

Risks in using public resources in emergency management (COVID-19)

Analysis

Published: 1.6.2020



FULL REPORT (PT) 

What we assessed and why

With this document, we sought to draw attention, at a very early stage of the pandemic, to a number of risks which are relevant to the financial management during emergencies and which must not be overlooked in the health, economic, social and financial crisis caused by COVID-19.

What we found

We identified risks relating not only to crisis and emergency-measure management, emergency and public aid, weakening of controls and integrity, public procurement and information systems, but also relating to fiscal transparency (as regards measuring the costs and impacts of emergency measures), and to accounting statements.

The aspects addressed took account of the usual characteristics of emergency situations, international recommendations, exceptional legislation already issued, and the results of audits and other controls already carried out in comparable circumstances.

What we concluded

We alerted all bodies managing public money to the need to be aware of these risks, and to consider taking measures to mitigate them, particularly as regards the clarity and coherence of legislation and regulations, issuing guidelines for the harmonised implementation of the measures, establishing monitoring mechanisms, defining and coordinating responsibilities, and preventing the duplication of support.

Emphasis was also placed on the importance of properly configuring the information systems for implementing support, strengthening IT security systems, valuing and safeguarding the integrity of all staff involved in emergency response actions, and guaranteeing the transparency and publicising of procedures and actions, particularly when support and public contracts or grants are involved.

We drew attention to the need for all procedures and decisions to be documented and substantiated, and for basic checks to be maintained, thus ensuring the separation of duties, cross-checks, confirmation of deliveries, stock checks and physical checks, and replacing ex-ante checks with checks during or after procedures.

PORTUGAL

Tribunal de Contas



We stressed that the reporting of and responsibility and accountability for the resources used involves keeping a detailed record of all actions to implement COVID-19 measures, all related expenditure as well as reduced fiscal income, for the purpose of measuring their effects, within a framework that allows the impact on public finances and the sustainability of the measures to be assessed.

We analysed each of these risk areas, cited findings from previous audits, and made more detailed recommendations for each of the areas concerned.