

Distance learning in an emergency situation

Financial audit

Published: 30.9.2020



[FULL REPORT \(LV\)](#) ↗

[EN SUMMARY](#) ↗

What we assessed and why

Following the WHO announcement declaring COVID-19 a pandemic, the Cabinet of Ministers (Cabinet) declared a state of emergency on 12 March 2020 and suspended classroom teaching in all educational establishments until the situation was resolved. Teaching was to be carried out remotely, except central state exams. Initially declared until 14 April 2020, the state of emergency was extended twice – until 12 May and then until 9 June 2020.

Between 12 March and 20 June 2020, the Cabinet allocated additional financial resources of €568 368 to the Ministry of Education and Science (Ministry), from the “Contingency Funds” programme, to fund distance learning facilities during the emergency:

- €203 160 for the purchase of smart devices (phones and tablets) for the distance learning needs of pupils in primary and secondary schools;
- €365 208 for the production and distribution of audio-visual content for distance learning on free-to-air television channels, and for the development of an internet platform and digital solutions.

In parallel, the Cabinet authorised the Ministry, during the emergency, to suspend application of the Public Procurement Law in the case of goods and services needed for distance learning, with procurement to be based on rapid action and the immediate conclusion of contracts.

Our interim report summarises the findings of our checks at the Ministry in relation to the validity of requests for and the actual use of the additional funds:

- (1) for the purchase of smart devices;
- (2) for the creation of audio-visual content for the distance learning project “Tava klase” (“Your class”).



What we found

(1) Purchase of smart devices

In March 2020, the Ministry organised a survey to assess the feasibility of implementing distance learning and obtain information on the actual situation regarding access to computers, smart devices and the internet for primary and secondary pupils. The survey found that more than 5 000 pupils did not have access to a computer or a smartphone with an internet connection. The Ministry therefore approached telecommunication companies for supplies of the necessary equipment.

The Ministry spent €436 732 to purchase smart devices with an internet connection for distance learning (including €203 160 from the contingency funds).

To ensure that the Ministry had used these funds economically and efficiently, we surveyed municipalities to find out whether they had distributed the Ministry's smart devices to pupils, and what they did with the devices after the emergency.

Survey results:

- Most of the 5 266 smart devices (total value €557 731) had been handed on to pupils. However, at least 295 (value €28 665) had not been distributed, but remained at the disposal of individual municipalities, because the Ministry had not verified whether their needs were still as initially indicated.
- Several municipalities had not received enough smart devices so had purchased them from their own funds (at least 139 devices).
- In addition, the municipalities had handed out at least 2 015 computers and tablets from educational institutions, and at least 144 donated to them.
- The Ministry had given no instructions for the use of smart devices after the emergency, so municipalities acted in different ways: devices were either returned to educational institutions for further use or left with the pupils.

(2) Implementation of the “Your class” project:

According to the Ministry, the emergency created an urgent need for original educational resources for both pupils and teachers in various subjects, using distance learning and high-quality interdisciplinary links, while ensuring that materials were as widely accessible as possible.

Audio-visual content was produced and distributed on free-to-air television channels, and an internet platform and digital solutions were developed. An additional amount of €365 208 had been allocated from the state budget. Accordingly, “Your class” lessons were broadcast on the RE:TV channel and Sportacentrs.com from 6 April to 29 May 2020, and a web site www.tavaklase.lv was created.

What we concluded

As a result of the audit, we concluded that the distance learning process was generally organised according to the circumstances prevailing under the emergency situation and that the Ministry had provided the necessary goods and services to overcome the COVID-19 crisis and to address its consequences. At the same time, we drew attention to possible ways of further improving the management of this process.