



**Courts of  
appeal instance  
celebrating**

**30<sup>th</sup>**

**anniversary**



**30 key facts 1995 to 2025**

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A photograph of the Lithuanian flag (yellow, green, and red horizontal stripes) flying from a tall wooden pole in a grand, classical-style hall with high ceilings and columns. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights.

# THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

after the restoration of independence  
of the Republic of Lithuania

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1

The transformation of Lithuania's judicial system, following the nation's restoration of independence in 1990, began on 16 January 1992. On this date, the Supreme Council (Reconstituent Seimas) adopted the *Law on the Amendment and Supplementation of Certain Articles of the Provisional Basic Law of the Republic of Lithuania*. This law laid down the foundation for a modern, four-tier court system, comprising the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, Regional Courts, and District Courts. Notably, this structure echoed the judicial framework that had existed in Lithuania in its interwar period.

2

On 6 February 1992, the *Law on Courts* and its implementing decree were adopted. However, additional legislation was required to fully implement the judicial system outlined in the *Provisional Basic Law*.

As a result, the *Law on the Establishment of District Courts* was adopted on 12 March 1992. This law replaced the existing city and territorial courts with 54 newly established district courts. Despite this progress, other provisions of the *Provisional Basic Law* and the *Law on Courts* pertaining to the establishment of district courts, the Court of Appeal of Lithuania, and the Supreme Court of Lithuania, remained unimplemented, as no further amendments and additions were made to the law.

3

Major changes to the judicial system are associated with the adoption of the new Constitution in a referendum on 25 October 1992. The Constitution enshrines the principles concerning judicial authority as recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Among these, the independence of judges, the courts, and the judicial system as a whole is of utmost importance.

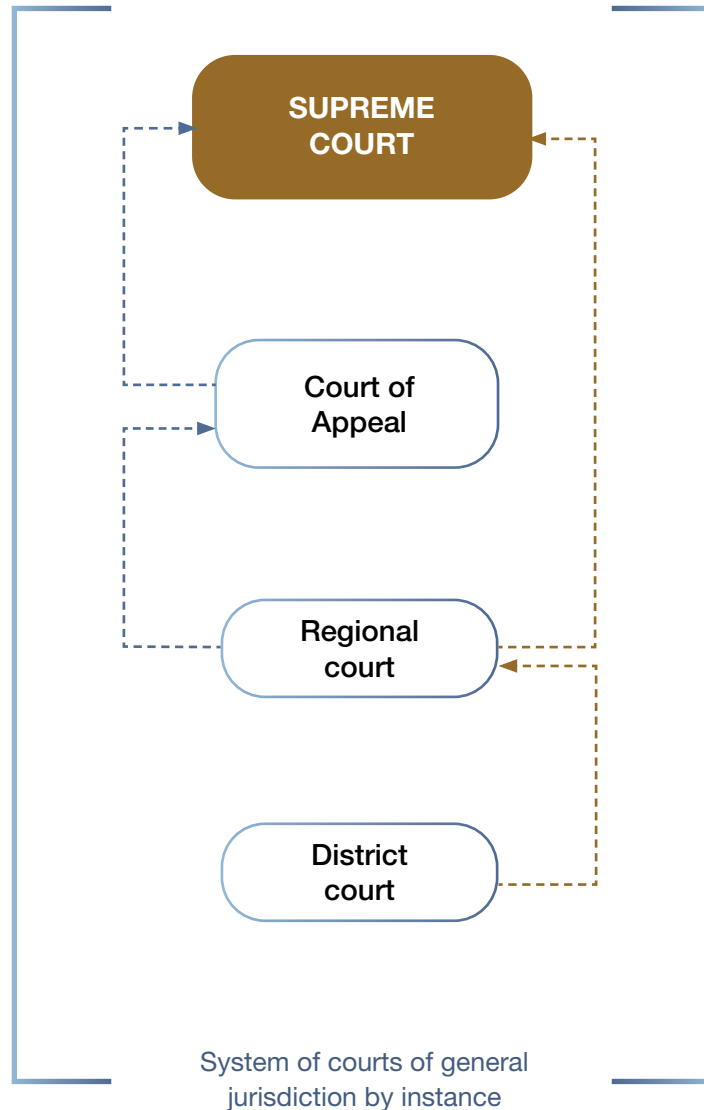
4

By the Law of 15 June 1994 On the Foundation of the Supreme Court of Lithuania, the Court of Appeal of Lithuania and Regional Courts, Determination of the Territory of Jurisdiction of Regional and District Courts as well as on the Reform of the Lithuanian Prosecutor's Office, all the courts outlined in the Constitution were established and began their activities on **1 January 1995**.



5

The structure of this judicial system has remained unchanged to this day, although the distribution of judicial competences among its branches has undergone significant adjustments. A major development took place on 8 April 1998 with the adoption of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Courts. This reform reassigned the function of hearing in cassation exclusively to the Supreme Court of Lithuania, replacing the previous arrangement involving the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, and five regional courts. This change established the current instance-based judicial system and provided a framework for consistent judicial practice throughout the country.



## CHANGES

following the establishment of specialised (administrative) courts

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6

Another key change in the judicial system was the establishment of specialised administrative courts. The Constitution provides that specialised courts may be established to handle administrative, labour, family, and other categories of cases. As of 1 May 1999, a three-tier system of administrative courts, consisting of 5 Regional Administrative Courts, the Supreme Administrative Court, and the Administrative Cases Division of the Lithuanian Court of Appeal, was implemented.

7

On 1 January 2001, this system was restructured by merging the Administrative Cases Division of the Court of Appeal of Lithuania with the Supreme Administrative Court into the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania.



## JUDICIAL SYSTEM TODAY

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8

Over the past decade, a series of reforms has been introduced to enhance the quality of judicial activities and ensure an equitable distribution of the judges' workloads. These reforms have been aimed to provide justice of consistent quality and efficiency across all cities and regions in the country. In 2013, the district courts in Vilnius, Kaunas and Šiauliai were merged. As of 1 January 2018, the 49 previously operating district courts were reorganised into 12 district courts with separate divisions (courthouses). The number of regional administrative courts was reduced from 5 to 2: the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court and the Regional Administrative Court. On 1 January 2024, the Regional Administrative Court of the Republic of Lithuania was merged into the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, which was subsequently renamed the Regional Administrative Court.

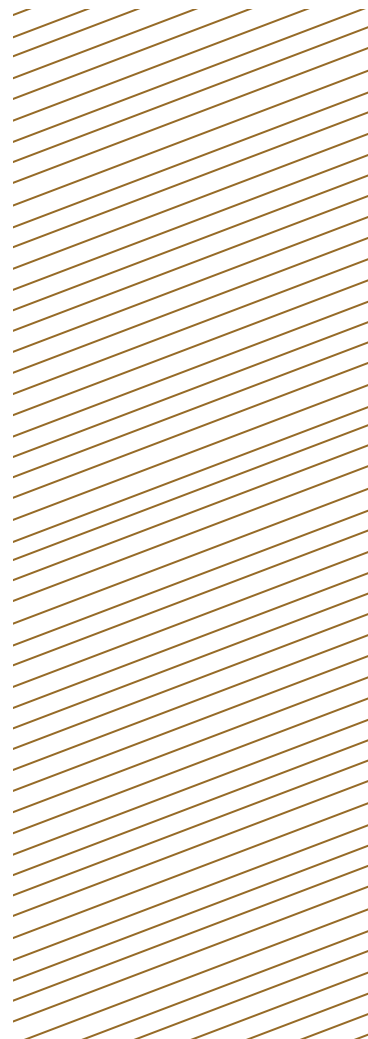
**The court system of the  
Republic of Lithuania consists of**

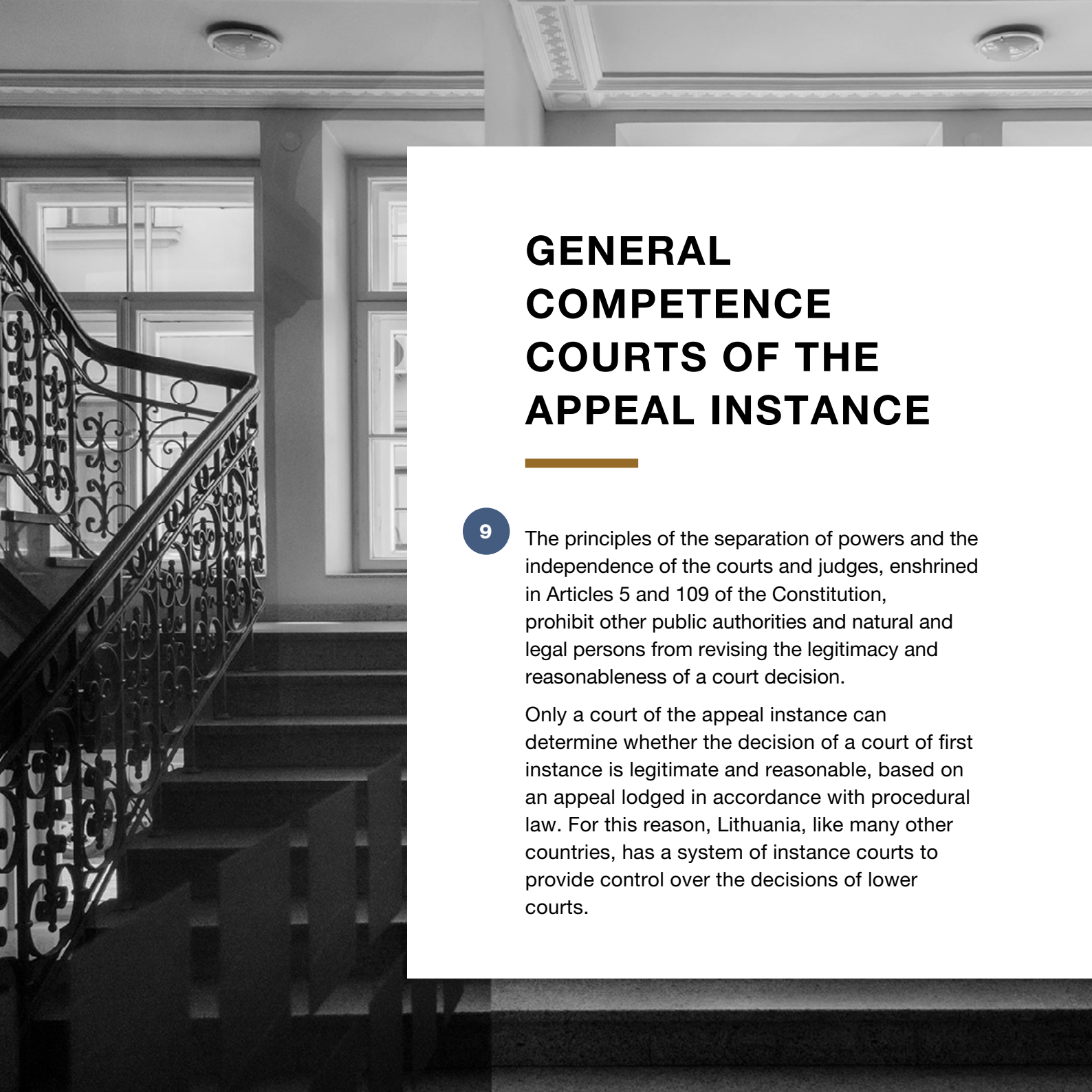
**21**  
courts

**19**  
courts of  
general  
competence

+

**2**  
specialised  
courts





# GENERAL COMPETENCE COURTS OF THE APPEAL INSTANCE

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9

The principles of the separation of powers and the independence of the courts and judges, enshrined in Articles 5 and 109 of the Constitution, prohibit other public authorities and natural and legal persons from revising the legitimacy and reasonableness of a court decision.

Only a court of the appeal instance can determine whether the decision of a court of first instance is legitimate and reasonable, based on an appeal lodged in accordance with procedural law. For this reason, Lithuania, like many other countries, has a system of instance courts to provide control over the decisions of lower courts.

Process participants who disagree with a court's decision may seek a review of the decision, which has not yet become final, by applying to the regional court as the court of the appeal instance when the case was initially heard by a district court, or to the Lithuanian Court of Appeal when the case was initially heard by a regional court. The court of the appeal instance may set aside or modify the decision on the grounds of factual and/or legal errors made by the court of first instance.

Over the past 30 years, significant reforms have been introduced in the area of appeal procedures. In civil procedure, there has been a gradual transition from a full appeal system to a limited appeal model. The latter has been set out in the Code of Civil Procedure, which came into force on 1 January 2003. Under this Code, the court of appeal instance hears cases strictly within the limits of the appeal. Furthermore, it establishes a prohibition on the admission of new evidence in the civil procedure, unless the court of first instance unjustifiably refused to admit it or where the need for it arose later.

10

In criminal procedure, the scope of the appeal hearing is also defined by the appeals lodged. However, unlike civil procedure, there are no restrictions on presenting new evidence before the court of appeal instance, nor on requesting amendments to the charges. Moreover, where the court of appeal instance identifies substantial violations of criminal procedural law, it shall assess whether these have affected not only the appellant but also other parties who have not filed an appeal. Hence, in the Lithuanian criminal procedure, the appeal procedure aligns more closely with the model of an unlimited appeal.





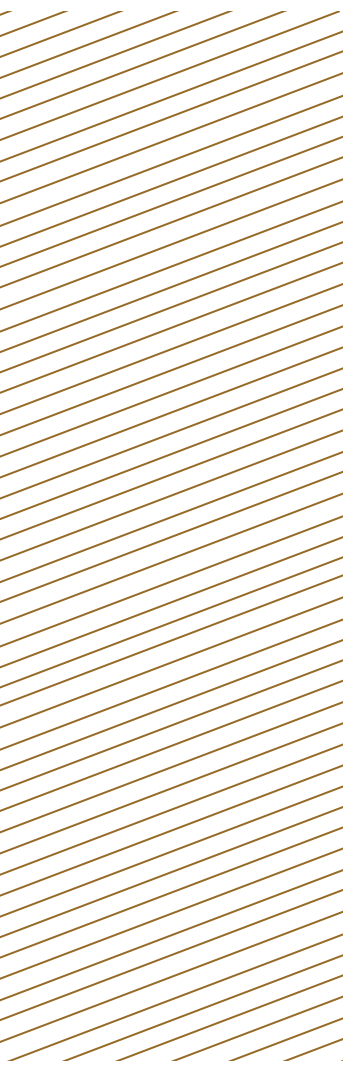
# COURT OF APPEAL OF LITHUANIA

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**Court of Appeal  
building: a Lithuanian  
cultural heritage site**

11

The Court of Appeal of Lithuania is located in a historic building at 40 Gedimino Avenue, Vilnius. Designed by St Petersburg architect Vasiliy Prusakov in 1890, the building was constructed between 1895 and 1897 on what was then Georgevskiy Avenue.



At that time, it was one of the most prominent new representative structures, occupying nearly half of the block, and served as the seat of the Vilnius Governorate Court of the Russian Empire until 1915. Subsequently, the building was used by the German occupation authorities. In 1921, the building was taken over by Polish authorities, who then controlled Vilnius region, and became the home of the Vilnius Voivodeship Court. From 1940 onwards, the building was used by the security agencies of various occupying powers, including the Soviet repressive authorities, the German Gestapo, and the KGB.

**12** After the restoration of independence, it was decided to allocate part of this historic building to the Court of Appeal of Lithuania. Initially, the Court was located on the third floor and later expanded to include the fourth floor. The Court now comprises over 70 office rooms and 5 courtrooms. In addition to the Court of Appeal of Lithuania, the building currently houses the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights, the Lithuanian Special Archive, the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, and the Vilnius Regional Court.

**13** The court building was registered in the Register of Cultural Property of the Republic of Lithuania in 1993 and is recognised as a state-protected cultural heritage site.

## Competence of the Court of Appeal

**14** The Law on Courts of 1994 established that the Court of Appeal of Lithuania is the court of appeal instance for cases heard by regional courts as courts of first instance.

**15** However, the 1996 amendments to the Law on Courts granted the Lithuanian Court of Appeal the cassation function it had not previously held. The Court of Appeal became the cassation court for decisions of regional courts rendered on appeal. This competence of the Court of Appeal of Lithuania was later abolished in 1999, when the cassation functions were assigned exclusively to the Supreme Court of Lithuania.

**16** From 1 May 1999 to 1 January 2001, the Court of Appeal of Lithuania temporarily served as the highest court in the administrative court system. Following the adoption of the Law on the Establishment of Administrative Courts, the Administrative Cases Division of the Court of Appeal of Lithuania was established on 1 May 1999. It acted as the appeal instance for cases heard by the Higher Administrative Court as a court of first instance and as a final instance for questions of jurisdiction

in administrative cases. Additionally, the Administrative Cases Division of the Court of Appeal of the Republic of Lithuania played a key role in shaping the uniform judicial practice of administrative courts in the application of the law.

**17** Today, the Law on Courts, which regulates the competence of the Court of Appeal of Lithuania, states that the Court of Appeal of Lithuania is:

- the appeal instance for cases involving judgments of regional courts in civil and criminal cases;
- the only court that hears applications for recognition and enforcement of foreign and international judgments and arbitral awards in the Republic of Lithuania.

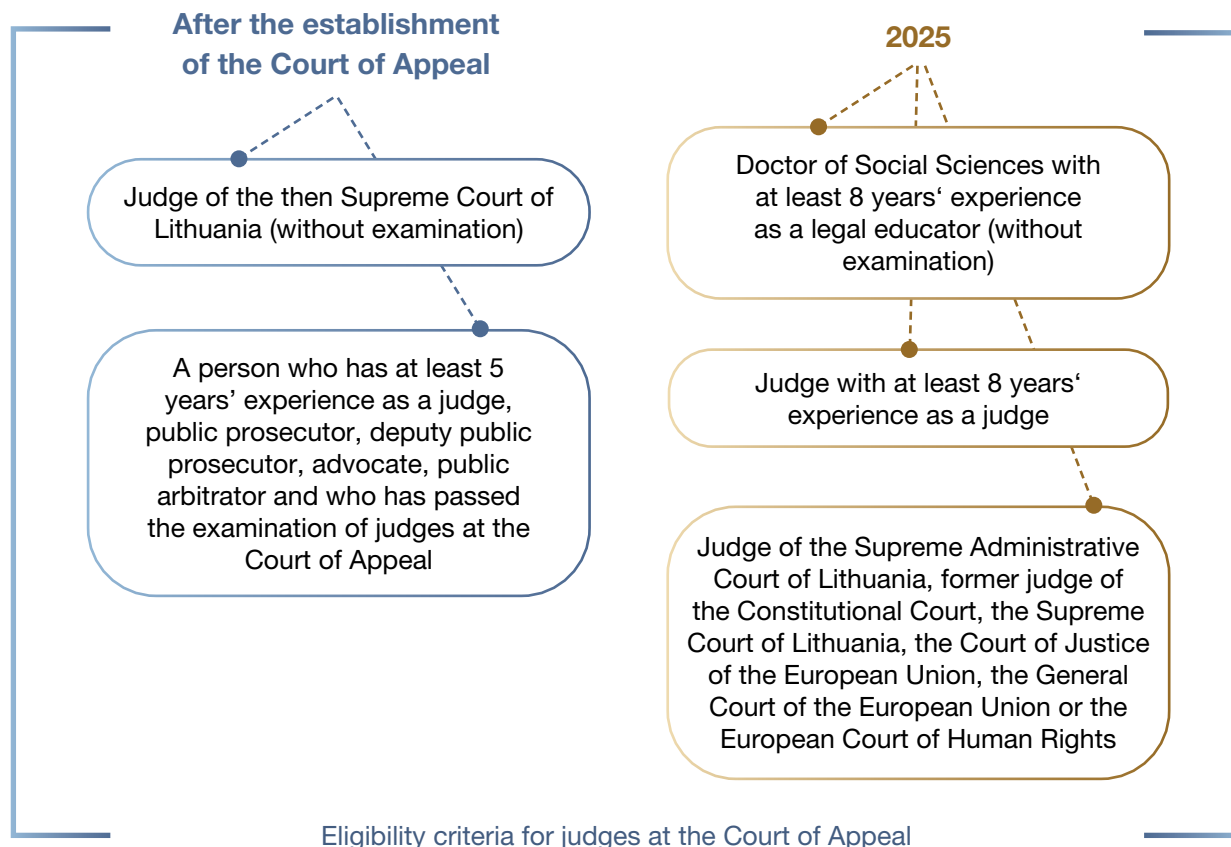
In addition, the President of the Court of Appeal of Lithuania supervises the administrative activities of the regional courts. The President of the Court of Appeal of Lithuania, or the Chairpersons of the Civil or Criminal Divisions, shall decide on the transfer of cases from one regional court to another, or from one district court to another district court located in the territory of another regional court.

## Judges and court staff

18

At the end of 1994, the President of the Republic of Lithuania set the number of judges for the Court of Appeal of Lithuania at 17 and formally appointed them. The majority of these judges had previously

served at the Supreme Court of Lithuania, which operated until 31 December 1994, while others had been working in district courts and in the Courts Department of the Ministry of Justice prior to their appointment.



19

In 1994, the judges of the newly established Court of Appeal of Lithuania, including the President, were appointed by the President of the Republic with the approval of the Seimas, based on the recommendations from the Minister of Justice and the Interim Examination Commission for Judges of Regional Courts, the Court of Appeal of Lithuania, and the Supreme Court of Lithuania. Chairpersons of divisions were appointed by the Minister of Justice. Currently, the judges of the Court of Appeal of Lithuania, the President of the Court and the Chairpersons of divisions are appointed by the President of the Republic with the approval of the Seimas, following a recommendation from the Judicial Council, the executive body of the autonomy of courts.

Judge Vytas Milius, who had served as the President of the Court for 15 years, was appointed as the first President of the Court of Appeal of Lithuania. Judge Virgilijus Valančius was appointed as the Chairperson of the Civil Division, and judge Viktoras Aidukas – the Chairperson of the Criminal Division. With the introduction

of the system of administrative courts on 1 May 1999, judge Kęstutis Lapinskas was appointed as the Chairperson of the Administrative Division of the Court of Appeal.

20

Since its establishment, the number of judges at the Court of Appeal of Lithuania, determined by the President of the Republic, fluctuated every few years until stabilising at 33 in 2011, a number that has remained unchanged to date. Currently, the judges at the Court of Appeal are supported by around 100 court staff, including judicial assistants, court secretaries, clerical staff, translators, IT specialists, finance officers, and others. In the early years of the Court's operation, when the number of judges was nearly half of today's figure, the Court employed over 40 court staff members, excluding the judges.

21

Preserved court files reveal a significant difference in the scale of administration of justice during the early years of the Court's operation. In its first year of operation (1995), the Court received 250 criminal cases and 75 civil cases. In contrast, recent years have seen a dramatic increase, with up to 1,000 criminal cases and over 3,000 civil cases received.

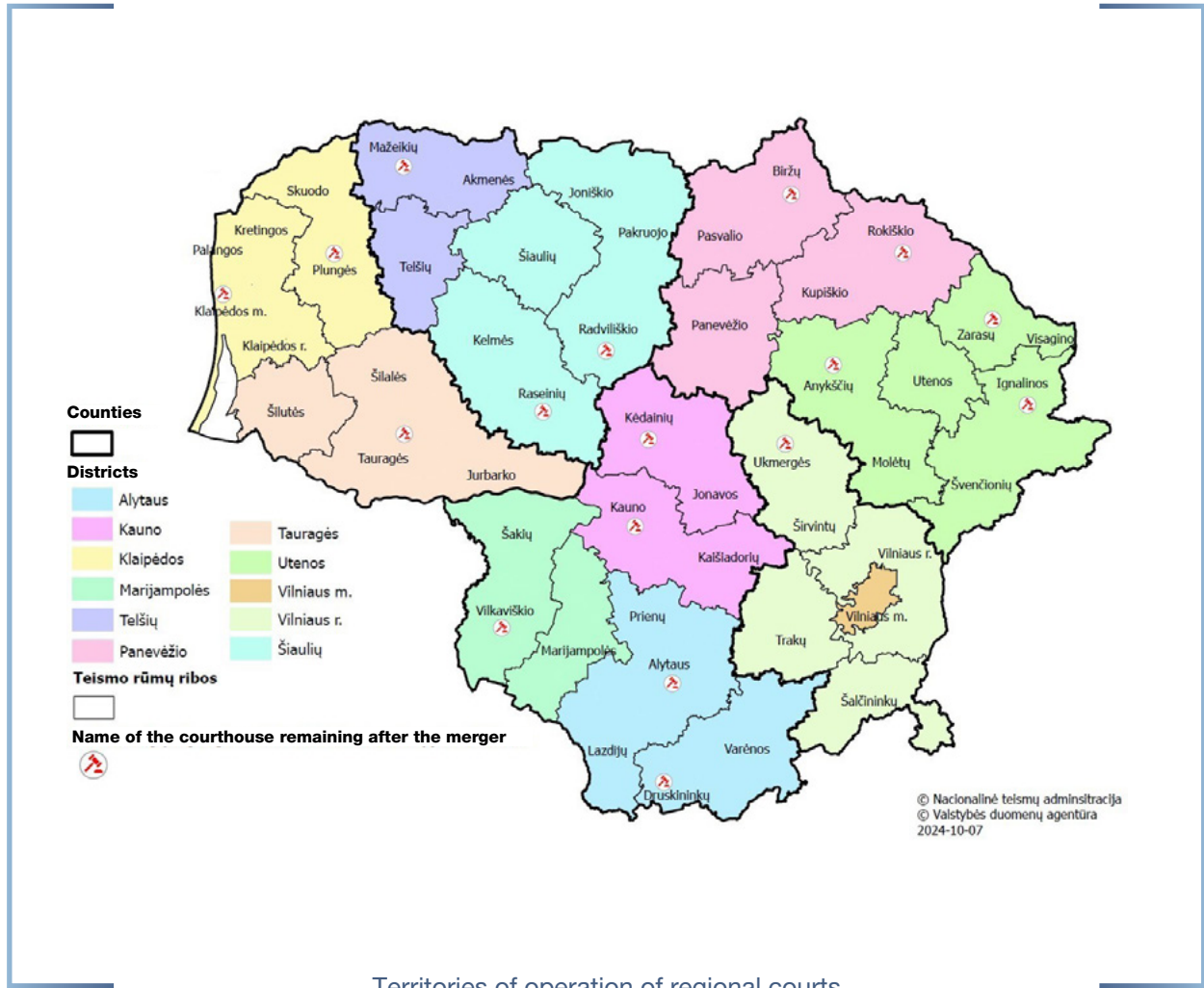
# REGIONAL COURTS

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## Territorial jurisdiction

22

As from 1 January 1995, in accordance with the *Law on Courts* adopted on 6 February 1992, which defined the competences of regional courts, five regional courts began their operations. The *Law on Courts* also established the territorial jurisdictions of these regional courts, aligning them with the country's administrative divisions, such as counties and cities. Since 2018, the territorial jurisdictions of the regional courts have been aligned with the territories of the district courts.



Territories of operation of regional courts

## Competence of Regional Courts

23

Regional courts serve as the first instance for criminal and civil cases defined by law, and as the appeal instance for decisions made by district courts in civil, criminal, and administrative offence cases:

- As the first instance, regional courts hear civil cases where the claim exceeds EUR 100,000, except for cases concerning family and labour relations and compensation for non-pecuniary damage. They also handle civil cases concerning corporate insolvency, copyright, civil cases where a foreign state is a party, as well as cases concerning the civil legal relationship in a public tender procedure, lawsuits against forced sale of shares, investigation into the activities of a legal person, and claims for the compensation for pecuniary and non-pecuniary damage caused by an infringement of established patient rights. Regional courts also hear other civil cases which, according to the law, shall be heard by the regional courts as a court of first instance.
- As the first instance, regional courts hear criminal cases involving serious offences, including smuggling, high-value bribery, drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings, serious impairment to health, and very serious crimes such as, murder, rape of a minor or serious impairment to a minor's health, distribution of large quantities of narcotic substances, genocide, and in criminal cases where the defendant was the President, member of the Seimas or the Government, judge or prosecutor at the time of the commission of the offence.
- As the appeal instance, regional courts hear cases against decisions of district courts in civil, criminal, and administrative offence cases. Same as higher courts, regional courts also hear appeals against judges' decisions in pre-trial investigations, and issue final and non-appealable rulings on disputes arising in pre-trial investigations in criminal cases.



24

The Vilnius Regional Court has exclusive jurisdiction over extradition, surrender under the European Arrest Warrant, and the transfer of pre-trial investigations to the European Public Prosecutor's Office. The Court also hears appeals against the decisions of the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Lithuania to refuse to open proceedings on the grounds of newly discovered circumstances. In civil cases, the Vilnius Regional Court has exclusive jurisdiction over the following cases:

- disputes under the *Patent and Trademark Laws*;
- adoption under applications of Lithuanian citizens whose permanent residence is in a foreign state, citizens of foreign states, and stateless persons to adopt a Lithuanian citizen residing in Lithuania;
- applications of persons with permanent residence in Lithuania to adopt a Lithuanian citizen residing in a foreign country;
- disputes under the *Law on the Bank of Lithuania*, the *Law on Commercial Arbitration*, the *Law on Electronic Communications*, the *Law on the Notary Office*, the *Law on the Bar*, the *Law on Bailiffs*, and the *Law on Designs*;
- cases, which, according to the applicable law, can only be heard by the Vilnius Regional Court as a court of first instance.

Regional courts also perform other functions related to the administration of justice. They monitor the work of the district courts in their territory of jurisdiction and exercise administrative oversight over these courts.



## Formation of the judiciary

25

When the judiciary of the newly established regional courts began to take shape, the issue of appointing future judges needed to be addressed. The *Law on Courts* (1994) stipulated that a person eligible for appointment as a judge of a regional court must have an impeccable reputation, at least 5 years of experience as a judge, prosecutor, deputy prosecutor, lawyer, or state arbitrator, and must have passed the regional court judges' examination. In 1998, additional requirements were introduced for prosecutors and lawyers seeking to apply for the position, including at least 10 years of professional experience and a mandatory 5-month court practice.

Later, the requirements for becoming a judge of a regional court were amended, and now the following persons of impeccable reputation are eligible to become judges of a regional court:

- judges with at least 4 years of experience as a judge;
- Doctors of Social Sciences in the field of law with at least 4 years of teaching experience in law;
- lawyers and prosecutors who meet the requirements for candidates for district court judges and have at least 10 years of experience as a lawyer and prosecutor.

The judges, court presidents, deputy presidents and chairpersons of divisions of regional courts are appointed by the President of the Republic, upon the recommendation by the Judicial Council.



26

## Vilnius Regional Court: the first and only court in Lithuania to receive the „Wings of Equal Opportunities“ award

The Vilnius Regional Court is situated in the same building as the Court of Appeal of Lithuania. In 2000, the lower level of this building, used by the Regional Court, was engraved with inscriptions commemorating the victims of Soviet repressions. This initiative was led by artist Gitenis Umbrasas.

The Law on Courts provided for 35 judicial posts in the newly established Vilnius Regional Court. However, as of 1 February 1995, the court operated with only 16 judges and 21 court staff. Judge Albinas Sirvydis was appointed as the first President of the Vilnius Regional Court, with Judge Konstantinas Ramelis serving as the Chairperson of the Civil Division and Judge Artūras Šumskas as the Chairperson of the Criminal Division.

Over its 30 years of operation, the Vilnius Regional Court has grown to become the largest regional court in Lithuania. It now has 56 judges, 167 court staff, and nearly 5,000



square metres of usable space, including 12 courtrooms.

In 2021, the Vilnius Regional Court earned the highest recognition for its commitment to the principles of equal opportunities, receiving three „Wings of Equal Opportunities“. This is the maximum number of wings awarded by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and the Human Rights Monitoring Institute, recognising an institution’s achievements in promoting equal opportunities. Notably, this is the only court in Lithuania to have received this prestigious award.

27

## Kaunas Regional Court: initiator of the identifier system for cases received on appeal

The Kaunas Regional Court is situated in a building at A. Mickevičiaus g. 18 in Kaunas. In 2008, a second court building of 3,300 square metres was opened in the former cinema theatre “Senasis trestas”. The new court building has 16 courtrooms, a conference room, spacious convey rooms, an interview room for young children and minors, and a court library.

In 1995, 19 judges began working at the reestablished Kaunas Regional Court. Judge Albertas Milinis served as the court’s first President, judge Alfredas Jonas Rinkevičius was the first Chairperson of the Civil Division and judge Algimantas Smolskas was the first Chairperson of the Criminal Division. In the beginning, the Kaunas Regional Court had 32 judicial posts but operated with only 19 judges. Today, the judiciary is fully formed, comprising 43 judges.



The Kaunas Regional Court initially started with 32 court staff supporting the judges. Over the past 30 years, this number has grown to 129. Notably, it was the staff of the Kaunas Regional Court who developed the identifier system for cases received on appeal, a system still in use today. Under this system, criminal cases on appeal are marked with the symbol 1A, criminal cases against lower court rulings – with the symbol 1S, civil cases on appeal – with the symbol 2A, and civil cases under a separate appeal – with the symbol 2S.

28

## Klaipėda Regional Court: the first regional court led by a woman

Since its establishment in 1995, the Klaipėda Regional Court has operated in the same building in the city centre. The court building consists of two architecturally distinct sections: one part, built in 1905, is an architectural and historical landmark of the city, while the other part, built in 1979, is a red brick building that was used as the headquarters of the Klaipėda Board of Trade in Soviet times. The court has 9 courtrooms, 1 mediation room, and a children interview room.



The Klaipėda Regional Court, which began operations in 1995, had 22 judicial posts, although only 12 judges were appointed initially. Currently, the Court has 25 judges (1 position vacant). The number of court staff has increased from 30 in 1995 to 80 in 2024.

After the restoration of independence, the Klaipėda Regional Court became the first regional court in Lithuania to be led by a woman, Judge Rasa Valentinienė. Judge Juozapas Surblys was appointed as the Chairperson of the Criminal Division and Judge Ona Gailiuvienė was appointed as the Chairperson of the Civil Division. The Civil Division was headed exclusively by female judges until 2020, i.e. for almost 25 years.



29

## Šiauliai Regional Court: the only court in Lithuania with the Judicial History Museum

The Šiauliai Regional Court is housed in a historic building built by the Counts Zubovas in 1850, located at Dvaro g. 83, Šiauliai. The building underwent major renovations in 1979 and 2015, with a second floor and an attic added.

Judge Vaclovas Algimantas Birbilas was appointed as the President of the Court. Alongside him, 19 other judges joined the Court. Since then, the number of judges at the Šiauliai Regional Court has remained virtually unchanged, currently standing at 18.

Following the restoration of independence, 40 court staff members supported the 20 judges of the Šiauliai Regional Court. In 2014, Šiauliai Regional Court became the first court in Lithuania to introduce court volunteers, individuals who assist witnesses and victims, helping them feel safer and more comfortable in court.

In 2016, the 7th courtroom of the Šiauliai Regional Court was named after Pelikšas Bugailiškis, a distinguished public figure and



long-serving judge in Šiauliai, making it the only courtroom in Lithuania to bear such a dedication. In 2017, the courthouse became home to Lithuania's only Judicial History Museum, which participates annually in the European Night of Museums every May.



30

## Panevėžys Regional Court: open to changes in the field of customer service

Since its establishment in 1995, the Panevėžys Regional Court has been located at Elektros g. 9, in a building that once served as a Jewish gymnasium. Constructed in 1928 for the Jewish community of Panevėžys, the building was one of the most modern buildings in the city at the time. It had its water supply, sewerage, and heating systems. After the closure of the Jewish Gymnasium, the building was used as a youth (evening) secondary school. In 1992, the building was transferred to the Ministry of Justice, and in 1995, the Panevėžys Regional Court opened its doors. Initially, the court operated in premises that were under renovation until the renovated building was inaugurated in the summer of 1996. In 2007, the building was officially entered in the Register of Cultural Property of the Republic of Lithuania.

In 1995, 10 judges began their work at the Panevėžys Regional Court. Judge Tomas Zdanavičius was appointed as the first President of the Court, Judge Romualdas Januška as the Chairperson of the Civil



Division and Judge Liudgardas Trakelis as the Chairperson of the Criminal Division. Over the 30 years, the number of judges at the Panevėžys Regional Court has doubled from 9 to 18. The number of court staff (judicial assistants, court secretaries, clerical staff, translators, IT specialists, and others) has grown from 37 in 1995 to 60 today.

To be more open to visitors, the Panevėžys Regional Court was among the first five courts in Lithuania to adopt the ISO quality management standard (ISO 9001) in 2012. This initiative aimed to provide more efficient coordination and management of organisational processes and enhance the quality of customer service. Moreover, the Court Volunteer Service was introduced at the Court in 2016.

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