

A POSTWAR SOCIAL CRISIS: THE FLOOD OF BEGGARS INTO LITHUANIA IN 1944–1947

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ABSTRACT This article presents an analysis of events in Lithuania in the years 1944 to 1947, when the Soviet authorities were forced to stem the large numbers of beggars, both children and adults, flooding into the country. The scale of the social problem is examined, as well as the reasons, the routes taken by beggars of various nationalities (Russian-speakers, Germans, Roma (Gypsies) and the local population), and the efforts taken by government institutions to use deportation as a way of managing the crisis associated with the spread of typhus. The author reviews the stereotypes, well established in historiography, alleging that only German children begged after the war, and that members of the Lithuanian population who took them in were therefore subject to repressions.

KEYWORDS: migration to the Lithuanian SSR, begging, typhus epidemic, *Wolfkinder*, deportation of Germans from the Lithuanian SSR.

One of the pressing problems to be solved after the Second World War was the issue of providing for millions of war refugees, displaced and homeless people. The Western Allies tried to control the social crisis in Europe by organising the return of people to their country of origin, and establishing refugee camps and charity foundations. The Soviet Union also had to control enormous streams of its own citizens being returned from European countries (by March 1946, around 4.2 million people had been returned from countries occupied by Germany: forcibly deported labourers, concentration camp inmates, refugees and prisoners of war),¹ while also dealing with another much larger challenge, domestic migration. The regime that up to 1941 had controlled its citizens totally could only watch amid the postwar chaos how populations

¹ For more, see: V. Zemskov, *Vozvrashchenie sovetskikh peremeshchennykh lits v SSSR. 1944–1952 gg.* (Moscow, 2016), p. 132.

from Nazi-occupied, starved and disease-ridden regions moved in search of a suitable place to live, or simply to find food to eat.

Due to its geographical location and its relative self-sufficiency in staple food products, Lithuania was one of the destination countries for these domestic migrants. Russian-speaking beggars had appeared during the Nazi occupation: people were fleeing from war-torn regions of the Soviet Union in spontaneous or German-organised streams of refugees.² Problems arose in the spring of 1944 about what to do with the wandering homeless children in Lithuania. By May, 180 of them had been placed with local Russian families, and two orphanages had been opened.³ When the fighting ended, people from the Soviet Union, emaciated by hunger and impoverished by the long and brutal war, continued to flood into Lithuania in their thousands. In addition, there were also Germans from the shattered East Prussia searching for food, where until April 1946 (the time of the official incorporation of a part of East Prussia under the name of the Kaliningrad oblast of the USSR) no one showed any concern for the welfare of the unemployed, or how they could feed their families, and barely a third of the population were employed.⁴ As well as these larger groups of arrivals, there were also poverty-stricken locals who were forced to live by begging, and Roma who continued their traditional itinerant way of life.

Many people arrived in Lithuania by train or on foot. It was common to see arrivals travelling on cargo trains, and on the roofs and the steps of carriages. Hundreds of people would spend the night in train stations and beg in marketplaces, on streets, or from door to door.⁵ They wandered from village to village and city to city,

² N. Kairiūkštys, 'Vokiečių atvežti rusai Lietuvoje II pasaulinio karo ir pirmaisiais pokario metais', in: *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis. 1992 (1994)*, pp. 145–150.

³ 'O sobranii nachal'nikov okružnykh otделov', in: *Vestnik Biuro poverennogo po delam russkogo naseleniia Litovskoi general'noi oblasti*, 30 05 1944, p. 4.

⁴ Y. Kostiashev, 'Sovetizatsiia Vostochnoi Prussii posle voiny', in: *Mažoji Lietuva: paribio kultūros tyrimai* (Vilnius, 2012), pp. 194–196.

⁵ B. Ratkevičienė, *Jaunystė ant laisvės aukuro* (Kaunas, 2014), p. 24; M. Dobkevičius, *Gyvenimo peripetijos. Prisiminimai* (Vilnius, 2012), p. 28; Jokūbo Dzienajevičiaus dienoraštis, in: *Lietuvos totoriai*, 7/8 (2007); p. 22, and others.

staying to do seasonal work or to work as maids or farmhands in return for food and at least temporary shelter. Historical sources from the postwar years contain pages of testimonials about the streams of foreign beggars arriving from countries armies of which decided the fate of the occupied Lithuania: In summer, German women from East Prussia with their children in tow began pouring in,' wrote the priest Jonas Žvinys, a witness to the first postwar years.

Some were so starving that they could hardly walk. At the same time, and for the same reasons, Russians also began pouring in from the east, from Smolensk and further away. And these people also asked for food. It was both painful and amusing: in Lithuania you saw both the winners and the 'saviours' begging ... And now you saw both coming with bags begging for bread from those from whom they had just stolen, or killed, deported and wanted to annihilate. What an irony of fate, what a punishment God exacted upon them!⁶

One of the factors that attracted beggars to Lithuania was probably the rumour that Lithuanians were generous when it came to helping such embattled souls. According to researchers, in traditional Lithuanian society, beggars had a relatively high social status from the earliest times; they were shown respect, in the belief that if anyone refused to help a beggar or did not accommodate one, an accident or a dearth of something was sure to follow.⁷ However, the Soviet regime did not show any sentiments like that. It was not long before a term describing this social group appeared in institutional documents: 'the vagrant and begging element', as if all those who begged were necessarily wandering vagabonds, and the state was not directly to blame for their poverty and struggles or their inability to improve their hopeless social status. Travelling without any personal documents or tickets, in the eyes of the Soviet government they were simply 'illegals', spreading infectious diseases, and not to be tolerated.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the scale and the reasons for the social problem of begging in the Lithuanian SSR, which reached a critical point in the postwar years. Using archival sources, the statistical data will be evaluated looking at the 'national

⁶ J. Žvinys, *Mano gyvenimo užrašai* (Vilnius, 1993), pp. 181–182.

⁷ V. Dzekcioriūtė, 'Elgeta XIX a. pabaigos–XX a. pirmosios pusės Lietuvoje', in: *Liaudies kultūra*, 5 (2013), pp. 80–81, 85.

composition' and age groups of beggars, and answering the questions when and by what means this was crisis contained.

Although the flood of beggars reached crisis levels (due to the spread of typhus), this is almost a forgotten narrative in Lithuania's postwar history. It is true that in the years of independence it was revived by memories of the *Wolfskinder* (wolf children)⁸, i.e. German children who resorted to begging in Lithuania for survival and stayed, eventually being raised here, which in turn prompted further research.⁹ However, the rich testimonials of German children so extensively exploited by researchers, artists and museologists¹⁰ became the only layer of memory, one that overshadowed other no less dramatic narratives of the first postwar years, first of all the news about the flood of beggars arriving from the Soviet Union,¹¹ and the scale of the deportations of begging German vagrants from Lithuania.¹² Historical literature based exclusively on the experiences of the *Wolfskinder* has entrenched the stereotype that it was basically just children who resorted to

⁸ B. Daubaras, *Duonos beieškant* (Londonas, 1954); L. Klafs, *Ir visgi mes išgyveno-me. Prisiminimai* (Vilnius, 2014); I. Jacobs, *Neįtikėtina Rytprūsių mergaitės Liesabeth Otto gyvenimo istorija* (Vilnius, 2017) and others

⁹ A. Hermann, *Lietuvių ir vokiečių kaimynystė* (Vilnius, 2000), pp. 290–303; R. Kibelka-Leiserowitz, *Vilko vaikai: kelias per Nemuną* (Vilnius, 2000); S. Winterberg, *Mes – vilko vaikai* (Vilnius, 2019); R. Matimaitytė, 'Lupant "vilko vaikų" svogūna: Rytprūsių krašto vokiečių vaikų likimas ir atmintis Lietuvoje', in: *Naujasis Židinys/Aidai*, 7 (2019), pp. 32–37; P. Kuodytė, 'Vilko vaikų traktuotė grožinėje ir dokumentinėje literatūroje', in: *Oikos: lietuvių migracijos ir diasporos studijos*, 2 (28) (2019), pp. 119–124 and others.

¹⁰ Rick Ostermann's film *Wolfskinder* (2013); the documentary film *Vilko vaikai: nutylėtos tragedijos įamžinimas* (2021); a photography exhibition organised by the Edelweiss Society in 2008 entitled *Vilko vaikai – Wolfskinder*; an exhibition organised by the Museum of Genocide Victims put on in Lithuanian and German cities in 2017–2022, *Wolfskinder: The Bread Route from East Prussia to Lithuania, 1945–1948*; Alvydas Šlepikas, *Mano vardas – Marytė* (Vilnius, 2012); Siegfried Gronau, *Klyksmas vaiduoklių mieste. Vilko vaikai* (Kaunas, 2017) and others.

¹¹ Their spontaneous migration to Lithuania during the period of starvation in 1946–1947 was noticed by the historian Grigorijus Potašenko: G. Potašenko, 'Rusai Lietuvoje 1944 m. liepą – 1953 m.: rusų migracijos ir Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštijos atmintis', in: *Lietuvos rusai XX–XXI a. pradžioje: istorija, tapatybė* (Vilnius, 2013), pp. 135–143.

¹² Only the deportation of Germans in May 1951 has been studied in detail (as the author correctly guessed, it was not the last such instance): A. Arbušauskaitė, "Kaliningrado vokiečių" klausimo išsprendimas(?): Lietuva, 1951-ieji metai, in: *Acta historica universitatis Klaipedensis*, Vol. 18 (2009), pp. 207–230.

begging as a means of survival after the war, that they were taken in by the Lithuanian population, who were in turn subjected to repressions (arrest and deportation) for their acts of kindness. It seems that memories of begging German children in postwar Lithuania have changed actual historical contexts, and function as an alternative to the historical facts, having an influence on the justice system as well. Not only do we have studies narrowed down to the memory sources of the *Wolfskinder*, but also the obliging position of Lithuanian law: the status of being a victim of the occupations of 1939 to 1990 is granted only to German children who grew up here.¹³

Issues of vagrants and beggars wandering the Soviet Union, the socialisation of invalids, and the system of prevention and punishment of homeless juvenile delinquents, are analysed broadly, among others, in studies by Russian, Belarusian and other countries' historians, especially in separate regions and regarding juveniles.¹⁴ This historiography is important for an understanding of the legal context, and the social situation in general, in the USSR, of which Lithuania became a part in the summer of 1944. As well as historiography, historical sources from the postwar years are also referenced: Soviet institutional documents kept in Lithuanian archives, journals and memoirs.

The scale and the reasons for the crisis. There were several successive major streams of foreign beggars pouring into Lithuania in the postwar years: a) as mentioned, the first wave came from

¹³ The Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Legal Status of Victims of Occupations in 1939–1990, amendment of articles 5, 7, 7¹, 9 and supplement, 14 May 2009, XI-260, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/legalAct.html?documentId=TAR.BCE11AB4EAB0> (accessed 05.12.2021).

¹⁴ In particular, the works by Yelena Zubkova are of note: E. Zubkova, "Bednye" i "chuzhie": normy i praktiki bor'by s nishchenstvom v Sovetskom Soiuze. 1940–1960-e gody, in: *Trudy Instituta Rossiiskoi istorii RAN*, 11 (2013), pp. 285–310; E. Zubkova, 'Deti voiny: polozhenie i strategii vyzhivaniia bezprizornykh i beznadzornykh detei v SSSR. 1942–1948 gg.', in: *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, 5 (2016), pp. 52–65; Y. Zubkova, 'The Excluded. Begging in the Postwar Soviet Union', in: *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 2 (April–June) (2013), pp. 259–288; see also: N. Stroganova, 'Nemetskie deti-siroty na territorii Kaliningradskoi oblasti (1945–1948 gg.)', in: *Kaliningradskie arkhivy*, 3 (2001), pp. 278–288; *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, ed. J. Fürst (New York, 2006) and others.

the east in 1944; b) when the Soviet army occupied East Prussia the resulting collapse of the economy and discrimination against Germans meant that the first wave was followed by an influx of homeless Germans from the south in the autumn of 1945; c) more beggars arrived from the east and southeast in 1946–1947 (when famine struck the populations of Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia; according to Veniamin Zima, the author of a book about this famine, people from these famine-struck areas reached Lithuania in the autumn of 1946).¹⁵

What were the numbers of begging migrants? Even though it is often stated in the public discourse that the partisan struggle that gripped Lithuania after the end of the war prevented the immigration of foreign nationals from other republics of the USSR, archival data contradicts this claim. On the contrary, this was exactly when the numbers were at their highest. Based on this data, it is claimed in historiography that at the beginning of 1947, around 30,000 people would arrive daily at Vilnius railway station, of whom ‘the majority, if not all’, according to *militsiya* officers, came to Lithuania searching for food and a roof over their heads, and travelled without any personal documents.¹⁶ Zima, who provides somewhat less source data, claims that around 35,000 to 40,000 people per day from starving regions would arrive in the Baltic republics (where they knew that collective farms had not been established) searching for food.¹⁷

These kinds of statistics look unbelievable. It is doubtful whether, even under the conditions of the greatest crisis, in the short term, over the course of a month, or even two or three months, hundreds of thousands of people could have arrived. The government in Vilnius (as in Riga and Tallinn), it seems, consciously exaggerated the situation in its reports to institutions in Moscow, for it could not handle the enormous numbers of homeless and begging adults and children arriving daily from the eastern regions

¹⁵ V. Zima, *Golod v SSSR 1946–1947 godov. Proiskhozhdenie i posledstviia*. Chast’ II. http://www.fedy-diary.ru/?page_id=6014 (accessed 05 12 2021).

¹⁶ D. R. Shaerer, *Stalinskii voennyi sotsializm. Represii i obshchestvennyi poriadok v Sovetskom Soiuze, 1924–1953* (Moscow, 2014), p. 501.

¹⁷ Zima, *Golod v SSSR*.

of the USSR and from East Prussia. Some of the daily arrivals mentioned in documents must have been people coming from the USSR in search of work, or sent for this purpose. According to calculations by Liudas Truska, in the years 1945 to 1950, around 130,000 such arrivals could have settled in Lithuania,¹⁸ while data collected by Vitalija Stravinskienė shows that the mechanical population increase in 1946 to 1949 consisted of around 170,000 to 180,000 individuals.¹⁹

We can gain a more realistic view of the scale of the flood of beggars from the internal documents of the institutions monitoring their movements. In trying to control the spread of a typhus epidemic in the spring of 1947, the Lithuanian SSR resorted to unprecedented means to isolate beggars. On 1 May, the highest authorities, the Council of Ministers, together with the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania, passed the resolution 'On the Liquidation of Typhus Outbreaks in the Lithuanian SSR', in which, besides medical and sanitation matters, quite a lot of attention was given to the migration of individuals. The railway board was ordered to stop the floods of passengers to large stations, requiring them to be disinfected, along with the passenger carriages. Internal affairs organs received orders to ban vagrants and beggars from using railway transport and from travelling on Lithuanian roads and byways.²⁰

Two institutions were responsible for the arrest of beggars and vagrants in the Lithuanian SSR: the ministries of Internal Affairs and State Security. With the spread of typhus and the constant emergence of new flashpoints, on 18 May the leaders of these organs were ordered to 'completely block' travel by beggars and vagrants, and to immediately send arrested Germans to the Kaliningrad oblast.²¹ The *militsiya* organised roadblocks and strengthened its

¹⁸ *Lietuva 1940–1990. Okupuotos Lietuvos istorija*, ed. A. Anušauskas (Vilnius, 2007), pp. 399–400.

¹⁹ V. Stravinskienė, 'Demografiniai pokyčiai Lietuvoje 1944–1989 m. (statistinis aspektas)', in: *Istorija*, Vol. 103 (2016), pp. 3, 40.

²⁰ Zima, *Golod v SSSR*.

²¹ Top secret resolution of the Republic Special Commission for the Fight against Epidemics, 18 05 1947, Lithuanian Central State Archives (LCVA), col. R-754s, inv. 13, file 115, pp. 3–4.

presence in cities, while the Transport Department of the MGB (Ministry of State Security) controlled the railways and created a *cordon sanitaire*.²² Institution heads provided daily updates to the specially established Special Commission for Epidemics under the Council of Ministers regarding the 'begging and vagrant element' arrested on roads, in cities and in the districts, and the sanitary 'cleansing' of those travelling by train.²³

In an attempt to physically block the migration of beggars (May and June 1947), data recorded by institutions of the Lithuanian SSR show that around 1,000 to 1,500 beggars and vagrants were arrested in the country each day. Nonetheless, there are grounds to state that this statistic hardly relates to the actual stream of arrivals, as some beggars would be arrested more than once, some avoided being caught by disembarking from trains in smaller stations, and others would manage to run away from their persecutors.

In May and June 1947, the *militsiya* would arrest around 50 to 150 beggars daily on roads, at stations and in marketplaces (however, on 21 May as many as 1,041 were caught).²⁴ Significantly larger numbers of arriving adult and child beggars would be ordered off trains each day: from 15 May to 11 June 1947, that is, in less than a month, a total of 12,467 beggars were found and arrested on goods

²² According to the confirmed procedures, sanitation points at train stations in the larger cities (Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai, Panevėžys, Joniškis, Kybartai and Marijampolė) checked people for fleas. If fleas were found, passengers had to go through 'sanitation cleansing', and when there were no such facilities they were sent to public bathhouses and their belongings were disinfected. Only after receiving a certificate that they had been 'cleansed' could passengers buy a ticket to travel. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these measures, as there were constant complaints that public bathhouses were not open in the postwar years, and there were shortages of soap even in hospitals, public bathhouses and kindergartens. Nonetheless, the chair of the MGB Transport Department would provide data each day about 1,000 to 2,000 'cleansed' people at stations. The Vilnius railway station ticket offices were moved temporarily to outside kiosks.

²³ Top secret letters from the minister of internal affairs and chair of the MGB Transport Department to the deputy chair of the Council of Ministers Vladas Niunka, 13 05–13 06 1947 (to the chair of the Republic Special Commission for the Fight Against Epidemics), LCVA, col. R-7548, inv. 13, file 115, pp. 3–13, 15–82.

²⁴ Top secret letter from the minister of internal affairs A. Mickevičius to the deputy chair of the Council of Ministers V. Niunka, 21 05 1947, *ibid.*, p. 82.

trains in the Lithuanian SSR, of whom 5,528 were Germans (119 of them were infected with typhus).²⁵

Having lasted for around a month, this rounding-up campaign probably ended in the middle of June, as it required great resources. On the other hand, with the spread of rumours about these obstacles, the flow must have decreased. We can arguably talk about a figure of up to a thousand beggars arriving each day (especially from the autumn of 1946). The image of the extraordinarily large influx was heightened by the numbers of homeless people resorting to begging, and that the majority already had a 'career' of migrating around Lithuania, having arrived more than once. After collecting the desired quantity of products, or the government luggage limit of 16 kilograms, the absolute majority of beggars would return to where they had come from of their own accord, as their starving families were waiting for them. Some adults would find shelter and a way of survival here, while children could find stable shelter with Lithuanian families. Only a fraction of these arrivals, desperate vagrants or juveniles caught committing crimes, would actually end up at the bottom of the social scale.

Russian-speaking beggars in Lithuania. 'Those invalids, the maimed, the wheeled ones, soldiers ...'²⁶ 'There's a bar on the corner of [Basanavičiaus and] Vingrių Street. On the other side, taking their places, war victims, invalid Russians line up to collect handouts.'²⁷ These come from the memoirs of inhabitants of Vilnius. After the war, cities in the USSR were filled with similar beggars, severely maimed, angry at the regime that showed no concern for the proper treatment of people who had sacrificed their lives in the war. It has been calculated that there were more than 2.5 million war invalids in the USSR, and the social welfare system was far from able to meet their needs. Finally, five years after the war finished, a resolution was implemented to remove them from public places. In the summer of 1951, almost simultaneously all over the USSR, without attracting attention, these individuals were

²⁵ Top secret notice from the MGB Transport Department chair Salminas, 13 06 1947, *ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁶ R. Oginskaitė, *Žebriūnas. Nutylėjimai ir paradoksai* (Vilnius, 2020), p. 61.

²⁷ *Našlaičių dalia* (Vilnius, 2009), p. 276.

rounded up from the streets and accommodated in long-since-closed monasteries, boarding houses and premises unsuitable for habitation of invalids, isolated and forgotten by everyone.²⁸

After invalids, children were the most noticeable on city streets and in villages in the postwar years in Lithuania. However, there were also plenty of adults, so-called 'bag people', for whom carrying food and other necessary items for personal use also acquired as handouts, from wealthier regions and better-supplied large cities, was probably the only means of existence. This phenomenon, which had been growing since the collapse of the economy in the Russian Empire during the civil war, took on such a scale after 1944 due to the general shortages that each year tens of thousands of 'bag people' and profiteers would be arrested, with tons of products confiscated.²⁹ Despite the fact that the passport system restricted the mobility of the population in the USSR (passports could be obtained only by some of the population, people also needed special travel documents too), and the existence of luggage limits, these 'bag people' flooded the roads and the transport system. In March 1946 alone, the *militsiya* arrested 7,281 'bag people' on trains travelling between Lithuania, Latvia and western Belarus, and confiscated 45.8 tons of food products. Most were collective farm workers from Russia who had no passports, but had with them the necessary certificates and papers confirming they were travelling for work purposes.³⁰

In the Soviet Union, where society had been living under conditions of permanent war since 1917, and political repressions and postwar poverty, there were hundreds of thousands of children

²⁸ For more detail, see: N. Shliakhtina, 'Otnoshenie k nishchim gosudarstva i obshchestva v sovetskoe vremia', in: *Traditsii i sovremennost'*, 24 (2020), pp. 40–62; S. Emeilin, 'Sotsial'naia politika v otnoshenii invalidov v SSSR posle Velikoi Otechestvennoi voyny: problema sobliudeniia prav cheloveka i ideologicheskoi tselesoobraznosti', in: *Vestnik VEGU*, 2 (2019), pp. 59–70; B. Fieseler, 'The Bitter Legacy of the "Great Patriotic War". Disabled Red Army soldiers under late Stalinism', in: *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*, pp. 46–61; and others.

²⁹ E. Tverdiukova, 'Bor'ba s meshochnichestvom v SSSR v 1940-e g.', in: *Vestnik ekaterinskogo instituta*, 3 (2010), pp. 54–59.

³⁰ I. Kometchikov, 'Regional'naia vlast' i derevnia Tsentral'nogo Nechernozem'ia v khlebozagatovitel'nykh kompaniiakh 1945—1953 gg.', in: *Vestnik orenburgskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta*, 2 (2018), p. 147.

and youths whose fathers had died at the regime's repressions, while their mothers, unable to cope with the grinding poverty, were unable to provide properly for their children. According to Russian researchers, at the end of the war, the number of such children increased annually, due to the bad conditions in orphanages and at professional schools (poverty and shortages of fuel and food), and in 1946 and 1947 famine struck part of the territory of the USSR. After the war, there were up to three million children without guardians wandering around the Soviet Union.³¹ Some had at least one living parent or relatives, but these could not afford to feed an extra mouth, so they would be handed over to institutional care (orphanages or boarding schools), often being sent out to beg on their own. According to Yelena Zubkova, certain routes became established: people from the Bryansk district travelled *en masse* to Ukraine and Belarus, while those from the Pskov, Novgorod and Velikoluts'k districts headed for the Baltic republics. The streams heading towards Lithuania in search of 'trophies' were the greatest, as it was on the way to the Kalinin-grad oblast.³² According to this historian, in the summer of 1946, the 'migration in search of bread' of abandoned children to the Baltics doubled. Some were sent by their parents; orphans would come of their own accord, in shabby clothes and covered in fleas.³³ Some of these children wandered about with their mothers, and would be left with Lithuanian families,³⁴ much like the Germans.

The Germans. In the autumn of 1945, Lithuania was flooded with beggars from East Prussia, Germans who had survived evacuation and the war, the total destruction of the economy, and postwar extermination. In September 1945, around 130,000 of them stayed in East Prussia, of whom around three-quarters survived up to their deportation to the Soviet-occupied zone in

³¹ M. Zezina, 'Sotsial'naia zashchita detei-sirot v poslevoennye gody (1945–1955)', in: *Voprosy istorii*, 1 (1999), pp. 127–136.

³² Y. Zubkova, 'Deti voyny: polozhenie i strategii vyzhivaniia bezprizornykh i beznadzornykh detei v SSSR. 1942–1948 gg.', in: *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, 5 (2016), pp. 58, 60.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁴ Dobkevičius, *Gyvenimo peripetijos* (Vilnius, 2012); *Atmintis. Tremtinių atsiminimų rinkinys* (Kaišiadorys, 2003), p. 123.

East Germany, which began in the autumn of 1947.³⁵ According to Sergei Kruglov, the USSR minister of internal affairs who initiated the deportation, there were barely 36,000 Germans in work in the spring of 1947; others were unemployed and were not provided with food or anywhere to live, except for those who ended up in children's or old people's asylums. The minister described their condition as 'exhausted'.³⁶

One of the earliest narratives about the fate of East Prussian Germans and their journey to Lithuania in search of bread (today we could say it is a typical narrative, except for the part about arriving with a very large group) was written in 1951: a 17-year-old who reached West Germany talked about his life after the war, when his mother died from starvation in Königsberg in 1946, and his father had died at the front: 'We ate potato peel, any vegetable we could find, grass, roots [...] There were hundreds of orphans there like me. [...] Starvation, typhus and other diseases raged through the city and its surroundings.' According to him, crowds of Germans hung around the train stations and tried to climb on to cargo trains heading for Lithuania. The Russians pulled them off and beat them, but some managed to climb on to the roofs of carriages or jumped on to the steps or the bumpers of a train that was just pulling away. He managed to leave in the summer of 1947 on a half-empty goods train:

The Russians let around 400 Germans on to that train who wanted to go to Lithuania, mostly women and children, and some men. The train took us to Kaunas railway station and let us off. Go where you like, they said as they let us out.

He found his way to a marketplace near the station, where he was found lying exhausted beside a fence by a Russian couple who spoke to him and took him to their home. He lived with the family for a month, recovered his strength, and left in search of work. He worked with one farmer, then another, until he was unexpectedly informed by the *militsiya* in May 1951 that he was being returned to Kaliningrad.³⁷

³⁵ Kostiashev, 'Sovetizatsiia Vostochnoi Prussii', pp. 194–196. In 1947–1951, almost 102,500 people were deported.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

³⁷ E. Tėvainis, 'Pasakoja išvykęs iš Kauno geg. 14 d.', in: *Draugas* (Chicago), 09 07 1951, p. 6.

As was mentioned earlier, researchers have largely paid attention only to the *Wolfskinder*. However, statistical data shows (as does the previously cited source) that most beggars were adult Germans. In May 1947 when they were being deported, nine carriages going from Kaunas to Kaliningrad carried 458 adults and 334 children.³⁸ After several similar campaigns, in early 1950 there were still 3,012 East Prussian-born Germans living in the Lithuanian SSR: 601 men, 1,321 women, and 1,090 children, of whom 372 were orphans.³⁹ During a deportation organised a year later, 804 men, 1,640 women, and 971 children under the age of 16 were sent away.⁴⁰ The trend of many German orphans integrating in Lithuania during the first five postwar years altered this statistic. Having found shelter, and reaching adulthood, they would often obtain documents, not in their own names, but with false surnames, or Lithuanian ones proposed by their guardians. They changed their identity and nationality, albeit not of their own free will, meaning that relatives searching for missing family members through the Red Cross never found them.⁴¹

The issue of the persecution of Lithuanian families who took in German children should be discussed separately. According to Ruth Kibelka, proclamations were made in the postwar years that anyone found providing shelter to begging Germans would be punished,⁴² while the journalist Sonya Winterberg, who recorded the life stories of *Wolfskinder*, also claimed that Lithuanians taking in Germans were arrested, imprisoned or deported to Siberia.⁴³ These claims were formulated by analysing children's memories; however, directives with such content or information about a family's deportation for providing shelter to Germans have not been

³⁸ Top secret note from the minister of internal affairs A. Mickevičius to the deputy chair of the Council of Ministers V. Niunka, 21 05 1947, LCVA col. R 754s, inv. 13, file 115, p. 82.

³⁹ Secret note from the deputy minister of state security Georgii Sokolovsky to the chair of the Council of Ministers Mečislovas Gedvilas, 08 02 1950, *ibid.*, file 262, p. 138.

⁴⁰ Arbušauskaitė, "Kaliningrado vokiečių" klausimo išsprendimas(?): Lietuva, 1951-iejį metai, p. 220.

⁴¹ Kibelka, *Vilko vaikai*, p. 77; Winterberg, *Mes – vilko vaikai*, 22, pp. 134–135.

⁴² Kibelka, *Vilko vaikai*, p. 73.

⁴³ Winterberg, *Mes – vilko vaikai*, p. 115.

found. It would be sensible to state that such instances did not exist: children were recalling the fears of the people who looked after them, or rumours, but not actual events.

Tension did exist in Lithuania after the war between the Soviet authorities and the local population who took in Germans. These tensions were created by the publicly instigated revenge against the Germans, motivated by Nazi crimes, and warnings issued to the population about the threat of catching typhus spread by beggars. In this kind of atmosphere, the government's sporadic attempts to register Germans in Lithuania aroused nothing but fear.

The first registration was prompted by the regime's social policy: the Soviet government would not tolerate the exploitation of hired labour. Unidentified children discovered with the 'bourgeoisie' and other small privateers, not necessarily even German children, were treated as hired hands with no rights, often seen as being exploited by not receiving any payment for their work. That is why in December 1946, the Council of Ministers obliged all organs of local institutions to ensure that such juvenile hired hands were transferred to orphanages, while teenagers were to be employed.⁴⁴ In the case of Germans, juveniles had to be returned to the Kaliningrad oblast. These requirements by central government forced local officials to register juveniles, in turn forcing the people to hide the young Germans they were looking after, not trusting the government, and not having reliable information about the purpose of registration. Similar doubts and fears were raised by later attempts at registration, motivated by the unlikely promise to open the way for Germans to be able to leave the USSR.

Roma. The ethnically diverse beggars also included Roma. Many were arrivals in the country (around 1,000 to 1,500), as the Lithuanian Roma community had been exterminated during the German occupation along with the Jews.⁴⁵ According to the historian Mindaugas Pocius, the constantly moving Roma found themselves

⁴⁴ Lithuanian SSR Council of Ministers resolution No 777, 24 12 1946, LCVA, col. R-754s, inv. 1, file 70, p. 172.

⁴⁵ According to Stasys Vaitekūnas, in the postwar years Roma arrived from Moldavia and sub-Carpathian Ukraine (S. Vaitekūnas, 'Lietuvos tautinės mažumos: žydai, totoriai, karaimai, žigonai/romai', in: *Tiltai*, 4 (2003), pp. 40–41).

in an extremely risky situation after the war. There were instances of whole families being murdered: in 1946 and 1947 partisans killed several groups of Roma (women and children) who had wandered into the villages because they were suspected of spying or stealing, or for racial reasons.⁴⁶ Soviet government representatives also viewed this ethnic group suspiciously, blaming them for avoiding 'socially beneficial work' and forming criminal gangs.⁴⁷

Ignoring the Soviet government's efforts to deter the Roma from their itinerant way of life (by constructing a 'Soviet Roma' ethnic group, norms were set for their language, schools were opened, books were published, attempts were made to organise collective farms and traditional craft artels, etc, specifically for them),⁴⁸ almost half the 60,000 Roma living in the USSR in 1951 had no fixed abode. They made a living from small trade and speculation, larger groups travelled around the Soviet Union by 'hijacking' trains, that is, travelling without a ticket.⁴⁹ In 1951 another attempt was made to regulate the status of 'Soviet Roma'. In October that year, the USSR MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) and the Office of the Public Prosecutor appealed to the highest government organs with the suggestion to relocate all Roma (both itinerant and settled) to special settlements set aside for them, i.e., to deport them to Siberia. However, the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers did not approve of this initiative, limiting themselves to the requirement to apply the laws against vagrancy and social 'parasitic behaviour' that had just been passed in 1951.⁵⁰ Historians of Russian law note that the regime's measures that were meant to force the Roma

⁴⁶ M. Pocius, *Kita mėnulio pusė. Lietuvos partizanų kova su kolaboravimu 1944–1953* (Vilnius, 2009), pp. 300–301.

⁴⁷ N. Koloshinskaia, 'Problemy preodoleniia 'obezlichki i razreshenii tsyganskogo voprosa' v SSSR vo II pol. 40-kh – nach. 50-kh gg.', in: *Istoriia gosudarstva i prava*, 3 (2017), pp. 15–19.

⁴⁸ Ibid.; V. Shapoval, 'Sovetskii opyt organizatsii obrazovaniia na rodnom iazyke kak primer upravlencheskoi aporii: tsygane (romy)', in: *Shamovskie pedagogicheskie chteniia nauchnoi shkoly upravleniia obrazovatel'nymi sistemami. Sbornik statei XIII mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii* (Moscow, 2021), pp. 98–100.

⁴⁹ Koloshinskaia, 'Problemy preodoleniia 'obezlichki i razreshenii tsyganskogo voprosa', p. 18.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 18–19.

to live a settled life and integrate into the 'Soviet socio-cultural environment' were fruitless.⁵¹

Roma without any clear means of survival or Soviet documents would sometimes come to the attention of the government of the Lithuanian SSR. Probably as part of a Union-wide attempt to register all 'parasitic' individuals, in 1952 the number of Roma in the republic was 747 adults, of which only 59 (almost 8%) were employed. That same year, 46 Roma individuals were arrested (for horse stealing and minor robberies and thefts; there were alleged to be six criminal gangs in operation). In the report to the Union-wide MGB Supreme Militiya Board, it was stated that following these arrests, the number of armed robberies and livestock thefts in the Lithuanian SSR were reduced to a minimum.⁵²

The local population. It is difficult to say what percentage of the local population contributed to the large numbers of beggars. It was not just arrivals in the country who begged in order to survive: after the war, families, especially large ones, were short of food, having lost their homes, so both Lithuanians and the early inhabitants of the Klaipėda region who returned from Germany resorted to begging (repatriated from the Soviet-occupied zone, they would find their homes and farmsteads occupied by new settlers). Some of these local beggars were probably people who had lost their homes because of the regime's repressions: they had escaped deportation, or returned illegally from their place of exile, and not found stable shelter.

Juvenile Lithuanians found in the streets would be taken to Juvenile Admission-Distribution Points, but they made up only a small fraction (in 1945, of the 3,387 children who ended up here, only 5% were local Lithuanians).⁵³ Lithuanian families were more inclined to take in or adopt orphans of their own nationality, caring for the children of relatives who had been left without guardianship. Children from orphanages would also beg for handouts in the countryside after the war, that is, if they were

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵² P. Liubertas, *Tamsios aukštumos: LTSR milicija 1940–1987* (Vilnius, 2019), pp. 291–292.

⁵³ Zubkova, 'Deti voyny', p. 59.

not stealing from orchards or vegetable gardens.⁵⁴ A man from a family originally from Klaipėda recalled how his mother was left with seven children after the war, so in 1946, at the age of ten, he and his brother would go from door to door asking for bread.⁵⁵ Another man related how he and his younger brother were forced to beg for food on account of their mother's 'stinginess'. They would go to the monastery in Plungė, where monks would cut loaves of bread and hand out thick slices. In the man's opinion, his parents were not so short of money, but they were extremely thrifty; growing up in such conditions, the children could not get a proper education.⁵⁶

The state's response to the begging crisis. With the regime's intolerance of any private or Church social welfare structures, all responsibility for controlling the situation fell upon the state. Special institutions were established. In the autumn of 1944 (before anyone even predicted the flood of German beggars from East Prussia, which commenced around a year later), the Lithuanian SSR NKVD system set up the Department for Fighting Child Homelessness and Neglect,⁵⁷ later developing an entire structure of agencies concerned with this matter.⁵⁸ Problems relating to adult vagrancy had to be solved by the Ministry of Social Welfare, namely the Republic Commission for the Liquidation of Begging (headed by the minister himself Juozas Stimburs).⁵⁹

Juvenile Admission-Distribution points were set up to provide temporary shelter for homeless children and juveniles in the larger

⁵⁴ *Našlaičių dalia*, pp. 181, 251.

⁵⁵ IS10_KLPK_VV1936vt, p. 32. Archive of copies of interviews conducted as part of the project 'The Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: The creation of a new society and its reflections in family histories' (kept in the Klaipėda University Centre for Studies of Social Change and the Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology).

⁵⁶ SK12_KLP_VL1930, *ibid*.

⁵⁷ Liubertas, *Tamsios aukštumos*, p. 68. As was the case with other NKVD institutions, it was headed by officials brought in from the USSR.

⁵⁸ For more details, see: I. Balčiūnė, 'Neprižiūrimų ir beglobių nepilnamečių problema ir jos sprendimas 1944–1954 metais Lietuvoje', in: *Lietuvos istorijos studijos*, 47 (2021), pp. 82–98.

⁵⁹ Secret notice from the minister of social welfare to the chair of the Council of Ministers M. Gedvilas, 05 03 1947, LCVA, col. R-754s, inv. 13, file 94, p. 53).

cities (Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai and Panevėžys, and later in Klaipėda as well), which stayed open for 24 hours. They appeared in the Lithuanian SSR in 1945. Until then, uncared-for homeless juveniles found in train stations, marketplaces and on the streets would be taken to orphanages. However, in March 1945, the People's Commissariat for Education recommended abandoning this practice, recommending instead the opening of special colonies for these arrivals. Teenagers subjected to fate and living on the streets for quite a while already were uncontrollable. Trying to secure their own welfare by any means possible, they would join gangs and steal; it appears that some groups of juveniles even had to be disarmed: in December 1944, a machine-gun was taken away from one group.⁶⁰ Finding themselves in orphanages, they proceeded to steal and sell the equipment and clothes they received; with their earnings they would buy tobacco and alcohol. They would vandalise buildings (smash windows, break and burn furniture). They would get into fights, hurl expletives at the staff, etc.⁶¹ The scale of the constantly growing problem of homeless children is evidenced by the efforts to significantly expand the network of orphanages in occupied Lithuania immediately after the war.

These Juvenile Admission-Distribution points were where mainly children aged three to 16 would end up, those who had been left without care due to repressions against their parents (arrest,

⁶⁰ Decree 0055 of the Lithuanian SSR People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, 15 12 1944, Lithuanian Special Archives Department of Ministry of Internal Affairs Documents (LYA VRM DS), col. V-102, inv. 1, file 1, p. 75. Children would arrive from all over the USSR: Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, Stalinabad (Tadjikian SSR), etc. The fathers of most of the Russian and Belarusian children, and all the German children's fathers, had died in the war, sometimes their mothers had also died. For example, of the 72 children found in Šiauliai in January 1945, five were Lithuanian, five were Belarusian, one was a German boy, one was a Jewish girl, and all the others were Russian, yet there were also Poles, Ukrainians, Latvians, and even Tartars. Children would usually know their main biographical information, the year of their birth and place, but there were instances when they only knew their name, and not necessarily even their real one. (Report file about arrivals at the Šiauliai Juvenile Admission-Distribution Point, LYA VRM DS, col. L-37, inv. 1, file 426, pp. 18–23, 39–40).

⁶¹ Secret notice from the deputy people's commissar for education Mikhalina Meškauskienė to the people's commissar for internal affairs J. Bartašiūnas, the people's commissar for state control Zigmas Tverkus, and the deputy chair of the Council of Ministers V. Niunka, 19 03 1945, LCVA, col. R-7548, inv. 13, file 37, p. 78.

imprisonment or deportation), or if their parents had died or been killed, as well as juvenile criminals and vagrant children found by the *militsiya*. Staff at these points had to seal their further fate in two weeks. Children arriving from East Prussia would immediately be sent back to similar centres that had opened in Kaliningrad, while those arriving from the Soviet Union would be sent home (if they had relatives), or to other distribution points or orphanages.

Data about the transfer of homeless juveniles and children to orphanages, professional schools and the like only started being collected by the MVD Militsiya Board in August 1951; before then there was no unified record-keeping in place.⁶² There were so many juveniles that they would often be escorted only as far as the station, and after being bought a ticket they would be put on to trains. A number of young Russian-speaking orphans ended up in Lithuanian orphanages and grew up there. Some teenagers were sent to professional schools that trained factory workers (these followed a very strict regime, anyone trying to escape would be tracked down like a criminal), while others were employed at enterprises and collective farms.⁶³ In places where there were no such points, children found by the *militsiya* would be taken to guardhouses with adults. This prompted the internal affairs organs to initiate the opening of children's rooms, with corresponding positions for staff.⁶⁴ Children caught by the *militsiya* on several occasions stealing, vandalising or committing other crimes would be sent to juvenile labour colonies. Thus, a standardised 'infrastructure' for fighting juvenile vagrancy and criminality emerged and started to function in the Lithuanian SSR in the first years of the occupation.

The passport regime system was used to control the migration of adult beggars within the Soviet Union. From the end of 1946 (according to the resolution of 5 November of the Lithuanian SSR

⁶² Top secret announcement about the work of the Lithuanian SSR *militsiya* organs, third quarter of 1951, LYA VRM DS, col. V-102, inv. 1, file 3, p. 126.

⁶³ Report file about arrivals at the Vilnius and Šiauliai Juvenile Admission-Distribution points, *ibid.*, col. L-37, inv. 1, file 423, 426.

⁶⁴ Secret notice from the deputy minister of internal affairs G. Sokolovsky to the chair of the Council of Ministers M. Gedvilas, 12 06 1946, LCVA, col. R-754s, inv. 13, file 94, p. 167.

Council of Ministers 'On Measures to Liquidate Begging and Vagrancy in the Adult Population'), internal affairs and state security organs carried out 'systematic operations', during which beggars would be rounded up from the streets, train stations and trains.⁶⁵ Applying the valid practice in the Soviet Union, people without personal identity documents had to be returned to their permanent place of residence, invalids and people unable to work had to be placed in the care of social institutions (disabled and old peoples' asylums), while those who could work had to be employed.⁶⁶ It is difficult to say how many beggars were sent from Lithuania to other Soviet republics according to this directive (those who expressed the will to leave would receive a one-off allowance) only to return again some time later.

All Germans caught in Lithuania would also be returned to where they had come from. When the government of the USSR decided to deport all Germans from the region to their own occupation zone in East Germany (April 1947), local authorities in the Lithuanian SSR received orders to register arrivals from the former East Prussia. As was mentioned, these people were transported to Kaliningrad or East Germany in several attempts at organising separate train routes. Children who had found shelter in Lithuania, and the Lithuanian families who had taken them in, feared deportation, as they did not trust the Soviet regime and did not know what fate would await them. Nonetheless, around 14,000 to 15,000 Germans removed from Lithuania against their will in 1947–1951 received the chance to escape from the Soviet Union.

Deportations such as those were arranged several times. Archival sources and historiography mention the following figures: in May 1947, a total of 792 people were sent from Kaunas to Kaliningrad; in June of that year, 5,528 Germans were sent away;⁶⁷ in October 1948, Germans were again rounded up and returned to the former East

⁶⁵ Secret notice from the social welfare minister J. Stimburys to the chair of the Council of Ministers M. Gedvilas, 05 03 1947, LCVA, col. R-754s, inv. 13, file 94, p. 53.

⁶⁶ Ibid.; Zubkova, "Bednye" i "chuzhie", p. 297.

⁶⁷ Top secret note from the head of the MGB Transport Department Salminas, 13 06 1947, LCVA, col. R-754s, inv. 13, file 115, p. 78. They were most likely deported in May and June.

Prussia, this time 1,290 people; in November another 652 Germans were removed from Lithuania.⁶⁸ In the autumn of 1949, 656 were sent away; on 10–11 May 1951, 3,415 Germans were removed from the country;⁶⁹ while in the autumn of that year, several thousand women were sent to Frankfurt am Oder, collected from villages, single farmsteads and cities where they had been living off casual labour or working as maids.⁷⁰

By the turn of 1947 and 1948, the migration of foreign beggars to Lithuania had peaked. This was due to the economic and political situations in neighbouring regions, and in Lithuania itself, where, with the efforts to suppress the partisan resistance, the beginning of mass deportations to Siberia and the confiscation of private property as part of the establishment of collective farms, the situation was only getting worse. Enforced Soviet reforms impoverished the population both of the countryside and of the cities. Meanwhile, on the edges of the USSR which had experienced the Nazi occupation, the social and economic situation was becoming slightly more stable. There were a number of accountable institutions and means of prosecution to control beggars, and especially crime among vagrant juveniles. The situation changed rapidly in East Prussia: according to A. Hermann, by 1947 the land had started to recover, and from the spring sufficient amounts of food products were available.⁷¹ With the end of extreme starvation, Germans made trips to Lithuania less frequently, and instead prepared for their journey to East Germany.

Conclusions. The flood of beggars that descended on postwar Lithuania became entrenched in historiography and the public space (literature, films and exhibitions), and even in the law, only in the form of the experiences of the *Wolfskinder*. Rich sources

⁶⁸ As told by German Lieutenant X who had been a Russian POW in Lithuania, in: *Eltos biuletenis* (in circulation in Germany), 18 07 1949, pp. 6, 22; Kostiashev, *Sovetskaia Vostochnoi Prussii*, p. 296.

⁶⁹ Arbušauskaitė, 'Kaliningrado vokiečių klausimo išsprendimas', pp. 210, 220.

⁷⁰ Jokūbas Skliutauskas, 'Über die Abschiebung der Ostpreußen aus Litauen in die DDR 1951 Erinnerungen eines Arztes', in: *Annaburger Annalen*, 1 (1993), pp. 7–12. Thanks to Arthur Hermann for referring me to this paper.

⁷¹ Hermann, *Lietuvių ir vokiečių kaimynystė*, p. 281.

extensively exploited by researchers and artists alike (testimonials of German children) became the only layer of memory drawn upon, one that overshadowed other no less dramatic narratives from the first postwar years, primarily news of waves of beggars arriving from the Soviet Union. The first arrived in Lithuania in 1944, followed by a second wave caused by starvation in 1946–1947. At this time, there were many more beggars arriving from the USSR (invalids, ‘bag people’, children) than from East Prussia. In addition, Lithuanians were also forced to resort to beg on the streets, and Roma wandered the country. The analysis of postwar sources does not confirm statements appearing in historiography based solely on the experiences of *Wolfskinder* regarding the national composition of postwar beggars, their age, or alleged reprisals against Lithuanians who took in Germans and looked after them.

The Soviet government did not tolerate beggars or vagrants. This intolerance was not limited to just Germans and children. Such people were persecuted primarily for criminal behaviour and for spreading infectious diseases. This crisis of an influx of beggars into Lithuania (at its peak, around 1,000 people would arrive each day) ended at the turn of 1947 and 1948. The fight against a typhus epidemic helped contain the flood of beggars: the *militsiya* and state security officials blocked the migration of beggars in May and June of 1947, with arrivals from other regions being returned to their place of origin. In later years, the flood of foreign beggars receded, as Germans who had managed to survive the interim period in East Prussia then had the opportunity to escape to East Germany, while the Soviet Union overcame the social and economic catastrophe caused by the Nazi occupation.

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POKARIO SOCIALINĖ KRIZĖ: ELGETŲ ANTPLŪDIS Į LIETUVĄ 1944–1947 M.

Santrauka

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Straipsnyje analizuojami 1944–1947 m. įvykiai Lietuvoje, kai sovietų valdžia buvo priversta kovoti su dideliu atvykstančių elgetų, vaikų bei suaugusiųjų iš Sovietų Sąjungos ir Rytų Prūsijos antplūdžiu. Tiriama šios socialinės problemos mastas ir priežastys, įvairiausių elgetų maršrutai, valdžios institucijų pastangos deportacijomis suvaldyti elgetų antplūdžio krizę, susijusią su šiltinės plitimu.

Pokariu Lietuvą ištikęs elgetų antplūdis istoriografijoje ir viešojoje erdvėje (literatūroje, kine, muziejų rengiamose parodose), net teisėje įsitvirtino vien *vilko vaikų* likimo temomis. Turtingi ir intensyviai tyrėjų bei menininkų eksploatuojami

šaltiniai – vokiečių vaikų liudijimai – tapo vieninteliu atminties klodu, užgožusiu kitus, ne mažiau dramatiškus pirmųjų pokario metų siužetus, visų pirma – žinias apie iš Sovietų Sąjungos atvykstančių elgetų bangas. Jų pirmoji pasiekė Lietuvą dar 1944 m., o dėl 1946–1947 m. bado atsirito ir antroji. Tuo metu elgetų iš SSRS (neįgaliųjų, „maišelininkų“, vaikų) atvykdavo daug daugiau nei iš Rytprūsių. Be jų, išmalda vertėsi ir lietuviai, po šalį klajojo čigonai (romai). Pokario šaltinių analizė nepatvirtina vien *vilko vaikų* patirtimi grįstų istoriografijos teiginių apie pokario elgetų tautinę sudėtį, amžių ir Lietuvos gyventojams dėl vokiečių globos esą taikytas represijas.

Sovietų valdžia netoleravo elgetaujančių ir valkataujančių žmonių, ne vien vokiečių ir ne vien vaikų. Jie persekioti pirmiausia dėl nusikalstamumo ir infekcinių ligų protrukių. Elgetų antplūdžio į Lietuvą krizė (didžiausio antplūdžio metu kasdien atvykdavo apie tūkstantį žmonių) baigėsi 1947–1948 m. sandūroje. Ją įveikti padėjo kova su šiltinės epidemija: milicijos ir saugumo pareigūnai 1947 m. gegužę–birželį blokavo elgetų migraciją, atvykėliai iš kitų regionų buvo grąžinami į kilmės vietas. Vėlesniais metais svetimtaučių elgetų antplūdis mažėjo. Tai lėmė ekonominė bei politinė situacija kaimyniniuose regionuose ir pačioje Lietuvoje. Čia slopinant partizaninį karą, prasidėjus masiniams trėmimams, nusavinus nuosavybę steigiant kolūkius situacija tik blogėjo. Prievarta primestos sovietinės reformos skurdino ir kaimo, ir miesto gyventojus. Tuo metu pokarį Rytų Prūsijoje išgyvenę vokiečiai naudojosi atsiradusia galimybe ištrukti į Rytų Vokietiją, o nacių okupaciją patyrusiam SSRS pakraštyje socialinė bei ekonominė situacija šiek tiek normalizavosi. Veikė nemažai atsakingų institucijų, o ir baudžiamųjų priemonių elgetavimui ir ypač valkataujančių nepilnamečių nusikalstamumui suvaldyti.