

# Preparedness to comply with the national defence action plan (report summary)

*Are the ministries ready to perform the agreed tasks  
in the event of a national defence crisis?*

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## Summary of audit results

### What did we audit?

**National defence crisis** – a situation in which there is an immediate threat to the independence and sovereignty of the country, its territorial integrity, constitutional order and population security. National defence crises are divided into military and non-military ones. They are man-made and may be initiated or supported from outside the Republic of Estonia.

### What did we find as a result of the audit?

**National defence task** – a permanent or one-time task, which is necessary for the organisation of increased defence readiness, mobilisation or demobilisation, or for handling a state of war. The permanent task is related to the main task of the ministry's area of government, other authority of executive power or local government, and the field or purpose of activity of entrepreneurs who are either legal entities or self-employed.

Source: National Defence Act, § 43<sup>1</sup> and 43<sup>2</sup>

The National Audit Office audited the state's preparedness to act in the event of a **national defence crisis**. For this purpose, the human and material resources of the ministries were analysed, as well as the plans with which they were preparing to perform **the national defence tasks** specified in the national defence action plan during a national defence crisis. In addition, it was checked whether and to what extent the ministries had practiced the performance of their national defence tasks in exercises.

The basis of the audit was the national defence action plan approved in 2021, which lists a total of 90 national defence tasks for the ministries and the Government Office. The audit dealt with 12 comprehensive national defence tasks of 5 ministries: the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications – that support military national defence and are related to internal security<sup>1</sup> and resilience<sup>2</sup>.

**As a result of the audit, the National Audit Office found that the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Rural Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications have significant deficiencies in their preparedness to perform the national defence tasks assigned to them. There were no significant deficiencies in the Ministry of Defence's preparedness to support the Ministry of the Interior in performing its national defence tasks. The coordination of the Government Office in preparing for a possible national defence crisis has not been sufficient, because the ministries have not been able to eliminate national defence deficiencies in addition to their daily activities.**

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<sup>1</sup> The focus of the field of internal defence is to prevent and resolve threats to the constitutional order and independence of Estonia, while the goal is to resolve the crisis in such a way that events do not escalate to military actions (the National Defence Development Plan 2022–2031).

<sup>2</sup> The resistance activity direction deals with the performance of the basic tasks of state institutions in the event of a national defence crisis and the manageability of the state at the strategic level. The course of action also includes the functioning of the state and society by ensuring the continuity of vital or other important services in a national defence crisis situation (the National Defence Development Plan 2022–2031).

**For example, government bodies do not have sufficient stocks to sustainably perform their national defence tasks, and the current system of posts or employment with national defence work obligation does not provide the institutions with the necessary amount of staff during a crisis, and state institutions and providers of vital services do not receive sufficiently timely and relevant information to prepare for crises and act in a crisis.**

**The coordinating activity of the Government Office in the preparation of sub-plans of the national defence action plan has not enabled the solution of common and recurring problems of the areas of government, nor has the Government of the Republic obtained a comprehensive overview of the ability of the areas of government to perform national defence tasks.** The Government Office gets an overview of the common shortcomings and recurring capability gaps of the areas of government in the course of preparing the national defence action plan, but the Government Office has not been involved in coordinating the finding of solutions for them.

When preparing and implementing development plans and processing the state budget, national defence capability gaps are not considered as a whole. Filling the gaps depends on the internal priorities of the ministries and on how additional requests will be granted. So far, however, many capability gaps remain unfilled.

The National Defence Act gives the Government Office the right to check the state of implementation of the national defence action plan, and, during the preparation of this plan, each area of government presents an overview of the current state of its available resources and plans. Based on this information, the Government Office does not prepare a consolidated overview of the condition of the areas of government in performing their national defence tasks, including what are the most critical deficiencies.

**Ministries do not have sufficient stocks to sustainably perform their national defence tasks of the areas of government over a longer period.** In connection with the national defence crisis, it has not been determined how large the primary stocks of the institutions themselves must be. Most of the ministries and institutions included in the audit sample have not dealt with the creation of stocks in a systematic way – there are either no stocks at all or up to three days' supply (e.g. hospitals). When preparing the national defence action plan and sub-plans, the Government Office, as the coordinator, does not get a nationwide overall picture of the adequacy and applicability of the stocks of ministries and subordinate institutions.

**Too much hope is placed on the stocks maintained by the Estonian Stockpiling Agency<sup>3</sup>.** Several areas of government and institutions examined in the audit assume that the state has additional stocks at the disposal of the Stockpiling Agency for institutions with national defence tasks, such as fuel, water, and food stocks. The task of the said Agency is

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<sup>3</sup> The Estonian Stockpiling Agency (AS Eesti Varude Keskus) is a state owned company in the governing area of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, which manages the stockpiling and storage of vital goods necessary during emergencies and will take care of organising their commissioning.

not to create stocks for state authorities to perform national defence tasks, but the stocks are instead created for the purpose of security of supply of the population pursuant to the Emergency Act. There is no relevant information in the area of government, if at all, in which part and from which moment, in the event of a national defence crisis, the stocks of the Stockpiling Agency can be relied on.

**The need for posts or employment with national defence work obligation has not been determined or linked to national defence tasks. The appointment of such posts or employment has not yet been based on the essential needs of the areas of government.** Although the National Defence Act stipulates what the purpose of a post or employment with national defence work obligation is, there is often no agreement in the areas of government for which functions it is necessary to appoint posts or employment with national defence work obligation. There is still uncertainty in some authorities performing national defence tasks as to what tasks those holding a post or employment with national defence work obligation can have and what are the obligations and restrictions that come with the respective status.

The audit showed that although the posts or employment with national defence work obligation are mostly filled in the ministries, this does not mean that the ministry is substantively ready to perform national defence tasks, since the posts or employment are not associated with specific national defence tasks.

**Informing the institutions of the areas of government of the ministries and the providers of vital services in the field of preparing for national defence crises and acting in them is currently insufficient.** The audit showed that there are no agreed rules for sharing information in the event of a national defence crisis. Authorities that carry out national defence tasks in practice do not receive enough timely and relevant information. As such, the authorities do not have a common understanding of how and which national defence crises should be prepared for and how to perform their tasks purposefully when a crisis breaks out.

One of the reasons for the limitation of information is the classification of the national defence action plan, its sub-plans, and other plans based on them (mainly due to risk assessments and scenarios), due to which the circle of people exposed to the issues is limited. Therefore, it is necessary for ministries and institutions to be able to describe both national defence tasks and the expectations arising from documents with restricted access to the necessary degree of generalisation, but the audit showed that this has not been done sufficiently in several areas of government.

## What do we recommend?

The National Audit Office made several recommendations to the audited ministries and the Government Office. The recommendations presented in the summary concern the recurring shortcomings revealed in the audit.

### Recommendations of the National Audit Office to the State Secretary:

- to regularly provide the Government of the Republic with information on the national defence capabilities of the areas of government and shortcomings in this field. Among other things, to

take a greater role than before in bringing the common and recurring shortcomings of the areas of government to the meetings of the Government of the Republic, including the preparation of the National Defence Development Plan and the approval of other sectoral development plans;

- to agree on common principles for the stockpiling of stocks for authorities in cooperation with the areas of government, to find out what the state's possibilities are for ensuring the replenishment of the stocks in the institutions, and to inform the areas of government about it;
- to give instructions to the ministries, which information related to the national defence action plan can be shared with the authorities of the areas of government and persons involved in the performance of national defence tasks.

### **Response of the State Secretary:**

- The Government Office is developing a crisis preparedness assessment methodology that will be tested at the end of 2023. Once a year, a report on the implementation of the National Defence Development Plan is prepared, which is submitted to the Government of the Republic together with the comments of the Government Office. In the future, the Government Office will draw the government's attention to national defence capability gaps when processing development plans.
- In the process of updating the National Defence Development Plan, the Government Office proposes to the areas of government to agree on the principles of forming the stocks necessary for the performance of national defence tasks (including the minimum target level in days or hours). In the process, the cost of stockpiling can also be estimated. The Ministry of Finance can assess the state's financial capabilities.
- Based on the general principle of the State Secrets And Classified Information Of Foreign States Act, it is possible to introduce information to a person who has the right to access state secrets and a justified need to know them. Extracts of documents that do not contain state secrets can be requested from the holder of the information.

**Comment of the National Audit Office:** The audit showed that in the areas of government there is a need, in addition to information treated as a state secret, to share information in a limited way for internal use and in certain cases also publicly. The aim is to give each person involved in the performance of a national defence task sufficient information about what is expected of him or her in a given situation. The opinion of the National Audit Office is that, for this purpose, at least the instructions for the national defence action plan and related documents should be uniform.

**Recommendations of the National Audit Office to the Minister of Health and Labour and the Minister of Social Protection, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Economy and Infrastructure,**

**the Minister of Entrepreneurship and Information Technology, the Minister of Defence, and the Minister of Rural Affairs:**

- set priorities in the ministry's budget so that capability gaps related to comprehensive national defence tasks can be eliminated;
- assess how many posts or employment with national defence work obligation should be in the area of government to perform national defence tasks and to implement the activities agreed in the national defence action plan;
- share as much operative information as possible about the general security situation as well as the development of a specific crisis to institutions and persons involved in national defence tasks, while taking into account the rules regarding classified information.

**Response of the Minister of Health and Labour and the Minister of Social Protection:**

- In the requests for the 2024 state budget, the Ministry of Social Affairs prioritises the crisis preparedness of healthcare service providers, based on the Minister's regulations<sup>4</sup>. The disaster medicine plan completed in 2023 has mapped capability gaps and the needs of the field, and drawn up an implementation plan (to be approved as of 29/03/2023).
- The main focus of posts or employment with national defence work obligation for hospital and ambulance workers is to provide the vital service of emergency aid in both civil and military crises. In order to form a common understanding, the relevant parties must be informed additionally. The Health Board, in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence, deals with the appointment of posts or employment with national defence work obligation for healthcare service providers. The Ministry of Social Affairs is engaged in harmonising the list of posts or employment with national defence work obligation and the institution's crisis management structure.
- Operational situation awareness for hospitals is ensured in civil and military crisis situations through the staffs of the Health Board's crisis structure, which includes representatives from hospitals, owners of ambulance crews, and primary care providers.

**Response of the Minister of the Interior:**

- The base budget of the Ministry of the Interior is currently spent on ensuring the provision of everyday services. Eliminating capability gaps related to the performance of national defence tasks requires a management decision at the level of the Government of the Republic and means increasing the base budget of the area of government. A

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<sup>4</sup> [Description and operational requirements of the vital services organised by the Ministry of Social Affairs \(21/04/2018\) and the tasks of the providers of emergency care, inpatient specialised medical care and general medical care in preparing for an emergency and national defence, as well as the levels and content of preparedness for the performance of established tasks during increased defence readiness, martial law, mobilisation and demobilisation, and in the event of a threat of an emergency and during an emergency \(06.11.2020\).](#)

reprioritisation of the current budget of the area of government would degrade the quality of current services or lead to the partial closure of service delivery locations (e.g. rescue stations). The Ministry of the Interior has submitted additional requests to the State Budget Strategy 2023–2026 in the amount of 221 million euros. The fact that the additional money received by 2023 was directed to pay the salaries of the servicemen directly contributes to the preparedness to perform national defence tasks.

- The Ministry of the Interior has assessed the need for posts or employment with national defence work obligation, including the ability of the area of government to perform national defence tasks with this composition. It is planned to involve the partners' personnel in the performance of certain tasks.
- The Ministry of the Interior already regularly communicates operational information in its field (including security) to its partners. Continuous work is underway to ensure that this information reaches partners safely and as quickly as possible. At the same time, excerpts are made from classified materials, which can be used for wider dissemination of information.

**Response of the Minister of Economic Affairs and Infrastructure and the Minister of Entrepreneurship and Information Technology:**

- It is not always possible to clearly distinguish whether the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, with its core activities, only contributes to functioning in a normal situation or creates a basis for coping in a crisis situation as well. In the National Defence Development Plan, only a limited number of top capabilities (e.g. cyber capability, state's operation stockpile, infrastructure of civil-military cooperation) have been identified, for which additional funds have been found in recent years.
- The needs of posts or employment with national defence work obligation of the ministry, institutions of the area of government, companies, and vital services are discussed with the Ministry of Defence. The allocation of these posts or employment so far has been a compromise between the needs of both areas of government. Cooperation continues. During 2023, the crisis plans will be updated, and, in the course of this, the posts or employment and the persons assigned to them necessary for the performance of national defence tasks will be reviewed.
- The ministry has shared information about threats in its area of government, taking into account the rules regarding classified information. However, this assumes that the competent authorities are ready to share the threat assessment in their field. The Ministry has informed the concerned persons and the public about the threats arising from its area of government (e.g. threats in ensuring security of supply of electricity and natural gas). National defence threats have been explained to the providers of vital services using, among other things, the lessons of the Ukrainian war. The Government Office is currently preparing a threat assessment that will include national defence threats, which can be used as a basis for explanatory work.

### **Response of the Minister of Defence:**

- The budget of the Ministry of Defence takes into account the need to perform the national defence tasks analysed in the audit. The Estonian Defence League receives additional money from the state budget to contribute to the comprehensive national defence, in order to ensure the availability of the necessary resources (e.g. field uniforms, training equipment). In the performance of supporting tasks, the expectation of the responsible area of government regarding the scope of aid, as well as the availability of professional training and equipment, are important. The contribution of the Defence League must be reflected in the sub-plan of the responsible area of government.
- The list established in the regulation of posts or employment with national defence work obligation and the maximum permitted scopes are regularly updated. It is important to harmonise the bases and principles for the appointment of these posts or employment.
- Information about the security situation must be distributed to institutions and persons with national defence tasks in cooperation with the Government Office.

### **Response of the Minister of Rural Affairs:**

- National defence capability gaps have been mapped at the meetings of the food security working group, the most essential of which cannot be eliminated by redistributing the ministry's budget, but additional targeted funding is needed for this.
- There are enough posts or employment with national defence work obligation in the ministry and its subordinate institutions, but food companies do not have any posts or employment with national defence work obligation before the civil crisis happens and the National Defence Act comes into force.
- Employees of the Ministry with national defence work obligation and members of the crisis committee meet regularly to exchange information. As a result of constant communication with subordinate institutions, cross-area crisis management, levels of preparedness, potential threats, and roles and goals of institutions in preparing for crises are discussed.

The Ministry of Rural Affairs has been sharing situational awareness information with private sector enterprises since the fall of 2022 and will continue to do so. In doing so, the rules regarding classified information are taken into account. The part of the National Defence Development Plan concerning the Ministry of Rural Affairs is classified to internal use, the same is planned to be done with the sub-plan of the national defence action plan of the Ministry of Rural Affairs.