



Executive summary of the public audit report

HAVE OBJECTIVES FOR THE PROVISION OF YELLOW SCHOOL BUSES BEEN REACHED?

15 March 2016, No. VA-P-50-1-2



Full audit report in Lithuanian is available on the website
of the National Audit Office
: www.vkontrole.lt

DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Bus lots : automotive transportation enterprises managed by the centres of the administrative units or municipal authorities of the Republic of Lithuania.

Yellow bus : a yellow school bus marked with the appropriate identifying attributes that transports children (students) along special routes and has been acquired as part of a programme for the provision of yellow school buses for schools.

The Ministry: the Ministry of Education and Science.

Programmes for providing schools with yellow school buses : the programmes being implemented since 2000 by the Ministry of Education and Science (eight were implemented from 2000 to 2012, and one was launched in 2013) under which yellow school buses are purchased and handed over to municipal and public schools.

School bus : a yellow school bus marked with the appropriate identifying attributes that transports children (students) along special routes and belongs to a municipality or school.

EMIS (Lith.: ŠVIS): Education Management Information System.

SUMMARY

In order to help municipal authorities, which are currently focusing on systematically optimising school networks, improve student transportation and ensure access to education services for all students, the Ministry of Education and Science has been providing national and municipal schools with yellow school buses since 2000: over a period of 14 years, the Ministry has implemented its Yellow Bus programmes¹ and spent 22 million euros on 691 yellow school buses handed over² to municipal and public schools for the purpose of transporting students.

Based on data from Statistics Lithuania³, from 2000, when the first programme for providing schools with yellow school buses was launched, to 2014, the number of general education establishments decreased from 2,354 to 1200. Over this same period, the number of students using yellow school bus services increased from 1,200 to 20,049. Because the school network continues to be optimised and because, from 1 September 2016, pre-school education will be made compulsory⁴, the demand for student transportation using yellow school buses will increase further and the provision of yellow school buses for schools will remain a relevant issue, this audit was incorporated into the Public Audit Programme.

The purpose of the audit was to assess whether student transportation using these school buses was being organised effectively:

- whether the Ministry adequately organises the provision of yellow school buses to schools;
- whether municipal authorities organise student transportation with yellow school buses based on safety requirements and the needs of the students.

The subject of this audit is the Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science.

During the audit, we collected data from the following sources:

- the Ministry of Education and Science (Division of School Activity at the Education Quality and Regional Policy Department);
- seven municipal administrations (Kretinga Dist., Šilutė Dist., Kėdainiai Dist., Prienai Dist., Trakai Dist., Druskininkai Dist. and Jurbarkas Dist.) and the schools in their territory that were provided with yellow school buses (we surveyed 49 and visited 19 schools), see Annex 1.

We surveyed all the municipal governments regarding the organisation of student transportation with yellow buses and carried out student surveys in 27 schools (about 30% of all

¹ Programmes approved by resolutions of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania: Yellow Bus Programme for Providing Rural Schools with School Vehicles, 17/04/2000, No. 437; School Improvement Programme, 28/05/2002, No. 759; Programme for the Provision of Yellow School Buses for Schools 2006–2008, 19/10/2005, No. 1110; Programme for the Provision of Yellow School Buses for Schools 2009–2012; 14/10/2008, No. 1052; Programmes approved by resolutions of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania: Yellow Bus Programme for the Provision of School Vehicles to General Education Schools 2001, 11/04/2001, No. 591; Yellow Bus Programme for the Provision of School Vehicles to General Education Schools 2002, 24/04/2002, No. 751; Yellow Bus Programme for 2003, 30/01/2003, No. 88; Yellow Bus Programme for the Transportation of Special Needs Students 2005–2008, 07/12/2004, No. ISAK-1953; Programme for the Provision of Yellow School Buses for Schools 2013–2017, 08/06/2012, No. V-955.

² 657 buses for municipal schools, 34 buses for public schools.

³ Available online at: <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize?id=1239&status=A> [Accessed on 03/11/2015].

⁴ Bill No. XIIP-3375 amending articles 2, 7, 8, 9, 24, 27, 36, 37, 43, 46 and 47 of the Law No. I-1489 of the Republic of Lithuania on Education. Available online at: http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5_show?p_r=4445&p_d=202690&p_k=1 [Accessed on 23/12/2015].

students transported to these schools with yellow buses). We analysed the data of studies conducted by the Ministry in 2002–2006 and common practices abroad.

The audit covered the period of 2012–2014. Data from previous and later years was also used to analyse trends and changes.

We discovered that over the period of 2012–2014, the Ministry only satisfied about 30% of demand for yellow school buses as established by municipal authorities. Municipalities could not always ensure the safe transportation of students because of the yellow buses allocated for the use of municipal schools in 2012–2014, about 30% are more than 10 years old (municipal authorities claim that such buses are 80% technically depreciated) and 11% do not have seat belts. Municipal representatives identified problems such as an insufficient number of yellow buses: not all students fit into the buses and bus drivers are forced to make several trips – parents complain that their children are transported to school too early.

In many cases, ensuring that disabled children are transported to educational establishments and that transportation is organised adequately is a prerequisite for ensuring access to education among children with disabilities. Municipal schools do not have sufficient means of special transportation for transporting disabled students: from 2008, the Ministry has not purchased any yellow buses adapted for the transportation of children with special needs.

We established that the Ministry failed to systematically collect and analyse quantitative information on how municipal authorities organise student transportation with yellow buses, thus the conclusion can be made that it has failed to meet the requirements of programmes for the provision of yellow buses for schools, and the quantitative information it did collect was inaccurate and incomprehensive.

The following public audit conclusions and recommendations were drawn upon the assessment of the audit findings.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Because no funds were allocated, the objectives of the programmes for the provision of yellow buses for schools (2000–2014) linked to the acquisition of these buses were reached only in part: the Ministry planned to purchase 862 buses but acquired only 691. Of these, 70 were supposed to be vehicles adapted for children with special needs, however, in reality, only 30 such buses were acquired (Subsection 1.1, pages 9–10).
2. During the audit period (2012–2014), the Ministry did not provide the funds allocated for the acquisition of buses, and sometimes assigned yellow buses without regard for approved distribution criteria, even though it had not approved or announced any additional distribution criteria in advance. As a result, programme objectives were not achieved (Subsection 1.2, pages 11–13).
3. During the audit period (2012–2014), the Ministry did not collect any accurate or comprehensive qualitative or quantitative information on the transportation of students using yellow buses, did not conduct surveys on the quality of school bus services and acquired buses without establishing/assessing the exact demand for yellow buses in municipalities and thus could not evaluate whether the results of the programmes for

providing schools with yellow buses were in line with the needs and expectations of the target groups (Subsection 1.3, pages 13-14).

4. The intended impact of the programmes for providing schools with yellow school buses was also only achieved in part because municipal authorities sometimes failed to organise school bus services efficiently:
 - 4.1 in the audited municipalities, authorities failed to ensure that students were transported by bus in compliance with the Road Traffic Rules (8% of routes approved by directors of municipal administrations required transporting more students than there were available seats; on 22% of routes, students were transported without a supervisor when the driver was not acting in the capacity of supervisor) (Subsection 2.1, pages 15-16);
 - 4.2 in only 17% of the municipalities, the timetables for these buses were drawn up in consideration of the schedules of informal educational activities taking place beyond the limits of the general education schools (Subsection 2.3, pages 17-18);
 - 4.3 78% of the procedures for the use of yellow buses in municipal schools allowed the school buses to be used for other purposes as well as student transportation, and 8% allowed them to be used for commercial purposes (Subsection 2.4, pages 18-19).

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Ministry of Education and Science:

1. In order to ensure that the provision of yellow buses is organised in consideration of municipal demand and that funds for acquiring these buses are planned and used for their intended purpose, the Ministry must conduct a comprehensive survey of municipal demand for such buses before purchasing them (Conclusion 3).
2. In order to ensure the transparent distribution of yellow buses and the use of yellow buses in municipalities that is in line with their intended purpose, incorporate additional criteria for the distribution of buses:
 - 2.1. criteria that would take into account the appropriate use of school buses already at the disposal of a municipality before assigning new yellow (Conclusions 4.3);
 - 2.2. criteria based on which distributing authorities could assign buses in cases when the number of eligible applications exceeds the number of yellow buses purchased (Conclusion 2).
3. If the Ministry of Education and Science is to evaluate the results and impact of providing schools with yellow buses, it must periodically conduct qualitative studies of student transportation with yellow buses (Conclusion 3).
4. In order to ensure the safe transportation of students by yellow bus, prepare and legalise recommendations (a procedure) for ensuring the presence of a supervisor and compliance with other requirements for the organisation and implementation of safe student transportation (Conclusion 4.1).

Measures and time frames for the implementation of the recommendations are presented in Annex 1, 'Plan for Implementing Recommendations'.