

LITUANUS

THE LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY

VOLUME 72:1 (2026)

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LITUANUS

THE LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

VOLUME 72:1, Spring 2026



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Lituanus: The Lithuanian Quarterly (published since 1954) is a multi-disciplinary academic journal presenting and examining various aspects of Lithuanian culture and history. Authors are invited to submit scholarly articles, *belles lettres*, and art work. Manuscripts will be reviewed. Books are accepted for review purposes.

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and Administration: admin@lituanus.org
Publisher: Lituanus Foundation, Inc., Giedrius Subačius, President
Address: 47 West Polk Street, Suite 100–300, Chicago, IL 60605–2000

Articles are archived and accessible at www.lituanus.org and in microform from University Microfilms (www.proquest.com/brand/umi.shtml). They are indexed in: MLA International Bibliography; PAIS International; International Political Science Abstracts; Historical Abstracts (EBSCO); Linguistic Bibliography (Netherlands); Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts; RILM Abstracts of Music Literature; Bibliography of the History of Art; OCLC Article First.

Worldwide circulation per issue – 1000 copies.

Individual subscriptions \$30.00. Seniors/students \$20.00.

Institutional print subscriptions \$40.00. Electronic copy only \$25.00.

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Printed by Kingery Printing Company, 3012 S. Banker, Effingham, IL 62401

Cover Design by Vincas Lukas.

Periodical non-profit postage paid at Chicago, IL and other locations.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to LITUANUS, 47 West Polk Street, Suite 100-300, Chicago, IL 60605-2000

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Boundaries of Belonging in Contemporary Lithuania: An Overview of the 2025 Social Attitudes Survey

AGNIEŠKA AVIN ILERI, IVAN TURNOV

Introduction

Ideas of tolerance and inclusion have become familiar elements of public discourse in Lithuania, reflecting broader European ideals of equality and diversity. Yet social research continues to show that belonging in Lithuania remains shaped by ethnicity, religion, and/or cultural difference. The 2025 Social Attitudes Survey, conducted by the Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences, Institute of Sociology, together with the NGO Diversity Development Group, offers latest data on how these divisions are reproduced in everyday life.

This article presents the main findings of the 2025 survey, focusing on how Lithuanians evaluate different minority and migrant groups and what factors shape these attitudes. It also summarizes the results of regression analysis that identify which social and demographic characteristics are related to more open or restrictive views. The article concludes by discussing public opinions about migrant integration measures and the role of education and language in promoting inclusion.

Methodology

The study is based on data from a nationally representative public opinion survey conducted in Lithuania between 8 and

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24 March 2025. The survey aimed to examine Lithuanian residents' attitudes toward various ethnic, religious, and social groups. A total of 1,020 respondents aged 18 and older were interviewed through individual structured interviews, administered according to a standardized questionnaire. The sampling design followed a multi-stage, stratified random selection procedure, ensuring proportional representation by region, gender, and settlement type. The maximum sampling error does not exceed ± 3.1 percent.

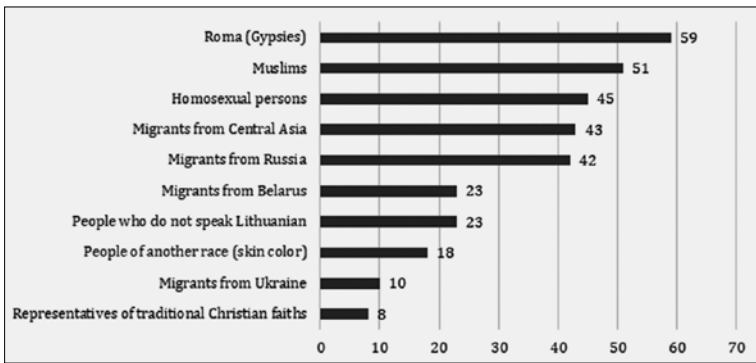
Analysis of the data is conducted using descriptive statistics and regression analysis: multiple linear and logistic regressions. Multiple regression is a type of statistical analysis that is able to isolate the effect of individual variables on the dependent variable and explain how much it changes when the other variable changes by 1. Multiple linear regression uses a straight line to explore relationship between the variables; however, it can only be applied to continuous dependent variables such as distance, volume, indexes or large enough numeric scales. Multiple logistic regression, on the other hand, can be applied to binary variables, such as social distance in the case of this study. For further questions regarding the methodology and analysis methods used in this study please contact the authors of the article.

Social Distance and Hierarchies of Acceptance

The survey primarily explores social distance, yet it also includes questions about general attitudes toward migrants, refugees, and their social integration. Social distance reflects the degree to which people are willing to live, work, or interact with members of different social groups. The results show that Roma remain the group facing the highest levels of social exclusion: almost sixty percent of respondents reported that they would not want Roma as neighbors. Muslims rank second, with half of the population expressing unwillingness to live next to them, followed

by homosexual persons, toward whom attitudes have shown slight improvement compared to 2023. A new category introduced in this year's survey – migrants from Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan – immediately appeared among the groups facing the strongest social distancing. Members of this group immediately appeared among those facing the strongest social distancing, reflecting a broader European trend in which public attitudes toward new migrant groups often depend on racialized perceptions, religion, and linguistic visibility.

Figure 1. Which of the following groups of people would you not want to have as neighbors? (% , 2025)



When analyzing this data, it becomes crucial to apply the concept of intersectionality – a framework increasingly recognized in both Lithuanian academic and political discourse. Intersectionality helps to understand how multiple marginalized identities can overlap, creating compounded forms of vulnerability. For example, a dark-skinned, non-Lithuanian-speaking Muslim man from Ukraine may face more resistance in everyday life than a white, Lithuanian-speaking Christian migrant from Belarus. Which aspects of a person's identity matter most for social inclusion – language, religion, skin color, or nationality – depends on the prevailing political narrative and social context at a given time. Importantly, these interactions are not static: they

shift and evolve as societies change and new social tensions emerge. This perspective allows us to move beyond simplistic ethnic categories and to see exclusion as a fluid process shaped by power relations and dominant narratives about who “belongs” in the nation.

Attitudes toward different groups shift slightly when respondents are asked about sharing a workspace rather than a neighborhood. Roma once again top the list of groups most often rejected, followed this time by migrants from Russia, whom nearly forty percent of respondents said they would not want as coworkers. Unfavorable attitudes are also recorded toward homosexual individuals, Muslims, Central Asian migrants, and people who do not speak Lithuanian. These findings suggest that ethnic and linguistic boundaries remain closely linked to notions of trust, competence, and social comfort in professional life. They also indicate that people perceive workplace and neighborhood relations through different forms of social intimacy: in the workplace, interaction and communication are unavoidable, language and opinions matter, and tensions may arise more easily, whereas in private life, cultural and linguistic proximity continues to define what is considered a “comfortable” or familiar environment.

Figure 2. Which of the following groups of people would you not want to work with at the same workplace? (% , 2025)

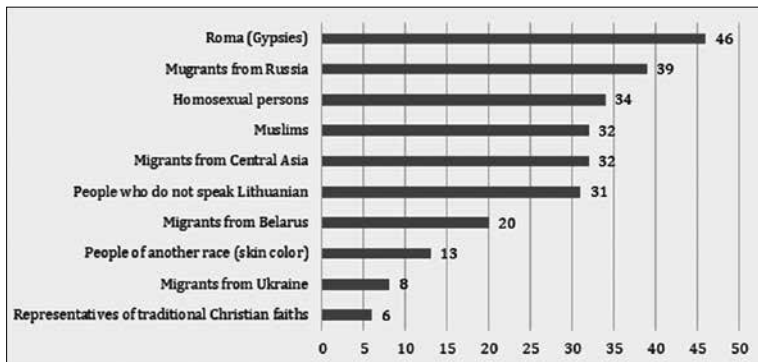
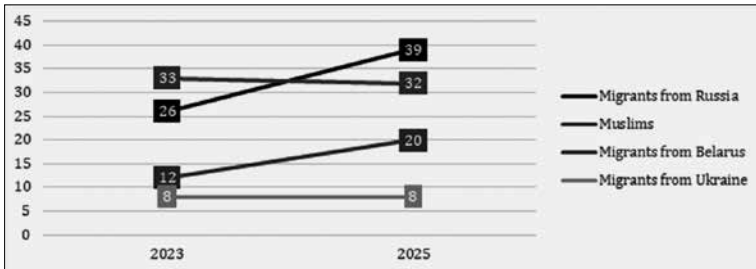
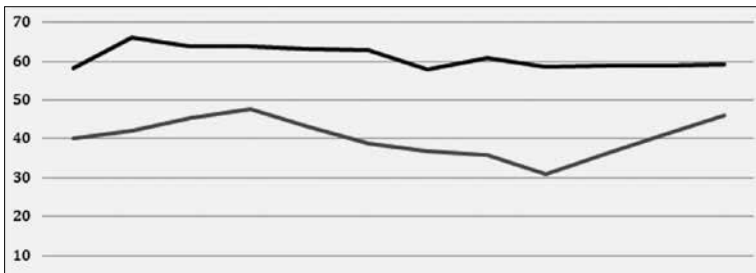


Figure 3. Which of the following groups of people would you not want to work with at the same workplace? (% , 2023 and 2025)



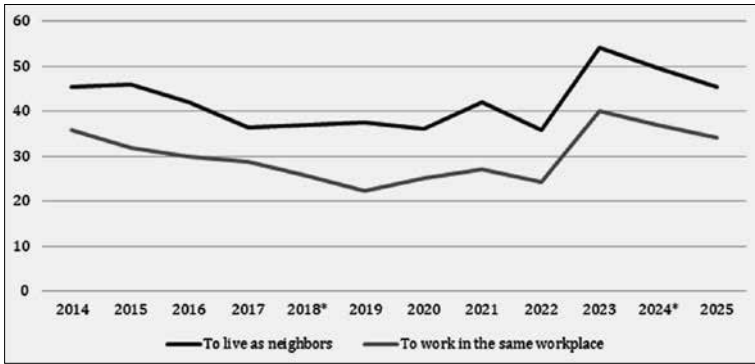
When looking at long-term trends, Roma remain the ethnic group with the highest social distance in Lithuania. The research from previous years confirms that negative attitudes toward Roma have persisted throughout the entire post-independence period. At the same time, the Roma community itself has changed: education levels have improved, the number of employed Roma has grown, and Roma-led cultural and social initiatives have become more visible. These developments show a clear effort to strengthen community social and cultural capital. Yet progress remains fragile without consistent political support and sustainable state-level integration policies that would confront the deep-seated anti-Gypsyism – racism and discrimination directed against Roma – that continues to shape public attitudes.

Figure 4. Social distance over time – Roma



* The survey was not conducted or did not include Roma category in 2024, 2023 and 2018

Figure 5. Social distance over time – homosexual persons



* The survey was not conducted in 2024 and 2018

Other concerning developments emerge when looking at change of social distance over time. Data from 2025 shows a steep increase in social distance to migrants from Russia for both the case of not wanting them as neighbors (42% in 2025 compared to 35% in 2023) as well as not wanting to work together (39% in 2025 compared to 26% in 2023). A negative change is also observed for migrants from Belarus in both the case of being neighbors (23% in 2025 compared to 18% in 2023) as well as working together (20% in 2025 compared to 12% in 2023), however, it is not as drastic. Lithuania hosts a large number of immigrants from Belarus, so souring of the public attitudes towards them is very concerning and can contribute to the increase of cases of discrimination. The long-term data also reveals that even though attitudes towards homosexual individuals improved compared to 2023, there is still a broad negative trend of increasing social distance since 2019.

What Shapes Openness? Results of Regression Analysis

As mentioned previously, the survey also includes questions measuring attitudes towards migrants, refugees and their integration. To simplify further, data analysis of many of such items are combined into one aggregate indicator, representing overall

views on migration. Items are chosen based on how well they thematically represent views on migration, including representation of items from different thematic parts of the survey, while prioritizing questions that are most divisive among the respondents. The indicator is created by assigning each item a value on a scale from -1 (negative view) to 1 (positive view) and then calculating the sum of all the values for respective items (min. = -9, max. = 8, mean = -1.174, standard deviation = 3.314). The variable is normally distributed and well-suited for regression analysis. Detailed list of items included is in the table below.

Table 1. *Items included in the aggregate indicator of attitudes towards migration*

Question	Item
1. Please share whether you agree or disagree that Lithuania should accept persons from countries outside the European Union.	1.1 Arriving to work.
	1.2 Crossing the border of the Lithuanian Republic in a non-legal way.
2. What is your opinion on the statements below? Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of these statements.	2.1 Migrants are enriching the cultural life of Lithuania.
	2.2 Refugees are a vulnerable group, therefore Lithuania must help them.
	2.3 Migrants can increase crime rates in Lithuania.
	2.4 I would not want my children to study in the same class as children of refugees.
3. Would you support or oppose such integration measures being applied to refugees living in Lithuania and arriving in Lithuania?	3.1 Ensuring equal opportunities at work.
	3.2 Provision of language courses.
	3.3 Ensuring equal opportunities during provision of social services.

Inclusion of sociodemographic variables as well as the aggregate indicator of attitudes towards migration allows us to conduct

further statistical analysis of social distance and find what influences these attitudes. The cases of Roma, migrants from Central Asia and homosexual persons are included to represent various minority groups. Multiple logistic regression is used to explore what variables are significant to explain cases where respondents are not against living together with these social groups as neighbors – in other words, predicting lower social distance values. Results of three logistic regressions show both similarities and distinctions between the way attitudes towards these social groups work. It is important to note that social distance is a distinct measure of attitudes and may differ from the way other measures function.

Table 2. *Logistic regression results on low social distance in the case of being neighbors*

	Roma	Migrants from Central Asia	Homo- sexual persons
	<i>Exp(B)</i> ¹	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
Constant	0.759	2,402*	2,237*
Aggregate indicator of attitudes towards migration	1.058**	1.171**	1.100**
Age	1.001	1.000	0.994
Monthly income (values below 2000 eur.)	1.000	1.000	1.000
Man (ref. woman)	1.034	0.981	0.519**
Big city (ref. not living in a big city)	0.585**	0.625**	0.999
Higher education (ref. without h.e.)	1.031	0.935	0.819

¹ *Exp(B)* is a measure of average effect of each of the variables. This is a standardized version of the B coefficient of the logistic regression that enables easier interpretation of the data. It represents an average change in the odds of the dependent variable when this independent variable changes by 1. For example, if the effect of 0.5 in this instance would mean that the probability of having low social distance on average decreases 50%.

	Roma	Migrants from Central Asia	Homo- sexual persons
	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
Youth (age 18–29, ref. 30 and older)	0.650	1.020	1.655
Not a Lithuanian (ref. Lithuanian)	1.386	1.135	0.717
Believer (ref. not believer, no response)	0.852	0.948	0.866
Political right (ref. left, center, no response)	1.031	0.876	1.455**
N	749	749	749
Correctly predicted 1	11.4%	77.2%	54%
Correctly predicted 0	94.6%	38.6%	65.1%

Note: * $p < 0.10^2$, ** $p < 0.05$, value 1 means the respondent is not against living together as neighbors with this group, outliers ($n = 9$) are excluded from the variable of monthly income per family member.

At first it is important to note the predictive power of those models. The model analyzing social distance towards migrants from Central Asia is relatively weak in predicting cases where social distance is high while the model for social distance towards Roma is very weak at predicting cases with low social distance. It seems that this set of variables is not effective at explaining why respondents would view Roma positively and migrants from Central Asia negatively. It is likely that additional variables are needed to improve this predictive power; however, this is not possible in our survey dataset. Conversely, this set of variables is relatively good at predicting both low and high social distance towards homosexual persons.

² p value is a measure of statistical significance and represents a probability that this particular variable in actuality has no effect on the dependent variable. The threshold for considering results of a particular regression coefficient to be statistically significant is usually 10%, which is alternatively shown as $p < 0.1$. If the p value is lower than 0.1, that means that the results are even more valid and significant.

Results show that general attitudes towards migration are statistically significant while predicting low social distance towards all three groups. In all three cases, positive views of migration are connected to higher chance of lower social distance. The strongest link is, predictably, with the migrant social group. This shows that attitudes towards migration are indeed highly correlated with attitudes towards many other social groups. Subjective evaluation of material conditions is statistically significant in predicting low social distance to migrants from Central Asia and homosexual persons. However, the effect is opposite in both cases – those confident in their financial situation have a higher social distance towards migrants and lower towards homosexual persons. Curiously, the exact value of income per family member has no influence on social distance at all – only the subjective evaluation of this income.

It is important to note that education, age, income, gender, religiosity, political views – none of these parameters are significantly related to lower social distance towards Roma. This might signify to what extent anti-Gypsyism is structurally entrenched in Lithuanian society, barely anything is correlated to positive attitudes towards Roma. Higher education has no impact on these attitudes whatsoever while young people actually have a higher social distance towards Roma. The negative effect is quite strong and almost statistically significant ($B = -0.430$, standard error 0.308, $p = 0.163$). In the case of homosexual individuals, quite a few variables are able to explain difference in the social distance. Gender is a very important parameter – men are much less likely to have a low social distance towards homosexual persons. This is also the only case when self-placement on a political scale is statistically significantly related to the social distance – self-identification with political right positively affects the chance to have a lower social distance towards homosexual persons.

A very curious result emerges when comparing responses of participants from big cities to participants outside big cities. It is generally assumed that the urban population has a more liberal stance on questions of social diversity and attitudes towards minorities. However, this is not the case in our dataset for social

distance towards those who are ethnically distinct – Roma and migrants from Central Asia. Residents of big cities are much less likely to have a low social distance than those outside big cities even if we account for the effect of all other variables included in the models. It seems that, based on the linear regression results explained further, even though urban residents are indeed more progressive in their views on migration, they would not want to be personally related to migrants and minorities. Several hypotheses emerge from these results. Urban spaces do provide a higher chance to encounter ethnic minorities in everyday life; however, they are also spaces of inequalities and high power imbalances. The exposure to minorities does not necessarily mean positive attitudes if this exposure is moderated through high inequality of the relative position of the representative of ethnic majority and minority. Alternatively, there could be a particular awareness of material inequalities among urban residents and a desire to not be sharing urban landscape with poorer parts of society. In the case of social distance toward migrants from Central Asia, the relative negative effect of living in big cities is nearly equivalent to the effect of good subjective material conditions.

At the same time, one can also reflect on the different social dynamics that characterize smaller towns and villages. In places where life follows more sedentary patterns, people tend to create smaller but more sustainable social ecosystems of coexistence. Over time, these environments may foster more stable and trust-based relations between various local groups, rooted in familiarity and everyday contact. In contrast, urban areas are marked by constant change, higher social differentiation, and even physical forms of spatial exclusion – as illustrated by the example of the former Roma neighborhood in Kirtimai.³ Such conditions create barriers to coexistence and may reinforce social distance. These insights call for further investigation into the relationship between social distance and the urban–rural divide.

³ Located on the outskirts of Vilnius, next to the city's airport, the Kirtimai Roma neighborhood – known locally as *Parubanka* – was once the largest Roma settlement in the Baltic region. Its origins date back to the mid-twentieth century, and it was demolished in 2020.

Table 3. *Linear regression results for the indicator of attitudes towards migration*

	<i>B</i> ⁴	<i>S.E.</i> ⁵	<i>Stand. B</i> ⁶	<i>p</i>
Constant	-2.240	0.668		0.001
Age	0.005	0.008	0.026	0.546
Monthly income (values below 2000 eur.)	0.000	0.000	-0.015	0.707
Man (ref. woman)	-0.344	0.237	-0.052	0.147
Big city (ref. not living in a big city)	1.516	0.247	0.226	0.000
Higher education (ref. without h.e.)	1.335	0.318	0.151	0.000
Youth (age 18–29, ref. 30 and older)	1.553	0.451	0.146	0.001
Good financial situation (ref. bad, average, no response)	-0.161	0.288	-0.021	0.575
Not a Lithuanian (ref. Lithuanian)	-0.149	0.488	-0.011	0.760
Believer (ref. not believer, no response)	-0.064	0.318	-0.007	0.841
Political right (ref. left, center, no response)	0.711	0.282	0.090	0.012

Note: $R^2 = 0.121$, $n = 753$, outliers ($n = 9$) are excluded from the variable of monthly income per family member.

A linear regression for the aggregate indicator of attitudes towards migration reveals that residence in a big city, higher education, age below 30 and self-identification with the political right are all statistically significant predictors of positive general attitudes towards migration. The model overall has a weak predictive power, correctly predicting only around 12.1% of the available data. This is probably because other potentially important variables like personal contact with migrants are not available in the data. However, even though the model is not precise, it might still capture broad tendencies within the available data.

Curiously, as opposed to the negative effect on low social distance, urban residence has the strongest relative effect on mi-

⁴ B coefficient represents the impact of this variable.

⁵ Standard error of the B coefficient represents the variance of data summarized by the model using this B coefficient.

⁶ Standardized B coefficient places all of the coefficients on the same scale enabling their comparison irrespective of the units of the individual variables.

gration attitudes when we control for all other effects included in the model. Respondents with higher education and those below 30 are only slightly more likely to view migration positively. A very weak effect is observed for respondents identifying with the political right; however, it is still notable that this effect is present and statistically significant after we account for the effect of other sociodemographic variables available in the data. It is curious that even though subjective evaluation of financial situation is an important predictor of social distance, it has no connection with the general attitudes on migration.

Public Views on Migration and Support for Integration Measures

A closer investigation of individual questions about migration reveals attitudes on specific aspects of migration and migrant integration among the Lithuanian population. The study reveals that public support is lowest for irregular migrants – those who have crossed the Lithuanian border without authorization. Yet these individuals are also among the most vulnerable people on Lithuanian territory. Opinions about political refugees remain divided: roughly half of the respondents support their presence in Lithuania, the other half opposes it. The most positively viewed are foreign students and family migrants, whose presence is associated with education and stability rather than crisis and dependency. A broader mistrust persists toward migrant communities and their perceived contribution to Lithuanian society. Only about twenty percent of respondents believe that migrants and growing cultural diversity enrich Lithuania's cultural and social life. Many also think that the number of refugees in the country is already too high and that Lithuania should not accept more. Still, a larger share of families say they would not object if their children's classmates were refugee students, showing that personal contact in schools may foster more open attitudes. At the same time, many respondents express a desire for more active state involvement in the inte-

gration of migrants and refugees – suggesting that improved institutional support could gradually shift societal perceptions in a more positive direction.

When asked about specific integration measures for refugees, the public shows strongest support for education and Lithuanian language learning. This could indicate that education is seen as the main pathway to inclusion. However, the growing diversity of Lithuanian society also calls for changes within the education sys-

Figure 6. *Would you agree or disagree that Lithuania should accept these individuals from non-European Union countries (% , 2025)?*

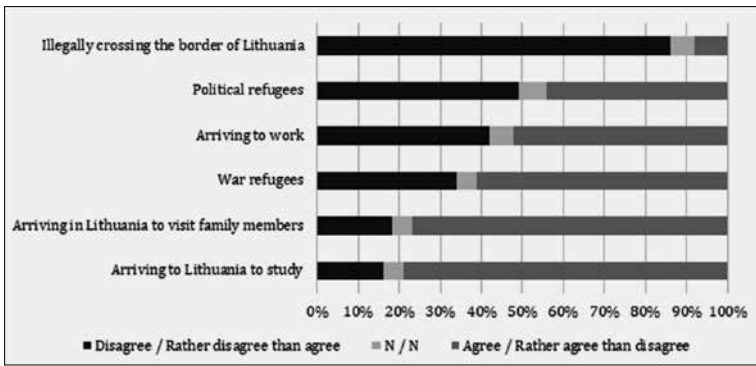
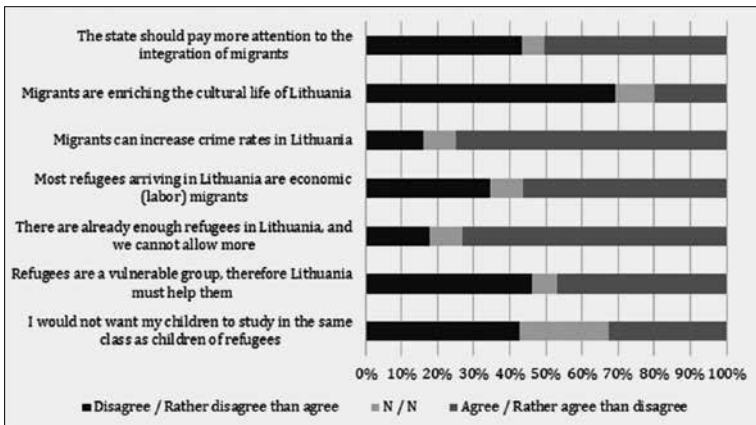


Figure 7. *What is your opinion on the statements below? Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of these statements (% , 2025)*



tem itself. Schools must adapt to multicultural realities, promoting cultural sensitivity and belonging among multilingual and multi-ethnic students. Inclusive education, currently being implemented as a national reform, should be understood in a broader sense – not only as inclusion of children with special needs, but also as ensuring equal learning opportunities for pupils from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This means creating a learning environment where all children can not only master the Lithuanian language effectively but also feel safe to express and maintain their identities. It is worth mentioning that the public also supports many of the integration measures listed in the study – even when we talk about free legal consultations there are more supporters of such measures than those in opposition to it.

However, the study reminds us of the delicate balance within social policy debates. Issues such as social housing or welfare benefits receive the least public support. Because these services are very important for vulnerable parts of the native population, this could be why Lithuanian residents are less likely to be open to sharing access to it with refugees. It is crucial not to frame these discussions through a “competition of vulnerabilities” – comparing which group is more deserving or more disadvantaged. Such comparisons only deepen social tensions and create a fertile ground for populist politics that thrive on resentment and division.

Conclusions

The 2025 survey presents a complex portrait of Lithuanian society: one that aspires to European values of equality but still struggles with racialized and cultural boundaries of belonging. The persistence of high social distance toward Roma and new migrant groups reveals the ongoing challenge of transforming tolerance from a rhetorical value into lived social practice. The path toward greater inclusion is neither straightforward nor linear – it requires long-term and consistent commitment across social policy, education, and civic engagement, guided by a clear moral stance on human rights and social justice.