Preparatory Reading Pack

Photo by Unidigita

VIeW – Virago-empowered Women

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VIeW – Virago-empowered Women – Project Description

Partners:
SNC "Parallel Silistra", Bulgaria Association;
"TAVO Europe", Lithuania;
"Association for Cooperation and Social Inclusion Amanei", Spain;
"Dorea Educational Institute", Cyprus

Associated Partners: Local authorities and institutions, NGOs.

Duration: 18 months

Target participants: Women from 18 up to 29 with fewer opportunities from remote areas, who face barriers to their inclusion in the community, as well as refugee women from Ukraine.

Goal: The goal of the project that unites us is to connect and activate youth workers and female volunteers from Bulgaria, Lithuania, the Canary Islands, Spain and Cyprus. We will involve them in an international training in Lithuania and several national ones to develop their competencies as youth leaders committed to protecting human rights. We will motivate them to undertake youth initiatives in their communities to solve problems such as human rights violations and the irresponsible use of natural resources and promote resilience against war. In this process, we will aim to include 180 different women and refugees from Ukraine.

Activities: During a workshop in Cyprus, the partners will discuss and share eight successful practices for promoting youth participation in local development partnerships and initiatives. They will incorporate the best of their experience into a training manual to support youth workers. In the spring of 2024, they will perform an international training for young women in Lithuania. In 2024-2025, the partners will organize national campaigns in which 180 young people will be directly involved and will be followed by at least 220 people online. The campaign participants will talk about their initiatives through 8 digital stories created by the young project participants and through numerous photos, Facebook posts, media publications, flyers, and brochures, uploaded on the project website.

Results: Four civil society organizations will work in partnership to increase the competencies of 8 youth workers and 16 women to involve 180 young people in initiatives as part of the democratic life of the EU. These events will attract at least 220 people online. Through the VIEW platform, participants will digitally tell their stories of solving problems such as human rights violations, the irresponsible use of natural resources, and societal resilience against the war in Ukraine.

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# Welcome to the VIRAGO- Empowered Women Training!

Dear VIRAGO Participants,

A warm welcome to every one of you! We are thrilled to embark on this empowering journey together, where we will explore, learn, and grow as a community of strong and VIRAGO-empowered women. What does the word VIRAGO stand for? Apart from meaning 'powerful women leaders', the VIRAGO concept stands for:

Vision	We envision a Europe where citizens actively contribute to a democratic, inclusive, and sustainable society.
Inspiration	By drawing inspiration from diverse perspectives and experiences, leaders can enhance their cultural intelligence, leading to more informed and empathetic decision-making.
Resilience	The development of resilience serves as a main pillar for individuals, enhancing personal, social, and learning-to-learn competence by strengthening skills to overcome challenges, adapt to diverse social contexts, and embrace life-long learning with a positive and proactive mindset.
Activism	We aim to improve organizational competence to reach out to diverse youth
Green thinking	Green thinking contributes to improved competence in sustainable green initiatives by fostering an environmentally conscious mindset that aligns with and drives responsible actions toward environmental sustainability.
Overcoming	Overcoming challenges is directly linked to digital competence and effective problem-solving skills. Individuals who use digital technologies can leverage them to devise innovative solutions and navigate complex issues.

As we embark on this transformative journey together, it's crucial to reflect on the significance of the VIRAGO - Empowered Women Training, it's a catalyst for change, a call to action that extends beyond our time together. Here's why the training is essential and what meaningful actions await you:

1. **Building a Supportive Network:** Since April 2024 we must strengthen the connections forged during the training by actively participating in post-training forums and collaborative initiatives.
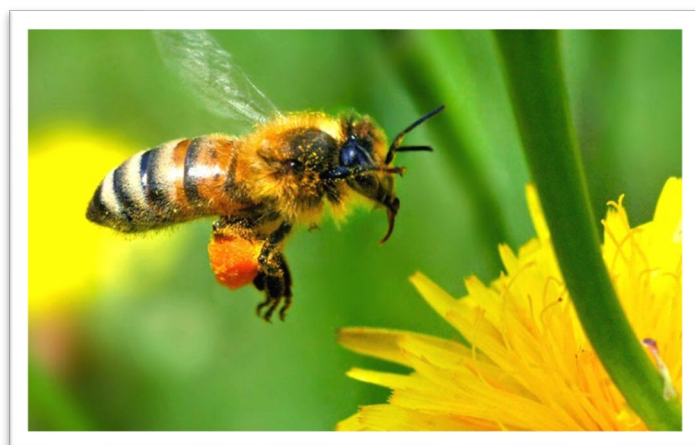
Supportive Network

2. **Applying New Skills and Knowledge:** From April 2024 until March 2025, during the National Actions, you should use the skills and knowledge gained during the VIRAGO training. Please, apply what you've learned to effect positive change, whether it's in your community, workplace, or personal life.

3. **Advocacy and Community Engagement***: Become advocates for women's empowerment in your communities. Engage in conversations, lead initiatives, and amplify the voices of those whose stories deserve to be heard. Be the change agents who drive societal progress.

4. **Social Impact Projects:** Collaborate with your fellow VIRAGO participants on social impact projects. Use the skills honed during the training to address challenges in your community, contributing to positive and sustainable change.

5. **Celebrating Achievements:** Acknowledge and celebrate your achievements, whether big or small. Your successes contribute to the collective narrative of empowered women, inspiring others to achieve their goals.
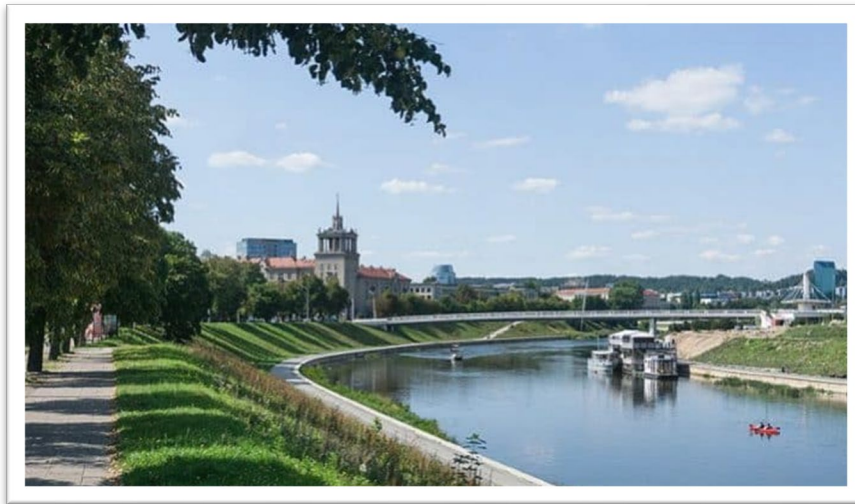
Neris River in Vilnius

Why do you need to read this Preparatory Reading Pack?

Generally, learning about a country before visiting demonstrates a commitment to responsible and respectful travel. Here are some compelling reasons why learning about a country before visiting is essential:

1. **Cultural Understanding**: Understanding a country's customs, traditions, and social norms helps travellers show respect for the local culture. Being aware of cultural nuances prevents unintentional disrespect or misunderstandings. Learning basic phrases in the local language can facilitate communication and enhance the traveller's ability to interact with locals. This effort is often appreciated and fosters positive connections. You can consider **Cultural Differences between Bulgarians, Lithuanians, Cypriots and Spanish.**

2. **Food Culture**: Knowing about a country's cuisine allows travellers to explore local dishes and traditions. It enhances the culinary experience and helps avoid cultural misunderstandings related to food practices.

3. **Historical Context and Appreciation of Sites:** Learning about a country's history (Read **12 Key Facts about Lithuanian History)** provides context for visiting historical sites and landmarks. Appreciating the significance of these places enriches the travel experience.

4. **Sensitivity to Local Issues:** Being informed about local environmental and social issues allows travellers to minimize their impact on the destination, which includes respecting wildlife, understanding conservation efforts, and being aware of social challenges.

5. **Appreciation of Art and Architecture:** Familiarity with a country's art and architectural styles enhances the appreciation of museums, historical buildings, and contemporary art. Since we are going to explore some historical sites in Vilnius, **you'd better read ……**

6. **Mindful Tourism:** Sustainable Travel Practices: Learning about responsible tourism practices helps travellers minimize their environmental impact and contribute positively to local economies.

7. **Health and Safety:** Being informed about healthcare facilities, emergency services, and local health risks prepares travellers for unexpected situations and ensures they can seek help. Read about **Lithuania's Geography and Climate** to get prepared for this experience!

Your Virago Journey Begins Here!

Embrace the opportunity to learn and grow together, fostering a supportive network of empowered women. The knowledge you gain about Lithuania will catalyze meaningful conversations, shared experiences, and a deeper understanding of our world.
See you in Lithuania, ready to write the next chapter of our VIRAGO story!

Lithuania's Geography

Land https://www.britannica.com/place/Lithuania

Map of Lithuania

Lithuania borders Latvia to the north, Belarus to the east and south, Poland and the detached Russian oblast of Kaliningrad to the southwest, and the Baltic Sea to the west.

Relief
The contemporary Lithuanian relief is a low-lying plain scraped by Ice Age glaciers. The country has a relatively short coastline along the Baltic Sea. The coastal region is flat and sandy, with dunes and a unique landscape.

Lithuania is known for its numerous lakes, especially in the eastern and northeastern regions. Lakes are a prominent landscape feature, contributing to the country's natural beauty. The Nemunas River, the largest river in Lithuania, flows across the country, influencing the surrounding landscape and forming river valleys.

The eastern part of Lithuania is home to the Eastern Highlands, also known as Aukštaitija. This region features rolling hills, lakes, and forests. It represents a transition from the lowlands to more elevated terrain. The northwestern part of Lithuania includes the Samogitian Uplands. This area houses slightly elevated terrain with hills, lakes, and dense forests.

Climate
Lithuania has a humid continental climate. The average temperature for January, the coldest month, is about −5 °C, while July, the warmest month, has an average temperature of about 17 °C.

Lithuania consistently ranks high in quality of life as it boasts low pollution, excellent healthcare, and high living standards at a lower cost than most Western European countries.

12 Key Facts about Lithuanian History

1. **Early Settlement:**
Lithuania is one of the oldest countries in Europe, with its statehood dating back to the early medieval period. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was established in the 13th century.

2. **Union with Poland:**
In the late 14th century, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania formed a political union with the Kingdom of Poland. The Union of Lublin in 1569 officially created the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

3. **The Grand Duchy of Lithuania:**
At its height, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was one of the largest and most powerful states in Europe, covering a vast territory from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.

4. **The Statute of Lithuania:**
The Lithuanian Statute, was a legal code written in 1529-1566. It played a crucial role in shaping legal and social norms in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

5. **The Great Northern War:**
In the early 18th century, Lithuania, along with Poland, faced significant challenges during the Great Northern War. The region experienced invasions and occupations by various powers, including Sweden and Russia.

6. **Partitions of Poland-Lithuania:**
The late 18th century saw the partitions of Poland-Lithuania by neighboring powers—Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Lithuania became part of the Russian Empire.

7. **Independence (1918-1940):**
Lithuania declared its independence on February 16, 1918, during the aftermath of World War I and the collapse of the Russian Empire. The interwar period saw the establishment of the modern Lithuanian state.

8. **Soviet Occupation and World War II:**
In 1940, Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union, followed by Nazi Germany in 1941 during World War II. The country experienced significant losses during the war.

9. **Post-War Soviet Annexation:**
After World War II, Lithuania was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union, marking a period of Soviet occupation that lasted until the early 1990s.

10. **Restoration of Independence:**
Lithuania declared the restoration of its independence on March 11, 1990, becoming the first Soviet republic to do so. This declaration eventually led to the recognition of Lithuania's independence by the international community.

11. **European Union and NATO Membership:**
Lithuania joined the European Union in 2004 and NATO in 2004, solidifying its place in European political and security structures.

12. **Modern Lithuania:**
Today, Lithuania is a democratic republic with a diverse cultural heritage, a strong emphasis on education, and active participation in European and global affairs. Vilnius, the capital, is known for its historic Old Town and cultural richness.

Cultural Differences between Bulgarians, Lithuanians, Cypriots and Spaniards

Perceptions and cultural differences among Bulgarians, Cypriots, Spanish, and Lithuanians can be multifaceted and influenced by historical, geographical, and socio-cultural factors. Here are some broad observations with examples, but keep in mind that cultural generalizations may not apply to every individual:

Bulgarians:

- **Collectivism and Hospitality:** In Bulgaria, family and community ties are strong, and hospitality is highly valued. Inviting guests into one's home is a common practice, and Bulgarians often prioritize social connections.

- **Reserved Communication Style:** Bulgarians may initially appear reserved in communication, especially with strangers. Trust and relationship-building are crucial before more personal topics are discussed.

Cypriots:

- **Mediterranean Hospitality:** Cypriots, influenced by Mediterranean culture, are known for their warmth and hospitality. Visitors may experience generous offers of food and a genuine interest in their well-being.

- **Communication Style:** Communication in Cyprus often involves expressive body language and gestures. People may engage in lively conversations and value personal connections.

Spanish:

- **Emphasis on Relationships:** Spaniards often prioritize personal relationships over punctuality. Socializing is a significant part of Spanish culture, and relationships are nurtured through regular gatherings.

- **Siesta Tradition:** The tradition of siesta reflects the Spanish approach to time and work-life balance. Afternoon breaks allow people to rest and recharge before resuming daily activities.

Lithuanians:

- **Reserved Nature:** Lithuanians may initially appear reserved or formal in communication, especially in professional settings. Building trust is essential for more open interactions.

- **Connection to Nature:** Lithuania's natural landscapes influence cultural values. Many Lithuanians have a deep connection to nature, and outdoor activities are popular.

Cross-Cultural Considerations

FACTORS AFFECTING CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Interpretation of Time

1

Interpretation of Space

2

Non-verbal Communication

3

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION
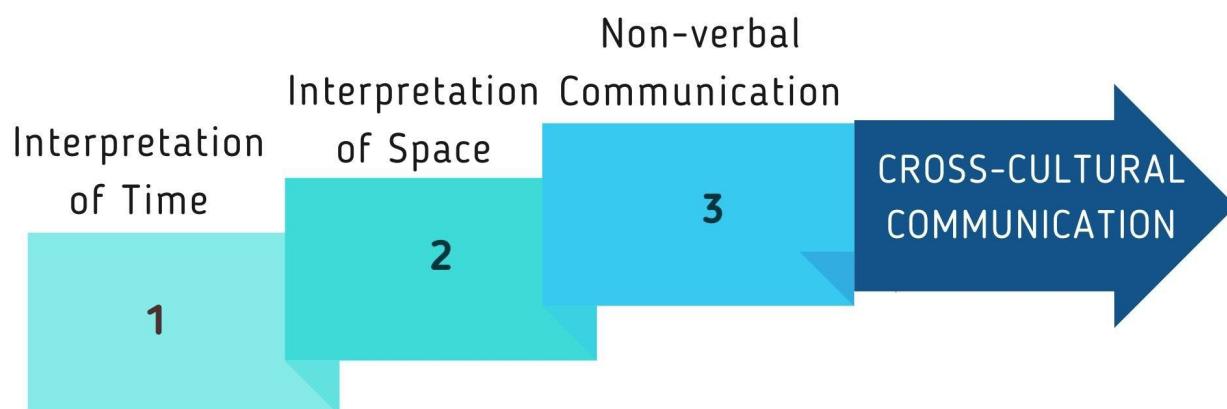
- **Communication Styles:** Bulgarians and Lithuanians may share a reserved communication style initially, while Cypriots and Spaniards might be more expressive. Understanding these differences is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication.

- **Family and Social Structure:** Family plays a central role in Bulgarian and Cypriot cultures. In contrast, the Spanish and Lithuanians may have a broader social network beyond the immediate family.

- **Approach to Time:** The perception of time varies; punctuality may be less stringent in Spanish and Cypriot cultures compared to Bulgarian and Lithuanian cultures.

- **Cultural Expressions:** Each culture has unique cultural expressions, including traditional dances, music, and art, reflecting historical influences and local traditions.

It's essential to approach cultural differences with an open mind, recognizing that individual experiences may differ. Cultural awareness and sensitivity contribute to effective communication and positive intercultural interactions.

What We Will Explore in Vilnius

1. Vilnius, Lithuania's capital, is known for its baroque architecture, especially in its medieval Old Town. But the buildings lining this district's partially cobblestoned streets reflect diverse styles and eras, from the Gothic St. Anne's Church to the neoclassical Vilnius Cathedral.

Vilnius Old Town

2. Vibrant Vilnius Old Town, or Vilniaus Senamiestis, offers a lively atmosphere and a chance to explore critical sites, starting with the 16th-century Gate of Dawn, renowned for its chapel and the Picture of Holy Mother of Ostra Brama.

3. The Basilian Monastery, a short walk away, is a complex featuring the Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity and the Uniate Basilian Monastery, which has historical significance for Polish Romantic literature.

4. Visit for relaxation amidst baroque architecture, where you can appreciate the Classical town hall, the Church of St. Casimir, and the captivating palaces of Pac and Sapiehas.

5. Cathedral Square is a focal point with the impressive Cathedral Basilica of St. Stanislaus, featuring two domed chapels and a standalone bell tower, offering a stunning view from the Upper Castle's Tower of Gediminas.


Vilnius Town Hall

Vilnius Town Square

6. The Town Hall Square in Vilnius has this fantastic mix of Gothic and Renaissance vibes in its architecture. Check it out – the buildings around the square are all detailed and fancy, giving off those medieval and early modern feels. You'll spot some Gothic elements like pointed arches and fancy decorations on the facades, and some Renaissance-style symmetry and balance. The whole vibe at the Town Hall Square is this fantastic blend of historical styles, making it the super charming and culturally rich spot in Vilnius.

Basics of Architectural Styles

1. **Gothic:** Gothic architecture and art originated in the 12th century. They are known for their pointed arches, ribbed vaults, glass windows and flying buttresses. These design elements are meant to inspire medieval perceptions of the sacred and sublime power of God. The gothic style evokes a sense of awe and spiritual contemplation, encouraging a connection with the divine and full submission

2. **Renaissance:** The Renaissance, spanning the 14th to the 17th century, marked a revival of classical art, literature, and learning. Renaissance architecture emphasizes symmetry, proportion, and the use of classical elements like columns and domes. It reflects a humanist philosophy, celebrating the achievements of individuals and the beauty of the natural world.

3. **Baroque:** Baroque is an ornamented and elaborated artistic and architectural style that emerged in Europe in the 17th century. It is characterized by grandeur, drama, and emotional intensity, often expressed through intricate detailing, curved forms, and rich ornamentation.

4. **Neoclassical:** Neoclassical style emerged in the 18th century as a revival of classical Greek and Roman aesthetics. It is characterized by simplicity, symmetry, and the use of classical orders such as Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns. Neoclassical buildings often convey a sense of order and rationality.

5. **Socialist:** Socialist architecture, prevalent during the 20th century in communist countries, emphasizes collective values and functionalism. It often features large, utilitarian structures with minimal ornamentation, reflecting the socialist ideology of equality and communal living. Common elements include repetitive patterns and a focus on mass production to convey the meaning of the power of the communist party.
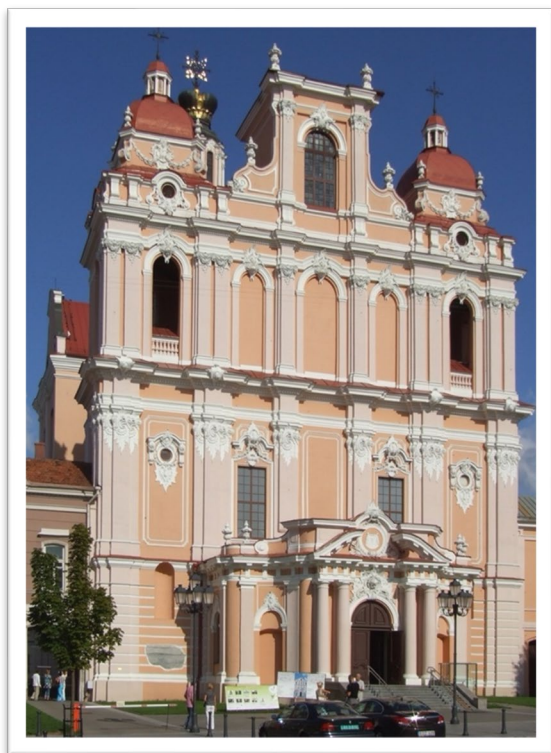
Baroque - Façade of the Church of St. Casimir
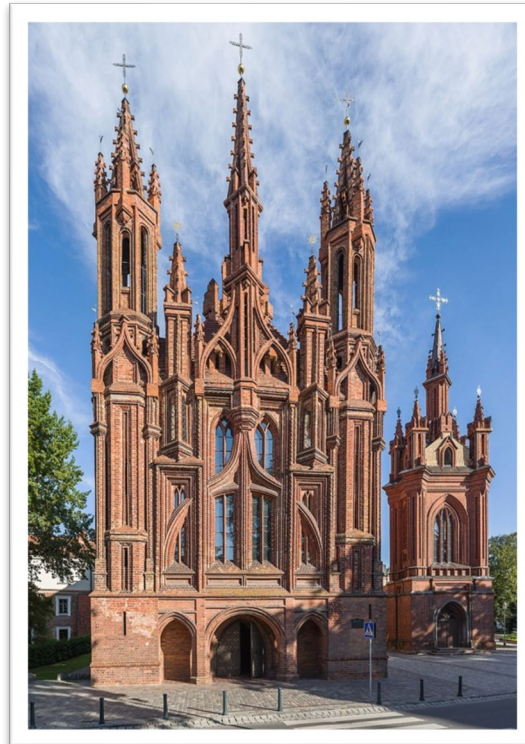
Gothic style - Façade of Saint Anne's Church