

Preliminary study

MODERNISATION OF THE PUBLIC WARNING SYSTEM, DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTIVE PROTECTION STRUCTURES AND SHELTERS

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No ITE-1

SUMMARY

Relevance of the audit subject matter

The security situation in the region and the world, as well as the increasing frequency of dangerous natural phenomena, require effective solutions to be ready to warn the population of the dangers at a critical moment in time and to protect them from the possible consequences of natural disasters, technological accidents and the threat of military conflicts.

One of the most important aspects of protecting the population is to warn them in time of danger. In Lithuania, warning sirens reach about 67% of the country's population, and mobile phone notifications reach 90% of the country's population¹. On 8 December 2022, a new version of the Law on Crisis Management and Civil Protection was adopted, which amended provisions related to the identification of the need for protection structures, their marking, and the organisation of their preparedness. The provisions of this law are being implemented through the development of collective protection structures and the creation of a network of shelters under the new law. Collective protection structures are used for the temporary accommodation of evacuated population. Shelters are intended for the short-term protection of the population in the event of airborne danger, indirect fire and/or other kinetic threats in the event of military

¹ Public opinion survey "Opinion of the population on public security, assessment of law enforcement bodies and preparedness for natural disasters", conducted at the initiative of the Ministry of the Interior and the Police Department under the Ministry of the Interior between 13 September and 27 November 2024, internet access: <https://vrm.lrv.lt/public/canonical/1743593877/9180/Gyventoj%C5%B3%20apklausa%20apie%20saugumo%20situacij%C4%85%20%C5%A1alyje%202024.pdf> (accessed on: 2025-05-12).

aggression. At the end of 2024², the country had 6 344 shelters, which could protect 53% of the country's population, and 2 412 collective protection structures, which could provide temporary shelter for about 37% of the population. It is important that the population is warned of threats in time, and that adequate preparations are made to prepare collective protection structures and shelters to protect the population.

Objective and scope of the preliminary study

Objective of the preliminary study ³ is to collect and assess information on the operation of the public warning system, the identification, selection, marking, organisation and use of collective protection structures and shelters, and the ongoing or planned changes and to identify the related problems. The preliminary study aimed to assess information on:

- ✓ strategic documents, legal framework, actors involved in the management system, funding from the state budget and other sources for the development of the public warning system, collective protection structures and shelters;
- ✓ public warning system, its measures, planned upgrades and modernisation;
- ✓ identifying the need for collective protection structures and shelters, their selection, marking, preparedness, use and planned development.

Audited entities:

- ✓ Ministry of the Interior, which formulates public policy on crisis management and civil protection;
- ✓ Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of the Interior, which coordinates the implementation of civil protection throughout the territory of the Republic of Lithuania and provides methodological assistance in the field of civil protection.

We collected information from the National Crisis Management Centre⁴, the Ministry of Environment, the State Data Agency, the Project Management Agency of the Ministry of the Interior, the Project Management Agency of the Ministry of the Environment, 8⁵ (out of 60) municipalities and 34⁶ managers of collective protection structures and shelters selected by the auditors for assessment, the PE Turto bankas, the Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania, the Lithuanian Real Estate Development Association

We would like to thank the audited entities and information providers for their cooperation.

² Collective protection structures - according to data of 16-12-2024, shelters - according to data of 06-12-2024.

³ Preliminary study is a phase of the performance audit process during which information on the area of activity under examination is gathered and evaluated to identify problems within the area. Based on the results of the preliminary study, the main study is carried out. However, in certain circumstances, in order to rationalise the use of audit resources, the main study may be omitted and the audit concluded with a preliminary study: e.g. the auditee has taken action to resolve the problems, there have been changes in the audited area that may prevent further audit work from having the required impact, etc. The preliminary study report identifies the problems found without making recommendations to the audited entity.

⁴ Article 9(1) of the Law on Crisis Management and Civil Protection provides that the National Crisis Management Centre is established in the Office of the Chancellery of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in accordance with the procedure established by the Law on Government.

⁵ Akmenė district, Druskininkai and Jonava districts, Kaunas city, Kaišiadorys district, Panevėžys city, Vilnius city, Vilnius district

⁶ In total, we selected to survey 20 collective protection structures (CPCs) (38 CPCs in total) and 14 shelter managers (489 shelters in total), of which 16 CPCs (26 CPCs in total) and 11 shelter managers (476 shelters in total) responded by 1 April 2025.

The audit period is 2022-2024. To assess trends and changes, we used data from previous periods and 2025.

The preliminary study was carried out in accordance with international standards for supreme audit institutions. The methods of information and data collection and assessment used in the preliminary study are described in more detail in Annex 2 "Methods of information and data collection and assessment used" (p. 33).

Key results of the preliminary study

There is insufficient preparedness to warn and protect the population in time in the event of emergencies or war. Improvements are needed in the public warning system to ensure that all warning measures are activated at the same time; to enable municipalities to select collective protection structures and shelters appropriately, and to ensure that structures and shelters are properly prepared for use when needed.

1. Public warning system needs to be improved

- ✓ At the end of 2024, a total of 1,144 sirens were installed in municipalities. We found that 22% (248 out of 1 144) of the sirens are connected to a single centralised control panel of the Fire and Rescue Department, which can activate connected sirens simultaneously, and 78% (896 out of 1 144) are not connected to a centralised system. Sirens not connected to the centralised system are controlled remotely by the municipalities using various technological solutions (e.g. mobile or radio systems) or manually by municipal representatives. There is therefore a risk that all sirens may not be activated at the same time when needed and that the population will not be immediately alerted to an imminent or actual emergency situation (Sub-section 1.1 , p. 12).
- ✓ In order to warn and inform the population in the event of an imminent or actual emergency situation by means of short messages to mobile phones, in 2012 the Fire and Rescue Department purchased and implemented the Public Warning and Information System. In order to ensure its cyber security and reliable operation, a decision has been taken to upgrade and modernise the system in 2022, with a budget of EUR 2.9 million for the period 2023-2025. However, the Department did not take action for more than 2 years (e.g. by not preparing an action plan for the upgrade and modernisation of the system, by not organising public procurement, etc.) and reallocated and used most of the money allocated from the State budget for the period 2023-2024 (95 % or EUR 1.8 million) for this purpose, with the agreement of the Ministry of the Interior and for the Department's other needs (e.g. social security contributions of employees, severance payments, etc.) (Sub-section 1.2, p. 14).

2. It is essential to ensure adequate protection of the population in times of emergency or war

- ✓ Shelters and collective protection structures are provided for the protection of the population in times of emergency or war. The need for these is determined annually by the mayor of the municipality, in accordance with the procedure⁷ laid down by the Government, taking into account the population of the municipality. A total of 2 412

⁷ Description of the procedure for identifying, selecting, marking, organising and using shelters and collective protection structures, approved by Government Resolution No 1317 of 29 December 2022, p. 12 and 20.

collective protection structures and 6 344 shelters have been selected ⁸ in 60 municipalities. We found that 45% (27 out of 60) of the municipalities did not have enough collective protection structures and 55% (33 out of 60) did not have enough shelters, resulting in a shortage of 0.2 million inhabitants in collective protection structures and 0.4 million inhabitants in shelters, according to the identified need (Sub-section 2.1, p. 17).

- ✓ Municipalities must select collective protection structures and shelters taking into account the following criteria: information provided by operators on the structures, premises and other objects under their control in the municipality, the requirements for the installation of collective protection structures and shelters, their location, etc. The structures, premises and other objects selected on the basis of these criteria are included in the lists of selected collective protection structures or shelters and their needs, which are approved by the Mayor of the municipality. None (out of 4⁹) of the municipalities selected by the auditors for the assessment provided supporting documentation on the selection of structures that could be selected as collective protection structures and/or shelters (e.g. which specific requirements were met by the selected structure, etc.). In the absence of evidence, we could not ascertain that the lists drawn up by the municipalities included objects suitable for collective protection structures and/or shelters (Sub-section 2.2, p. 22).
- ✓ There is no regulation on the mandatory technical requirements for structures and engineering systems for collective protection structures and shelters (e.g. what vibration or dynamic loads the shelter structures should be able to withstand from the blast wave) to be installed in existing structures, nor on the criteria for assessing the appropriateness of the location of these structures in municipal areas (Sub-section 2.2, p. 22 and p. 24).
- ✓ Where the selected facilities are not required for the functions of collective protection structures and/or shelters, they are used for their primary purpose, but if necessary, the managers have to prepare the collective protection structures and/or shelters for use for the protection of the population no later than 12 hours after receiving information of an order from the Mayor of the municipality or the Head of Emergency Operations. We found that:
 - There have been cases where building managers were unaware that their buildings were designated as collective protection buildings or were located in areas that are difficult to adapt for the temporary accommodation of the population (e.g. basements of apartment blocks, underground car parks, etc.), or in specific facilities where it is difficult to ensure safe and necessary living conditions (e.g. power stations, etc.). This suggests that, if necessary, collective protection structures may not be prepared, or it may be difficult for their managers to prepare them adequately for the temporary accommodation of the population in times of emergency or war, in accordance with the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Department (e.g. accommodation, sanitary facilities, catering facilities, etc.). Without this information, building managers cannot plan in advance what measures and actions will be needed to adapt these buildings for collective protection of the population (Sub-section 2.3, p. 25);

⁸ CPSs according to data from 16-12-2024, shelters according to data from 06-12-2024.

⁹ Jonava district, Panevėžys city, Vilnius city, Vilnius district

- None (out of 8¹⁰) of the municipalities selected by the auditors for assessment had adequately planned in their emergency management plans the specific measures and actions needed to accommodate the population in collective protection structures if necessary (e.g. the total number of beds, other equipment or material resources needed, the number of staff required, etc.) (Sub-section 2.3, p. 26 psl.);
 - the majority (10 out of 11) of the shelter managers interviewed were not sufficiently prepared to prepare their shelters for use, as they did not know the specific steps they should take to make the shelter properly prepared for use once they had received the order (Sub-section, p. 27).
- ✓ Managers of collective protection structures and shelters are obliged to carry out inspections at least once a year (to assess their physical condition, compliance with the requirements for the installation of collective protection structures and shelters set by the Minister of the Environment, etc.), but the results of a survey of managers showed that (92.6 %) of the respondents had not carried out inspections or had carried out annual maintenance of structures where collective protection structures and/or shelters have been selected, which does not cover the specific requirements set for collective protection structures and shelters (e.g., compliance with the installation requirements set by the Minister of the Environment, etc.) (Sub-section 2.3, p. 28).
 - ✓ The mayor of the municipality, together with the municipal preparedness officer, must organise civil protection training for those responsible for the preparedness and use of collective protection structures and shelters at least once a year, but 3¹¹ (out of 4) municipalities selected by the auditors for assessment did not organise training for those responsible for the preparedness and use of collective protection structures and all (4¹²) did not organise training for those responsible for the preparedness and use of shelters (Sub-section 2.3, p. 30).

Reasons for concluding the audit with a preliminary study

In 2024, the Seimas approved the Civil Protection Strengthening and Development Programme, which sets out¹³ priorities for strengthening and developing civil protection, including the development of shelter infrastructures, improving the warning system and strengthening public information. The implementation of these priorities includes:

- ✓ The Fire and Rescue Department launched an EU-funded¹⁴ project¹⁵ at the end of 2024 to expand the centralised siren network by 2029, connecting at least 600 existing sirens and 275 newly acquired sirens to the department's control panel. In addition, a plan for the deployment of a multi-channel warning platform covering all major warning tools (including sirens and the Public Warning and Information System) has been prepared for 2025, with a view to deploying the platform by the end of the first quarter of 2028;

¹⁰ Akmenė district, Druskininkai and Jonava districts, Kaunas city, Kaišiadorys district, Panevėžys city, Vilnius city, Vilnius district.

¹¹ Panevėžys city, Jonava district, Vilnius district.

¹² Jonava district, Panevėžys city, Vilnius city, Vilnius district

¹³ Programme for Strengthening and Development of Civil Protection, approved by the Seimas Resolution No XIV-2946 of 18 July 2024, p. 14.

¹⁴ Funding of EUR 12.7 million earmarked for 2024-2029.

¹⁵ Project No. 11-007-P-0001 Development of Population Warning and Information Infrastructure in the Central and Western Lithuania Region.

- ✓ The Project Management Agency of the Ministry of the Interior has issued a call¹⁶ for project implementation plans for 24 out of 60 municipalities in central and northern Lithuania in 2024 for the purchase of equipment for the temporary accommodation of evacuated population (e.g., foldable beds, sleeping bags, drinking water containers, first aid kits, power generators, etc.). Following the Agency's assessment of the plans submitted by the municipalities, EUR 4.5 million of the State Defence Fund is planned to be allocated to 20 municipalities in 2025. A further EUR 23.0 million is planned to be made available under subsequent calls for proposals
- ✓ by 2030, at least 1,900 shelters are to be installed and modernised across the country for a total cost of EUR 77.0 million. At the end of 2024, the Project Management Agency of the Ministry of the Interior launched a EUR 12 million¹⁷ call¹⁸ for municipalities to submit plans for the implementation of projects to install shelters. Following the Agency's assessment of the plans submitted by the municipalities, the total planned funding has been allocated to 51 municipalities for the installation of 346 shelters.

The Ministry of the Interior approved on 3 March 2025 a description of the procedure for the preparation of Crisis and Emergency Management Plans, which sets out the requirements that the preparation of municipal emergency management plans must describe the actions and measures to be taken by shelter managers when receiving an order to prepare the shelters for use¹⁹.

On 4 March 2024, the Fire and Rescue Department approved a Civil Protection Training Programme²⁰ for Persons Organising and Carrying out Protection of the Population, the purpose of which is to provide civil servants and employees working under employment contracts responsible for the evacuation of the population of the municipality, managers of collective protection structures and shelters or their authorised persons with the knowledge necessary for organising and carrying out the evacuation of the population and the collective protection. Training for managers of collective protection structures and shelters is planned²¹ for 2025.

Considering the changes that have taken place in the period 2024-2025 and the activities planned and implemented by the Ministry of the Interior and the Fire and Rescue Department, we can see that the planned activities are aimed at solving the problems identified in the preliminary study. As the findings and insights provided by the audit may help the entities to implement the planned changes more quickly and appropriately (in the context of the planned measures to improve the public warning system, the development of collective protection structures and shelters, the decision-making process on the selection of collective protection structures and shelters, and the improvement of the preparedness process), we

¹⁶ Internet access: <https://pva.lrv.lt/lt/civilines-saugos-stiprinimo-ir-pletros-programa/kvietimas-teikti-paraiskas-vrm-002-k/> (žiūrėta 2025-01-28).

¹⁷ Description of the progress measure No.07-012-10-04-01/07-013-10-04-01/01-001-10-04-01 "Strengthening preparedness for crisis and emergency management and recovery", Annex 2 "First description of the project financing conditions" approved by Order of the Minister of the Interior No V-127 of 14 March 2023.

¹⁸ Internet access: <https://pva.lrv.lt/lt/civilines-saugos-stiprinimo-ir-pletros-programa/kvietimas-teikti-paraiskas-vrm-001-k/> (accessed on: 18 January 2025).

¹⁹ Description of the Procedure for Preparation of Crisis and Emergency Management Plans, Annex 1, Instructions for Completion of the Plans, subsection 4.2 Protection of the Population in Shelters and in Collective Protection Structures approved by the Order of the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania No. 1V-151 of 3 March 2025.

²⁰ Approved by Order No 1-141/2024(1.4E) of 4 March 2024 On the Approval of the Civil Protection Training Programmes of the Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of the Interior.

²¹ Schedule of training and qualification events in civil protection of Firefighter school for 2025.

have decided to conclude the audit with a preliminary study. In the follow-up, we will monitor the implementation of the planned measures and the changes achieved.