the identity of Europe indicates the

cultural diversity of European nations. With regards to the refugee crisis in EU many questions were raised – what are the prevailing attitudes of the citizens to these challenges and how to increase their tolerance and social sensitivity of the citizens belonging to various minority groups, what is the legal, material and social readiness of the countries to receive refugees, etc.

COVID-19 has somewhat overshadowed the refugees problem, but it has not disappeared and may become even stronger in the near future. Thus, the problem of citizens' attitudes towards the phenomenon in question remains relevant.

Human history shows that the migration of large groups of people causes indigenous people feelings of insecurity, hostility and inter-group conflicts (Dummett, M., 2001). This is often related to the strengthening of stereotypes and prejudices towards "strangers" (Louis,Duck,Terry, et al.,2007). Thus, the question why some citizens want to exclude refugees is socially important. Usually people are more tolerant toward asylum-seekers who are escaping from war-zones, as they can be considered as extremely deprived persons. But recent researches show that in some EU countries (Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary) a relatively small percentage of citizens would admit refugees from war-zones and let them settle down in these countries (Bernát, Sik, Simonovits, Szeitl, 2015). There are also other differences in the attitudes of citizens of different EU countries towards refugees, asylum seekers, etc. (Thalhammer et al., 2001, Erolova Y.,2017, Hochman O., 2015). Researchers are exploring the various mechanisms by which such attitudes are formed - sociocultural, national, socioeconomic, and psychological (Davidov, E.,Meuleman, B.,2012, Nickerson A. M., Louis W.R., 2008). The aim is also to understand the influence and weight of individual characteristics and the influence of the environment such as education, social media on the formation of attitudes and prejudices (Hochman O., 2015, Chong, D., Druckman, J. N. 2007, Sutkutė R., 2019). One of the most important factors influencing the formation of personality attitudes and humanistic values is education. Education for autonomy and open-mindedness can prepare students for citizenship in diverse society (Taylor, R.M., 2017).

Every EU country meets the challenges for Citizenship education how to raise and educate children and young people in the spirit of tolerance, combating racism and xenophobia, respect for human rights, and an understanding of common cultural heritage. Discrimination and intolerance are often based on/or justified by prejudice and stereotyping of people and social groups, doing this consciously or unconsciously. People may be discriminated against because of many factors – age, disability, ethnicity, origin, political belief, race, religion,

gender, sexual orientation and on many other grounds. Researchers has proved that negative attitudes toward homosexuals and elderly people, Blacks (as well representation of racism), women (as well representation of sexism), prejudice toward mentally disabled persons are highly correlated and form one single factor (Ekehammar and Akrami, 2003; Ekehammer et al., 2004). Discrimination has direct consequences on those people and groups being discriminated against, but it has also indirect and deep consequences on society as a whole. A society where discrimination is allowed or tolerated is a society where people are deprived from freely exercising their full potential for themselves and for society (EP, 2006).

Lithuania has very homogeneous society in means of ethnicity and religion. Surveys in Lithuania show that Lithuanians are not psychologically prepared to accept refugees and asylum-seekers and have quite negative attitudes towards them as well as attitudes toward various minority groups and it may reflect general intolerance (Petronytė, 2016, Snieškienė, Vaitkevičiūtė, 2016, Jankauskaitė, 2003, Reingarde, Zdanevičius, 2007, Platovas, 2003, Tereškinas, 2003).

Police and law enforcement officers should not take up discriminatory position related to some persons as this can affect the professional interactions negatively. The quality of police–community relations depend on effective communication and trust-based interaction. However, police officers may have many barriers to communication because of their position and authority, nature of their work, power they may demonstrate in relations with citizens, and the image they convey (these barriers include use of jargon, lack of feedback, failure to listen, prejudices and stereotypes). One of the most challenging things in our increasingly diverse society is to avoid the discrimination. Prejudice is an attitude, discrimination is a behavior. According to researchers and professionals who work in practice it is critical to recognize prejudices and stereotypes in order to avoid discrimination (Miller, Hess, Orthmann, 2011), and it is very important for every law enforcement system. Police officers, lawyers, educators, employers' agents are the professionals who should ensure right to equality of any person despite his/her belonging to certain group. Unfortunately there is no evidence about Lithuanian law enforcement officer's attitudes towards immigrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, as well as towards representatives of other minority groups in the sense of ethnicity, religion, special needs, sexual identification, etc. So, it was important for us to explore this point of attitudes.

Role of education and tolerance training may have a huge impact on homophobic reactions, attitudes toward and dealing with immigrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, and other

minority groups members. According to Council of Europe recommendations, educational programmes that raise awareness about the mechanisms of prejudice and intolerance and how they contribute to discriminate and oppress people, and on the appreciation of diversity and promoting tolerance, may be most effective. Educators recognize the need to develop in every person a tolerant, non-discriminatory attitude and create a learning environment that acknowledges and benefits from diversity instead of ignoring or excluding it (Council of Europe). Therefore, we believe that the training of future police officers at the University must pay due attention to the development of appropriate attitudes of future officers to immigrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, and other minority groups members.

The purpose of the study to explore and assess the attitudes of the future police officers towards immigrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, and other minority groups, analyzing them in the context of the general tolerance level, as well as of the acceptance of other minority groups and identifying the role of Education at the University in developing these attitudes.

Objectives:

- To evaluate students' tolerance level in relation with acceptance of migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, and other minority group persons.
- To explore students' opinion about admission of asylum-seekers refugees, and immigrants to Lithuania.
- To evaluate the role of education at the University in forming their attitudes towards migrants and asylum-seekers
- To compare the attitudes towards migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, and other minority group persons in relation with the gender of respondents

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Participants. 264 students (63,1,8% female and 36,9% male) of Mykolas Romeris University Academy of Public Security from Law and Police Activity program participated in the study. The age range of the students is 18 to 46 years with mean M=21,7(SD=3,4) years.

Methods. Questionnaire: questions adapted from our previous study, also Hungary study "Attitudes towards refugees, asylum seekers and migrants" (Bernát, Sik, Simonovits, Szeitl, 2015) was used in the study, statements with 5 point scale were ealuationg the attitudes toward various minorities groups (statement evaluation: 1 – strongly disagree, 3 – neutral, 5 – strongly agree; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,906$).

Also students were asked about their sociodemographic: gender, age, parents family status (lived with both parents, with single parent but was interacting with both of them, lived with single parent), siblings (no/yes), living place in early years (city, town, village place, countryside), financial strain of parental family during early years of live and personal financial situation during studies (sufficient–lack).

Procedure. The questionnaires for participants were anonymous. SPSS 22.0 package was used for statistical analysis and empirical data.

RESULTS

Results presented in Figure 1 revealed that only about one third of participants strongly perceive themselves as a tolerant person (and in fact this prevalence may be smaller because of positive social acceptability and tendency to present themselves as more positive). 58,1% males and 71,3 % females consider themselves as a tolerant person. Future law enforcement officers females consider themselves being more tolerant compared to males: Chi-squared statistics χ^2=11,578, df=4, p=0,021).

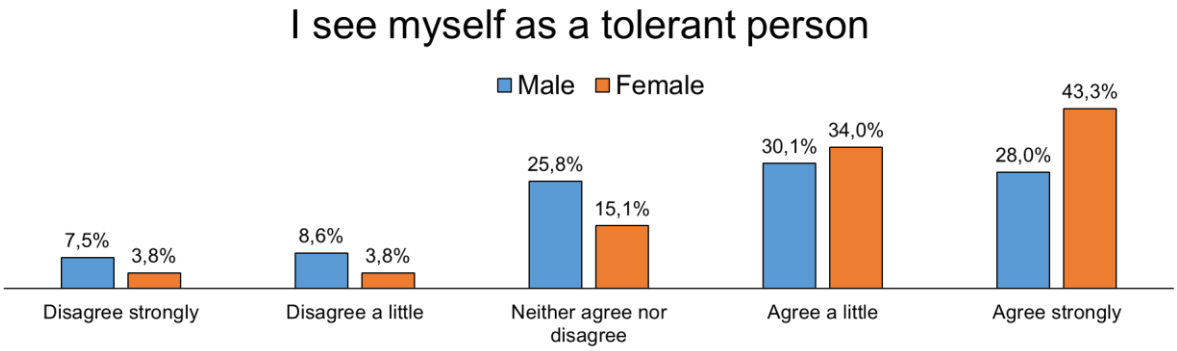


Figure 1. Do future law enforcement officers consider themselves as a tolerant person?

Students do not consider Lithuanians as very tolerant – only 22,8% males and 21,4% females stated that their nationals are tolerant persons (no statistical significant differences in opinions between male/female groups: χ^2=4,799, df=4, p=0,309, Mann-Whitney standardized statistics -1,590, p=0,112; Figure 2).

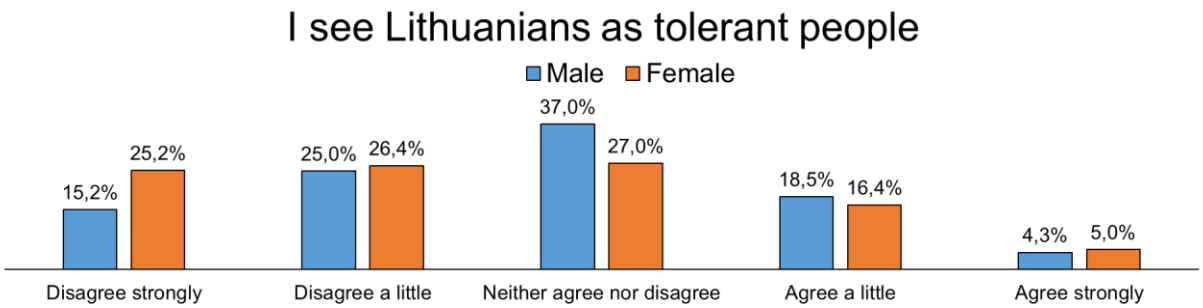


Figure 2. Do future law enforcement officers consider Lithuanians as a tolerant society?

Participants consider themselves as more tolerant persons compared to other Lithuanians (Sign test standardized statistics -5,828, p<0,001 (male); standardized statistics -10,231, p<0,001 (female)).

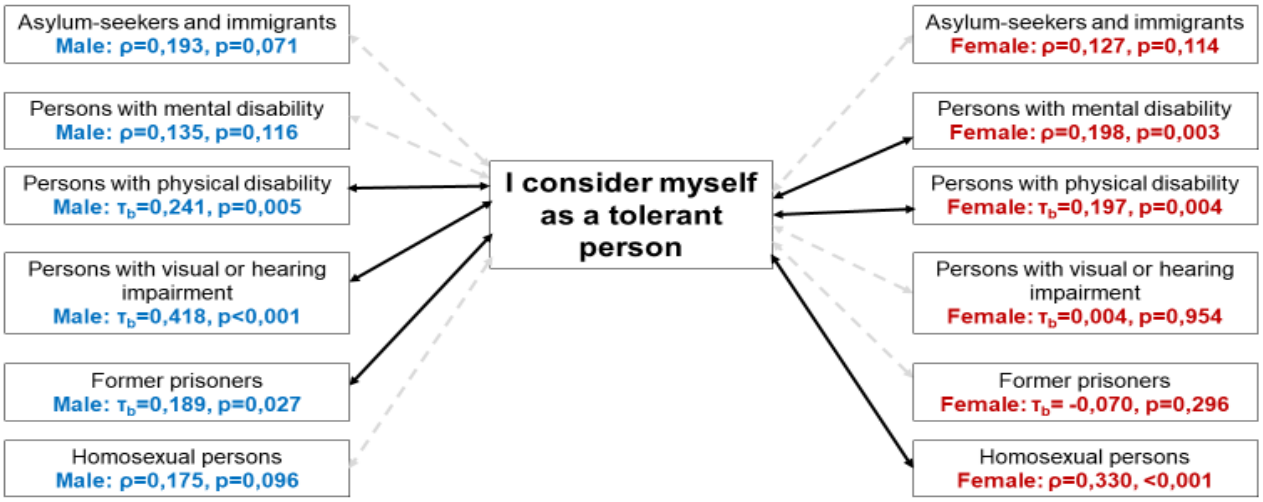


Figure 3. How students' tolerance level is related to acceptance of minority group persons?

Higher perception of themselves as a tolerant person is related to stronger acceptance of persons with physical disability (positive correlations coefficients for both male and female participants groups (p<0,05; Figure 3)). Male participants that perceive themselves as a more tolerant person are more tolerant and unobjectionable for persons with visual or hearing impairment and former prisoners as well. Contrary, female participants that perceive themselves as a more tolerant person, are more tolerant and acceptable for persons with mental disability and homosexual minorities.

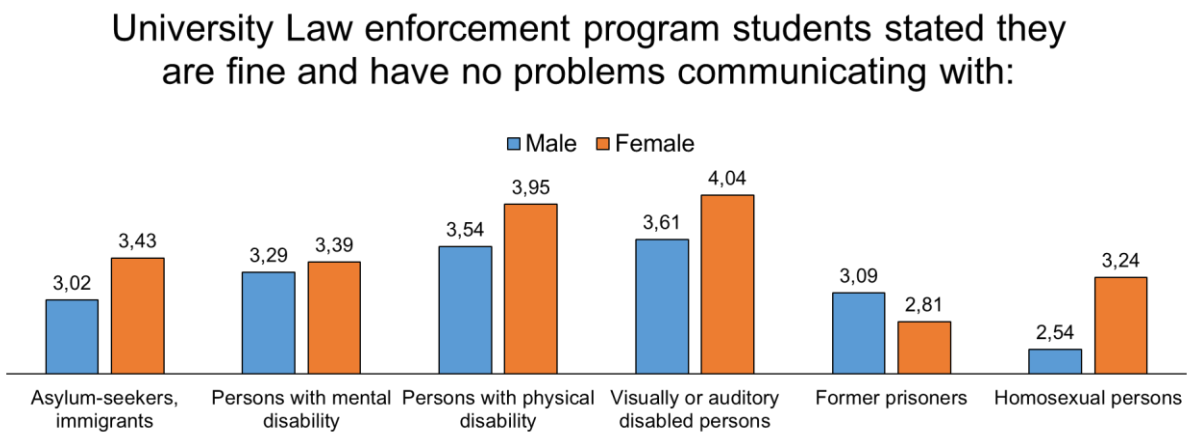


Figure 4. Do future law enforcement officers avoid some minority group persons?

Results presented in Figure 4 reveal that female participants are more comfort compared to male colleagues while communicating with asylum seekers (Students t test's $p<0,05$), persons with physical, visual or auditory disabilities ($p<0,05$) and homosexual persons ($p<0,01$), while male future law enforcement officers are more confident when communicating with former convict individuals ($p<0,05$) (higher mean scores in Figure 4 represents higher tolerance and acceptance while communicating with a person).

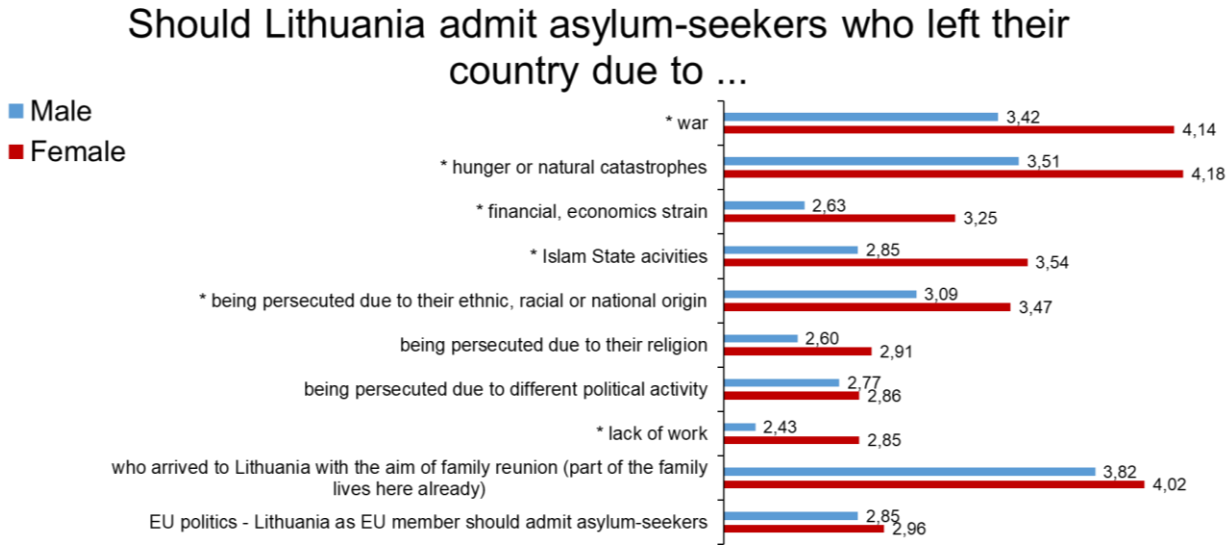


Figure 5. What is male and female student's opinion about admission of asylum-seekers and immigrants?

Female students tend to be more acceptant because of specific admission circumstances of asylum seekers compared to male colleagues ($p<0,05$; higher mean scores in Figure 5 represents higher tolerance and acceptance of asylum seekers) – female future law enforcement officers agree that Lithuanian governance and citizens should accept for residence individuals who left their country because of war, hunger, natural catastrophes, economical strain, lack of work, because of Islam state activities and being persecuted in home country for some reasons.

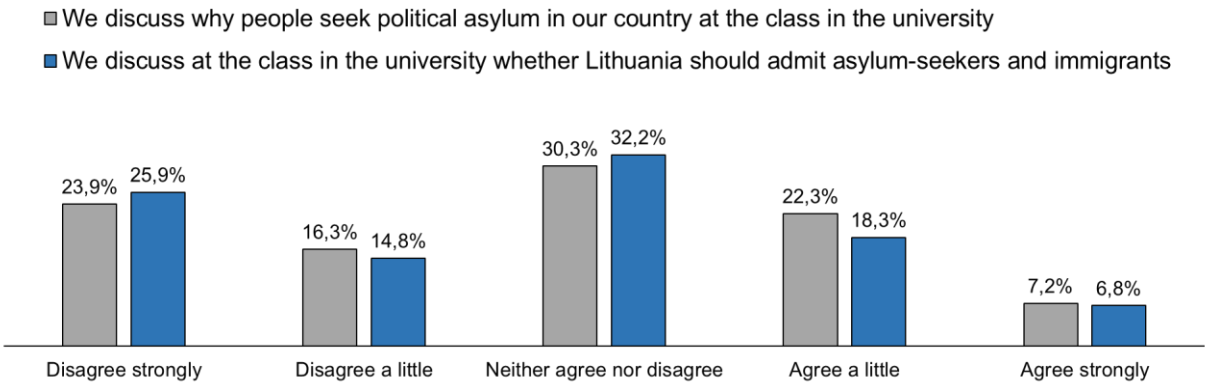


Figure 6. Do future law enforcement officers discuss during the study process why do people seek political asylum and the admission problems?

Only about 25-30 percent of students stated that they discuss during the study process about the individuals who seek political asylum and the reasons of admission problems (there were no statistically significant differences comparing the opinions of male and female persons, $p>0,05$ for Chi-squares statistics; Figure 6).



Figure 7. May the discussions about the asylum-seekers' and immigrants' admission process be related to students' tolerance?

There are no statistically significant relationships between discussions at the class in the university whether Lithuania should admit asylum-seekers or immigrants and future law enforcement officers' perception of themselves as tolerant persons: correlation coefficients ρ(male)= -0,004, p=0,962; ρ(female)=0,027, p=0,691 (Figure 7). However male students who discuss more at the class in the university whether Lithuania should admit asylum-seekers or immigrants, perceive other Lithuanians as more tolerant persons: ρ(male)=0,209, p=0,017; ρ(female)=0,097, p=0,136.

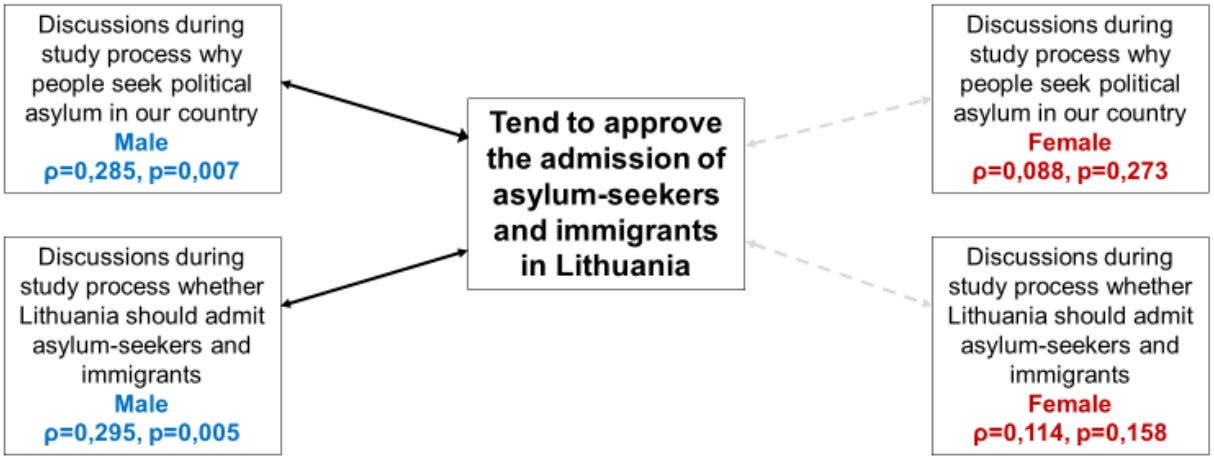


Figure 8. May the discussions about the asylum-seekers' and immigrants' admission process be related to students' acceptance of these persons?

Male students tend to approve the admission of asylum-seekers and immigrants in Lithuania more often if they discuss more often why people seek political asylum in our country (correlation coefficient ρ=0,285, p=0,007; Figure 8) as well if discuss more often whether Lithuania should admit asylum-seekers and immigrants in the university (ρ=0,295, p=0,005). There are no statistically significant relationships related to these points in female future law enforcement officers' group (ρ=0,088, p=0,273 and ρ=0,114, p=0,158, respectively).

CONCLUSIONS

Students do not consider Lithuanians as very tolerant. Participants consider themselves as more tolerant persons compared to other Lithuanians. Future law enforcement officers females consider themselves being more tolerant compared to males.

The concept of being tolerant does not include the attitude toward acceptance of asylum-seekers and immigrants. The level of tolerance in both gender groups is related to acceptance of persons with physical disability. Males' level of tolerance is related to acceptance of persons with visual or hearing impairment and past prisoners, but not related to acceptance of persons who are asylum-seeking or immigrant, homosexual and have mental disability. Females' level of tolerance is related to acceptance of persons with mental disability, but not asylum-seeking or immigrant individuals, past prisoners, persons with visual or hearing disability.

Students express higher agreeableness to admission of asylum- seekers to Lithuania under such circumstances as family reunion, hunger or natural catastrophes and the war. Female students tend to be more tolerant because of specific admission circumstances compared to male colleagues. Female students are more likely to agree with the admission of asylum-seekers in the cases of the war, hunger, financial, economic strain, Islam State activities, lack of work, and being persecuted due to different political activity.

Only one third of the law enforcement program students stated that they discuss during the lectures the issues about asylum-seeking and immigration. The discussions during the lectures about the problems of asylum-seekers and immigrants are related with the male students' perception of Lithuanians as more tolerant persons.

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