

Management of state material reserves in emergency situations

Performance audit

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[FULL REPORT \(SK\)](#) ↗

What we assessed and why

The audit objective was to assess whether the Slovak Republic's Administration of State Material Reserves' (ASMR) competences and processes were appropriate and effective, and to assess the ASMR's readiness and verify its actions in the event of an emergency (pandemic).

Given the lack of medical products in Slovakia during the first wave of COVID-19, we expected the ASMR's competences and processes to be inappropriate and ineffective and that it was not prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic.

What we found

We highlighted how unprepared the state's institutions were. The crisis management authorities failed to fulfil their obligations and did not submit requests for emergency medical stocks to the ASMR. The items to be provided by the ASMR are determined by the government. However, medical supplies were not part of the ASMR's portfolio until a government decision of 27 February 2020. The state was therefore not in a position to provide the necessary supplies to hospitals, care homes for the elderly or frontline workers. Two expert advisory commissions – the government's Pandemic Commission and the National Anti-epidemic Commission – had key roles to play in the exceptional epidemic situation. We found their role was formal and the Anti-epidemic Commission, chaired by the country's Chief Sanitary Inspector, had not met once since 2019. On the other hand, the Permanent Crisis Staff, a body lacking legal competence and authority, had actively entered into the management process. There is no written evidence from the meetings of the Permanent Crisis Staff regarding their conclusions, for example on prioritising the distribution of emergency stocks. The state's main coordinating body in times of emergency is the Central Crisis Staff and the Slovak government is the supreme authority with the right and the duty to take decisions.

We also drew attention to the ASMR's lack of preparedness for the next wave of the pandemic. Preparations were made without a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the measures taken in the first wave. As a result, it seemed, in mid-September 2020 the ASMR's stores were only 16 % stocked with medical equipment. This posed a risk to the capacity for rapid reaction to a rapid increase in COVID-positive patients. The ASMR did not have reserves for 60 days, as required by the government resolution, but only 10. Of 14 types of medical equipment, only two were ready in sufficient quantities, but stocks of surgical masks and COVID-19 tests were larger than



required. No sacks for hazardous bio-waste were available, and requests for single-use coats, gloves and protective shields could hardly be met (10 %). The ASMR management's approach to requests for medical equipment was case-by-case and it had no mechanism for objective assessment or prioritisation. During 2020 the ASMR allocated medical material worth nearly €40 million, of which almost three quarters was for the health sector. It responded most quickly to a request by the Slovak Government Office – the items were ready within 2 days, but took more than one month to respond to a request from the Ministry of Justice.

The ASMR is an executive component of the state crisis management system. Ministries and public authorities must submit requests concerning the creation of emergency stocks and the composition of materials to the ASMR. The health department did not comply with this obligation until the end of February 2021, and requested the ASMR to provide medical equipment for 30 days for public health authorities and hospitals' infectious disease clinics. Our report points out the risk of a lack of personal responsibility for inaction, i.e. of non-compliance by state institutions. During the state of emergency, the ASMR provided the supplies that should have been provided by various central state authorities.

We also pointed out the ASMR's insufficient use of IT systems, in particular between its headquarters and branches, which contributed to the lack of a real-time overview of inventory in warehouses in several parts of Slovakia.

What we concluded

We found that, at the time of the emergency, the ASMR's competences and processes were inappropriate and ineffective, and highlighted its unpreparedness for the COVID-19 pandemic. We issued recommendations to remedy the shortcomings identified – both of a systemic and procedural nature.

We recommended that the National Council of the Slovak Republic should require the Ministry of the Interior to perform an in-depth analysis of state management processes in times of extraordinary situations or emergencies and, based on experience with the COVID-19 pandemic, to consider changing the legislation to lay down new rules for the state's crisis management process.