



Summary:

County Administrative Boards' emergency preparedness

The Swedish National Audit Office has audited the work of the County Administrative Boards concerning civil protection, emergency preparedness and civil defence. The audit also covers the Government's governance and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency's and the Government Offices' follow-up of the County Administrative Boards' work on emergency preparedness.

Audit background

Society needs to be prepared for emergencies such as epidemics, terrorism, natural disasters and disruptions in technical infrastructure. The forest fire in Västmanland in 2014 showed that preparedness for rescue operations was not adequate. Moreover, the security policy situation in Sweden's neighbourhood has deteriorated, which has prompted the Government to raise its level of ambition for civil defence.

The County Administrative Boards are responsible for reducing vulnerability in society and are to ensure that Sweden's emergency preparedness is good. One of the County Administrative Boards' tasks is to draw up regional risk and vulnerability analyses and coordinate emergency preparedness in the counties. They are also to promote the collaboration of various actors, such as municipalities, county councils, firms and central government agencies.

The purpose of the audit is to assess whether there are deficiencies in the regional emergency preparedness work of the County Administrative Boards. The purpose is also to assess whether resources for regional emergency preparedness can be used more effectively.

Audit findings

The overall conclusion from the audit is that the County Administrative Boards' emergency preparedness work needs to be improved in several respects so that all counties can conform to the objectives and requirements of the Government and Riksdag.

Great freedom for counties to design emergency preparedness work

The Government's governance allows County Administrative Boards great freedom to interpret and determine for themselves what is needed to accomplish the tasks. This flexibility is necessary to enable each County Administrative Board to handle a changing world and take into account the special circumstances of the county. At the same time extensive scope for interpretation entails challenges and risks. For example, it will be more difficult to assess whether the County Administrative Boards' emergency preparedness work is functioning as intended and whether there is a balance between the tasks and resources.

Project grants make up a major part of the financing

The County Administrative Boards' administration appropriation is to finance the emergency preparedness work stipulated in applicable laws and ordinances. For development projects the County Administrative Boards can apply for grants from a special emergency preparedness appropriation that the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency allocates.

Since 2012 the project grants constitute a greater source of funding than the administration appropriations for the County Administrative Boards' direct costs for emergency preparedness work. The project funds for some County Administrative Boards are approximately double the administration appropriation allocated for emergency preparedness. In practice the form of financing has contributed to the work of many County Administrative Boards being characterised by short-term development activities rather than continuity.

The development projects may have positive effects, for example project grants have made it possible to carry out exercises. At the same time the audit shows that a large proportion of project grants may have negative consequences. The projects ran for 1–2 years at a time, which resulted in uncertainty from year to year as to the size of the resources available to County Administrative Boards for emergency preparedness work. This makes conducting long-term activities and personnel provision more difficult.

According to several County Administrative Boards it is difficult to employ staff with sufficient skills by only offering time-limited project employment. To be able to afford to retain permanently employed staff some County Administrative Boards have applied for project funds and conducted projects that did not meet the most important needs of emergency preparedness. Moreover, there is a risk that work that the County Administrative Boards are obliged to perform is financed with project funds from the emergency preparedness appropriation, which is not the intention. The audit also shows that there is a risk that the County Administrative Boards do not have the resources to effectively deal with and implement the results of the development projects.

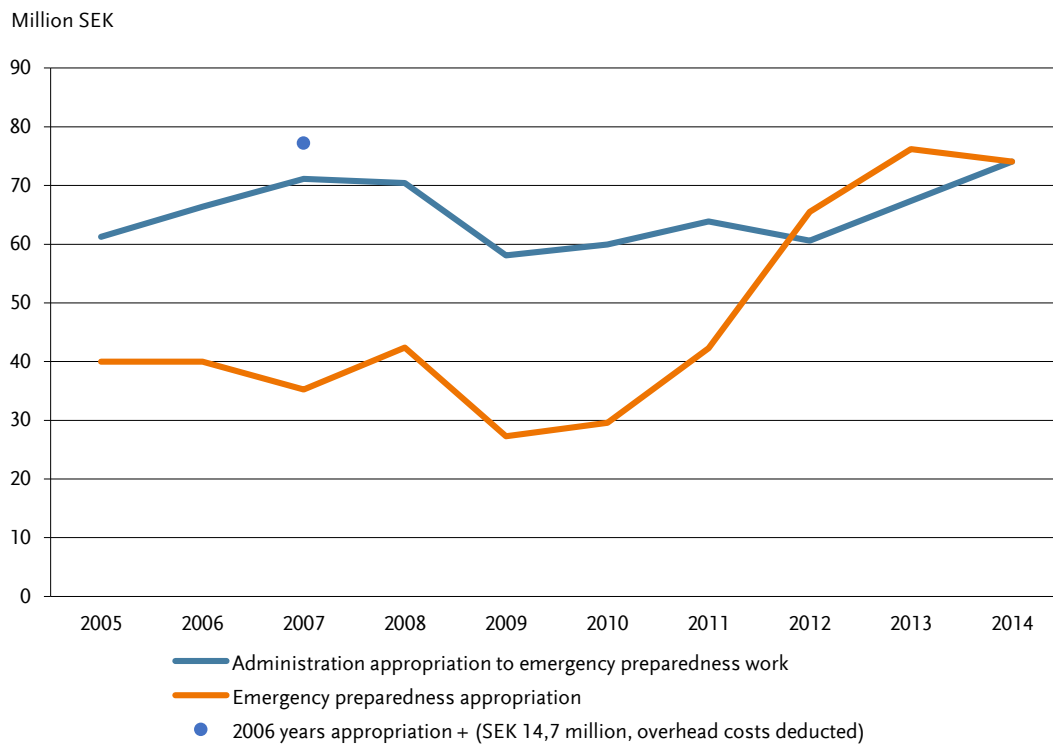
For 2015 the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency has decided on new conditions for development projects. For example, it will be possible for projects to run for a longer period than before; up to four years. This may help to reduce some negative effects observed in the audit. However, the Swedish NAO considers there is a risk that several problems will remain, due to the emphasis on development activities rather than performing the tasks within the remit of the agency.

Initiative gave limited financial reinforcement

Ahead of the 2007 budget year SEK 14.7 million was transferred from the emergency preparedness appropriation to the County Administrative Boards' administration appropriation. The purpose was to strengthen the role of County Administrative Boards and develop their capacity for crisis management.

The audit shows that a part of the money went to other activities within the County Administrative Boards. Hence the transfer resulted in limited reinforcement of resources for emergency preparedness from the administration appropriation, see below.

Figure 1. County Administrative Boards' administration appropriation used for emergency preparedness work and allocated project grants from the emergency preparedness appropriation 2005–2014



Interaction and support have high priority and generally function as intended

The County Administrative Boards have given priority to interaction, coordination and support, for example through participating in and running various interactive networks. The audit shows that interaction and the support given by the County Administrative Boards by and large function as intended.

Limited use of the County Administrative Boards' risk and vulnerability analyses

The County Administrative Boards are responsible for preparing risk and vulnerability analyses. These should be useful reference material for emergency preparedness measures, both for the County Administrative Boards themselves and for other actors. The audit shows that the County Administrative Boards prepare the analyses in time and in accordance with the formal requirements, but there are several examples showing that the actual use of the analyses is limited. According to the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency and some County Administrative Boards the deficiencies are partly due to the broad nature of the analyses rather than their depth. In addition there is sometimes a lack of connection between identified threats, risks and vulnerabilities and the measures planned by the County Administrative Boards.

The risk and vulnerability analyses are not uniformly formulated. This makes it more difficult for the Civil Contingencies Agency to draw up national risk pictures and overall assessments of national emergency preparedness.

The Swedish NAO's conclusion is that risk and vulnerability analyses are not always fully usable, either as reference material for taking measures in the counties or as reference material for national risk pictures and assessments of national emergency preparedness. The Civil Contingencies Agency introduced new regulations in the area in spring 2015. It is too early to assess how these may increase functionality.

Under the Emergency Management and Heightened Alert Ordinance, risk and vulnerability analyses must be submitted every year. Annual changes in regional risks are seldom so extensive that they warrant a new report on the risk picture. Less frequent and more needs adjusted reporting could free up resources, for example for more in-depth analysis or for practical emergency preparedness measures.

The County Administrative Boards' follow-up of municipalities' emergency preparedness work needs improvement

Almost all County Administrative Boards consider that they have implemented the follow-up of municipalities entrusted to them. However, according to the Civil Contingencies Agency and several County Administrative Boards the quality of follow-up has in some cases been deficient. In 2011–2014 there was no clear regulation of what the follow-up should include or what level of quality was adequate. The audit shows that the County Administrative Boards have devoted little time to following up municipalities.

At the beginning of 2015 the Civil Contingencies Agency completed a process description aimed at clarifying follow-up of municipalities' emergency preparedness. However, it is too early to assess whether this will result in improved quality.

The municipalities can receive compensation for the emergency preparedness work they perform under the Act on Municipal and County Council Measures prior to and during Extraordinary Events in Peacetime and during Periods of Heightened Alert. If a County Administrative Board considers that a municipality is not living up to the preparedness requirements the County Administrative Board can propose that the Civil Contingencies Agency reduce the compensation. However, the County Administrative Boards have rarely used this possibility; in the period 2011–2014 the County Administrative Boards proposed reduced compensation for three municipalities.

Deficiencies in supervision under the Civil Protection Act

The task of the County Administrative Boards is to support and conduct supervision of the work of municipalities under the Civil Protection Act and Ordinance. The supervision by the County Administrative Boards should aim to ensure equal development and equal conditions, taking into account local conditions.

The Civil Contingencies Agency follows up and evaluates the supervision by the County Administrative Boards. The Agency has also drawn up criteria for supervision. The Civil Contingencies Agency has drawn attention to two main deficiencies; that supervision too infrequent and that the County Administrative Boards set aside too little time for it. The Swedish NAO's audit confirms the assessment by the Civil Contingencies Agency and draws the conclusion that the County Administrative Boards need to improve their supervision to fulfil the intentions of the legislator.

The audit further shows that there is no single national picture of how well the municipalities comply with the legal requirements. According to the Swedish NAO, an overall picture would be needed as decision-making data.

More exercises and training is needed in many counties

The County Administrative Boards have a broad remit to work with exercises and training. They are to promote sound emergency preparedness among different actors in the counties. They must also be able to take over operational responsibility for municipal emergency services when there are major events. To achieve this there must be regular exercises.

The purpose of exercises is to identify deficiencies and needs for measures to develop emergency preparedness capacity. Without exercises there may be increased risk of deficient preparedness.

The audit shows that only about half of the County Administrative Boards have carried out exercises and training to the extent they consider their remit requires. The Civil Contingencies Agency has also assessed in supervision of the County Administrative Boards that the operative responsibility needs to be exercised to a greater extent.

The Swedish NAO considers that it is serious when many County Administrative Boards describe their exercise activities as inadequate. This applies to both exercises to develop emergency preparedness in the counties and exercises to enable County Administrative Boards to take the operative responsibility for the municipalities' emergency services.

The work of developing civil defence has deficiencies

The civil defence work of the County Administrative Boards has for many years had low priority. In the past years the level of ambition has been raised, the Riksdag has highlighted the need for reinforced civil defence in its decision on a new orientation for defence policy for the period 2016–2020.

The civil defence work of the County Administrative Boards is thus in the development stage. The audit shows that only one County Administrative Board considers that it has performed its tasks in this area. The County Administrative Boards have not perceived the remit to be clear or well-defined. According to several actors, increased civil defence ambitions entail a need for clearer requirement specifications.

The Civil Contingencies Agency does not assess individual County Administrative Boards' overall emergency preparedness work

The Civil Contingencies Agency does not assess every County Administrative Boards' overall emergency preparedness work. According to the Swedish NAO such an assessment could provide the County Administrative Boards an overall picture of how their emergency preparedness work functions. The assessment could also constitute reference material for improving civil protection, emergency preparedness and civil defence.

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Recommendations

To the Government:

- Consider a reallocation of part of the emergency preparedness appropriation to the County Administrative Boards' administration appropriation and ensure that reallocated funds are used for the activities intended, for the purpose of achieving more effective emergency preparedness work.
- Reduce the frequency of reporting for risk and vulnerability analyses for the County Administrative Boards.
- Clarify the level of ambition and ensure that the County Administrative Boards have sufficient resources for civil defence, in accordance with the defence policy orientation for 2016–2020.

To the County Administrative Boards:

- Develop endeavours to meet the Civil Contingencies Agency's criteria for supervision under the Civil Protection Act.
- Implement and participate in exercises to a greater extent in order to maintain good emergency preparedness in the counties. For example some County Administrative Boards have not practiced taking over the operative responsibility for the municipal emergency services.
- Develop risk and vulnerability analyses so that they can function to a greater extent as reference material for decisions on measures.

To the Civil Contingencies Agency:

- Draw up an overall national status description of municipalities' compliance with the provision