

# Lithuania's Administrative Court Structure Undergoes Transformation

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In a significant development set to reshape Lithuania's legal landscape, the administrative court system is undergoing a transformation that promises to streamline proceedings, enhance access to justice, and improve the quality of administrative justice.

Effective January 1, 2024, the new Regional Administrative Court will emerge, born out of the merger between the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court and the Regional Administrative Court of the Regions. This pivotal move will bring about several noteworthy changes with far-reaching implications.

The Regional Administrative Court is poised to become a central hub within Lithuania's judiciary, consisting of five chambers that cater to specific geographical areas: Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, and Panevėžys. This new entity will serve as a pivotal institution, reshaping the way administrative cases are handled across the nation.

## Benefits for Individuals and Representatives

Perhaps the most striking change brought about by this reform is the improved rules of jurisdiction. Starting in 2024, cases will be allocated based on geographical proximity to the applicant's residence, making it significantly more convenient for individuals to engage with the court system. Additionally, applicants will gain the flexibility to submit initial documents to any chamber within the Regional Administrative Court, simplifying the process.

## Balancing Workloads and Promoting Specialization

One of the key aims of merging administrative courts into a Regional Administrative Court is to balance the workload of judges and court staff across different chambers. This strategic shift will facilitate more efficient case management and foster specialization among judges in handling administrative disputes, ultimately elevating the overall quality of case adjudication.

The Vilnius Regional Administrative Court has been grappling with a substantial caseload in recent years, leading to delays in case processing. A prime example of this strain occurred in 2021 when the court faced an extraordinary influx of asylum appeals due to the arrival of thousands of refugees from neighbouring Belarus. With the establishment of the Regional Administrative Court, a central Case Distribution Module will automatically assign cases to judges, ensuring a more equitable distribution and expedited processing.

## Judge Specialization

The core group of judges with expertise in specific categories of cases, present in the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, will continue their specialized roles and will be joined by judges from the existing Regional Administrative Court. This specialization is expected to enhance decision quality, promote consistent case law, reduce the number of appeals, and ensure the stability of decisions. Specialized training courses, including those focused on tax law, have already commenced, further reinforcing this shift.

## Streamlined Procedures for Applicants

The Regional Administrative Court aims to simplify the application process. While applicants will have the option to submit documents to initiate proceedings at any of the chambers, modern technology has made physical visits to court chambers largely unnecessary. The majority of complaints are currently filed electronically through the teismas.lt portal. Furthermore, written procedures and remote hearings, facilitated by platforms like Zoom, will remain common, offering applicants the convenience of participating from their homes or workplaces. For those who prefer in-person hearings, courtrooms will remain available upon request.

## Strengthening Access to Justice and Public Trust

In conclusion, these judicial reforms are designed to bridge the gap between the courts and applicants, optimize administrative court operations, enhance transparency, improve efficiency, and elevate the quality of justice administration in Lithuania. These changes are anticipated to contribute significantly to increased access to justice, bolstered public confidence in the judicial system, and the delivery of efficient, high-quality justice in the country.