

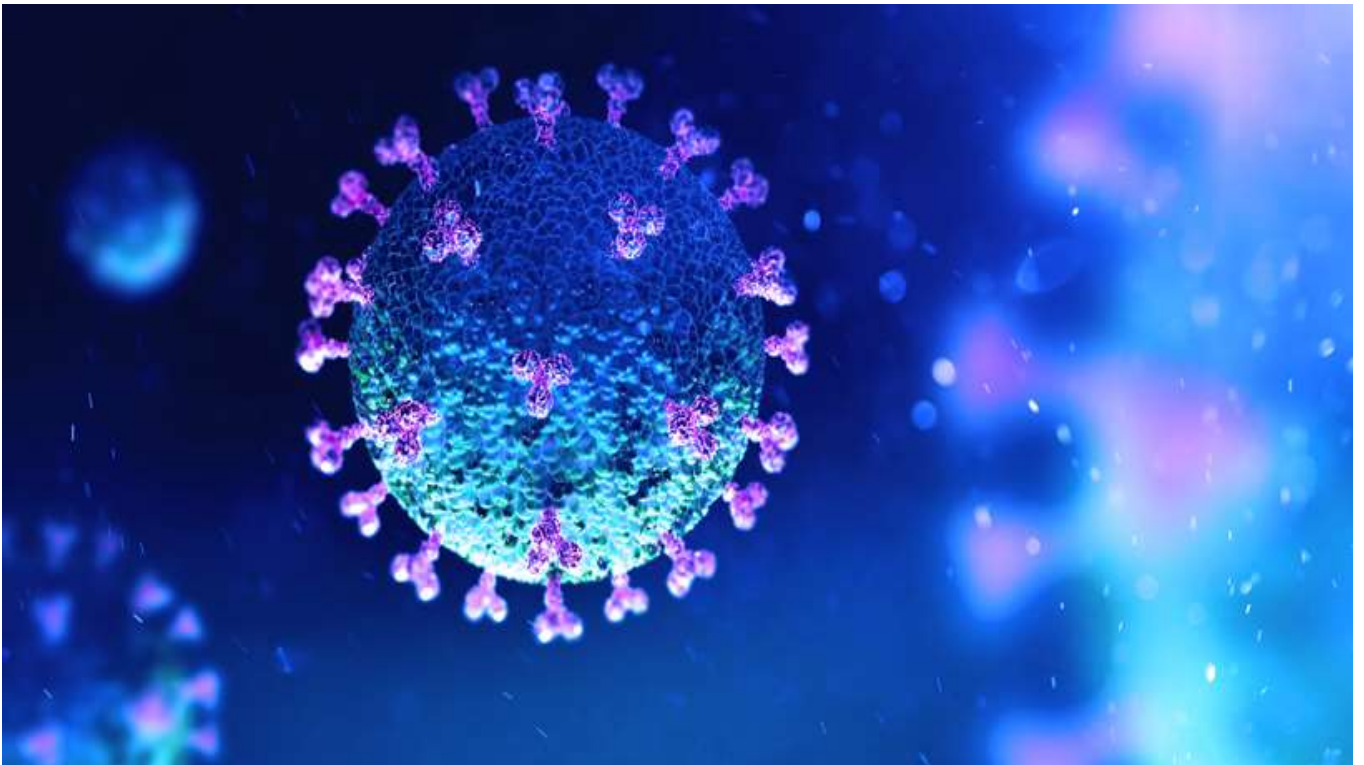


AUDIT
OFFICE



REPUBLIC
OF CYPRUS

Evaluation of the adequacy and effectiveness of checks , carried out by Cyprus Police, in order to ensure compliance with measures imposed, against the pandemic COVID-19, in order to reduce covid cases.



**AUDIT OFFICE OF THE REPUBLIC
SPECIAL REPORT no. ΑΣΤ/01/2022**

16 June 2022

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AUDITED ENTITY

Cyprus Police

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In the context of dealing with the coronavirus pandemic COVID – 19, which was officially declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on March 11th, 2020, the Cyprus Police was called upon to monitor and ensure the implementation of measures in order to prevent the spread of the virus, which arise from the issuance of the relevant Decrees, which were issued from time to time by the Minister of Health on the basis of the Quarantine Law Act.

Cyprus Police, as one of the bodies that had the obligation to contribute to the implementation of these Decrees, in the context of its other duties, responded to a great extent to what they had to perform, especially considering that they had to face an unprecedented situation, which even caused internal problems (members of the force were infected by Covid or were considered as covid close contacts), which made their task difficult.

The main objective of the audit performed by our Office, was to evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of checks, carried out by Cyprus Police, during the period March 2020 - September 2021, in order to ensure compliance with measures imposed for dealing with COVID-19, in order to reduce covid cases.

During this period, the following were recorded:



- 1.1** For the purpose of pandemic management, the Police Headquarters immediately set up special teams, consisting of motorized and pedestrian patrols, by district, giving guidelines by issuing operation orders, circulars, notes and instructions, for the effective implementation of the Decrees issued by the Minister of Health.
- 1.2** In addition to the above actions, the Police carried out a large number of checks and issued fines as well as temporary decrees of suspension of premises where these repeatedly did not comply with the provisions of the relevant decrees. The Police also investigated several criminal cases, made arrests and issued ex-parte orders. Furthermore they declared reference detention centers, where people were held until they tested COVID-19 negative.

1.3 In several cases the Police was called to attend and police events by citizens who opposed the decrees

In the context of the audit of the planning/programming process prepared and implemented by Cyprus Police for the conduct of checks, we identified the following weaknesses:

a. **Organization/planning of Cyprus Police operations:**

Since the appearance of the pandemic in Cyprus, in March 2020 and until November of the same year, orders of operations and relevant instructions issued, from the Headquarters, to the Police Divisions/Departments, were generalized, based on the relevant Decrees.

District Operational Offices, in collaboration with the heads of the Police Stations, Departments and the Crime Prevention Offices involved, determined where checks would focus with the issuance of operation orders, after taking into account and evaluating the statistics in relation to previous checks and fines issued, so as to achieve targeting where necessary.

- ◆ The daily planning of checks and instructions given, by the heads of the Police Divisions based on the operation orders, to the members of the teams, was done orally, and the on-duty Police Officers carried out the checks of premises based on these orders.
- ◆ A large number of out-of-court fines were issued by hand, which created additional administrative costs due to their subsequent registration in the computerized system as well as an increased risk of human error.
- ◆ The process of examining citizens' complaints, in relation to out-of-court fines imposed on them, is time consuming and bureaucratic and needs to be simplified.
- ◆ In some cases, complaints submitted by citizens, due to a non-existent out-of-court fines issued, also referred to the behavior of the members of the Police, without, however, being further examined, as would be expected.

b. **Effectiveness of Police checks in combating the pandemic and limiting the spread of the virus.**

- ◆ The intensity of the Police checks, increased during periods when stricter measures were imposed by the Government, while during periods of relaxation of measures the intensity of checks weakened. As a result, the intensity of checks was not always dependent on the epidemiological situation and the number of covid cases recorded. Indicatively, during the summer period of 2021, when the highest number of covid cases was recorded and measures were relaxed, there was a significant reduction in the number of checks carried out.
- ◆ In Paphos District, where the intensity of Police checks, by proportion of population, was high, and where the degree of rigor shown, was also high, the number of fines issued increased and the lowest number of covid cases was recorded. In contrast, in Limassol District, where the intensity of checks and fines issued was the lowest, the highest number of covid cases, by proportion of population, was observed. These data indicate a positive correlation between

Police checks and dealing with the spread of the pandemic, as measured by the number of covid cases recorded.

c. Efficiency in the collection of out-of-court settlements.

- ◆ The largest number of out-of-court fines imposed (61%) remained unsettled until the date of our audit.
- ◆ For a large number of out-of-court fines imposed, which had not been settled within the time limit provided by law, the opening of a criminal case and the referral of the matter to justice were pending.
- ◆ The large number of out-of-court fines imposed that are not settled on time, inevitably leads to the criminal prosecution of these cases, which entails high administrative costs.
- ◆ With the adjudication of cases, relevant fine warrants are expected to be issued, the execution of which entails further administrative costs and is, admittedly, ineffective, since, as recorded in a lot of our previous Audit Reports, there is a huge accumulation of warrants over time as much as in volume as in value. As we have repeatedly pointed out, this leads to impunity, a delay in the delivery of justice and creates feelings of injustice among citizens who are consistent in their obligations to the state.

Relevant recommendations were submitted for the above issues by our Office, which, together with the comments and views of Cyprus Police, are presented in this Report.