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## Summary

Date: 2023-11-23

Reference number: 2022/1121

RiR 2023:22

# Emergency number 112

## – Central government and SOS Alarm management of emergency calls

### Summary

In an emergency, the ability to call the emergency number 112 and receive a response quickly is crucial. The emergency number is managed by the partially state-owned enterprise SOS Alarm as a public service for the central government. The overall assessment of the Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) in its audit is that the central government and SOS Alarm are not ensuring that calls to the emergency number 112 are being handled effectively.

The Swedish NAO has found that SOS Alarm has not met its objectives relating to average call answer times in any year during the past ten years, and that answering times vary systematically between different parts of the country and depending on when the calls are made. The Swedish NAO's assessment is that this is partly due to weak Government control and because the Government has not sufficiently taken advantage of its opportunities to follow up and control SOS Alarm, neither as a commissioning body nor as a partial owner of the enterprise SOS Alarm. Furthermore, the Swedish NAO finds that the 112 service is not regulated in a way that is consistent with the significance of the service. There is no special statutory regulation of the emergency call service, leading to unclear roles and responsibilities and making effective supervision difficult.

## **SOS Alarm does not always make it possible for people nation-wide seeking help to quickly reach the right emergency service**

Among SOS Alarm's four objectives relating to contact with those seeking help, only one has been fulfilled. None of the other three objectives has been fulfilled at any time in the past ten years. All three of these objectives refer to the time it takes for SOS Alarm to answer a call to the emergency number 112.

The number of calls with very long answering times has increased over time. There are systematic variations in the average answering times; the variations depend on what part of the country the emergency calls come from and follow predictable changes in the number of incoming calls at different times. Long answering times occur when calls are forwarded from SAS Alarm to the public safety services, and there are agreements with the public safety services that adversely affect SOS Alarm's answering times.

## **Supervision of SOS Alarm's call processing is ineffective**

The Swedish NAO considers that the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency's supervision and control of obligations under the emergency call agreement is not effective on account of inadequate conditions and the agency's working methods. The Swedish NAO also considers that supervision of SOS Alarm's emergency processing is not comprehensive; for example, there has been no supervision of call-forwarding from SOS Alarm to the public safety services.

## **SOS Alarm carries out extensive follow-up and development activities with some shortcomings**

SOS Alarm carries out extensive follow-up and development activities. However, the Swedish NAO has been able to identify certain shortcomings in these activities, for example concerning SOS Alarm's analysis and evaluation of the risks resulting from long answering times.

## **Government control of SOS Alarm's call processing is ineffective**

The Swedish NAO's assessment is that the Government's control of SOS Alarm is weak in relation to the policy tools that the Government actually has at its disposal. The agreement that the central government concluded with SOS Alarm for the performance of the 112 service, for example, does not include any consequences for SOS Alarm if the company does not achieve the set objectives. The Swedish NAO also considers that the Government has not acquired, until recently, sufficient documentation from SOS Alarm about essential factors such as

objective fulfilment and staffing. This has made it more difficult for the Government to direct SOS Alarm to better achieve its objectives.

The Swedish NAO also notes the absence of a special statutory regulation on this vital public emergency call function, which, in the assessment of the NAO, leads to ambiguity in terms of responsibilities, roles and obligations. As early as 2018, an inquiry proposed a statutory regulation to replace the agreement regulation. However, the Government has neither sent the proposal for referral nor in any other way pursued this inquiry proposal.

## **Recommendations**

For a long time, SOS Alarm has enjoyed essentially unwavering trust for shouldering the responsibility of the 112 service as a public service. An essential part of this assignment is to quickly respond to incoming calls from people in distress. However, for some time, SOS Alarm has not met the objectives regarding average call answer times that the central government and SOS Alarm concluded an agreement on. The Swedish NAO considers that the absence of a special statutory regulation on the emergency call service means that fundamental prerequisites for supervision, follow-up and control are missing. The Swedish NAO therefore makes the following recommendation to the Government:

- Develop a proposal for a statutory regulation of the emergency call service and its objectives to support achieving the objectives, strengthening supervision and clarifying the division of responsibilities between SOS Alarm and the public safety services. The 112 inquiry is a possible point of departure for this work.

Pending any statutory regulation, the Swedish NAO recommends that the Government:

- review the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency's supervisory remit and replace or supplement it with clearer and more comprehensive reporting requirements on SOS Alarm
- initiate an amendment of the emergency call agreement with SOS Alarm so that it is clear that the agreements that the company concludes with the public safety services may not have a negative impact on the 112 service's achievement of objectives.
- make use of the existing opportunities that the Government has to demand appropriate documents from SOS Alarm to create better conditions for more effective governance.