

DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIELD OF FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL-TECHNICAL SUPPORT OF VOLUNTARY MUNICIPAL FIRE BRIGADES IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to analyse the development of financial and material-technical support of the Municipal Voluntary Fire Brigade (VMFB¹). Voluntary municipal fire brigades have in recent years recorded the progressive nature of their activities, preparation, support and status within the Integrated Rescue System of the Slovak Republic. In spite of the upward prognosis, it is possible to identify possible shortcomings related to the character of the voluntariness, as well as the legislative basis in the given area in SR conditions. Voluntary municipal fire brigades are currently supported by an annual flat-rate allowance, the amount of which is determined by the VMFB category and increased in 2017. The brigades are also supported by direct technique allocation and call-based subsidies. Expenditure on the basic functioning of intervention work, however, in many cases still exceeds the amount of annual income. Issues of insurance and inconsistency of documentation are also unresolved. In the field of vocational training, the lack of differentiation of the basic training of members within individual categories is a drawback, although the nature of their activity is diametrically different.

Key words

Voluntary municipal fire brigades, financial, material, technical support, development.

INTRODUCTION

At present, VMFB are an important part of the IRS. They often intervene with the Fire Brigade and Rescue Corps of the SR. A large part of these brigades is able to intervene independently in various emergencies. The reallocation of state subsidies has a significant impact on positive results, which have been a major aid to individual brigades. For this reason, it would be appropriate to consider increasing these funds to improve the protection of the population from fires and other extraordinary events. [2]

In order to increase the protection against fire and to ensure that the municipality, in co-operation with the IRS, was able to inform and prepare citizens in time for extraordinary events and crisis situations, the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic developed a system of nationwide deployment of fire forces and means of fire fighting units. The system simply means ensuring adequate deployment of forces and means, based on the degree of danger of cadastral territory. This is associated with the allocation of necessary fire fighting equipment and financial subsidies to individual fire brigade units VMFB.

Based on the degree of danger, which is intended for the cadastral territory of individual municipalities, individual VMFB are integrated into five categories. The procedure for determining the degree of danger is part of the Amendment to Decree No. 611 / 2006, which entered into force on 1st September 2015.

Categories of VMFB:

A1; A; B;C; D.

Category D includes all voluntary municipal fire brigades that do not apply for inclusion in one of the categories. [7] Voluntary fire brigades of category A1 and A are capable of independent intervention, to a certain extent they are also able to replace professional fire brigade units. [1] If VMFB requests categorization, it must also meet certain conditions that are set in that category. There are also set the minimum number of members of each category, the function to be held by members and minimal material equipment. If, even after having been categorized, the VMFB ceases to fulfil the set conditions, the Regional Directorate transfers it to a different category. All changes concerning the inclusion of VMFB into individual categories are submitted by the Regional Directorate to the municipality in writing. According to the category, individual municipalities are allocated lump sums once a year.

METHODOLOGY AND AIM

The aim of the contribution is to analyse the current state of numeracy, VMFB intervention, categorization and development in the field of material, financial support. The secondary objective is to identify the weak points of the monitored issue. The methodology used to achieve the objectives was to use the collection of information, which was systematically organized and evaluated on the basis of deduction. In order to obtain the input information, literary, electronic and legislative sources were used. The partial knowledge was compared to each other and a summary reflection of the facts was established using the synthesis method. The methods of the contribution are focused on the study of professional resources and legislative basis in relation to the selected type of fire units as well as information from the interviews conducted with practitioners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Categorization was initiated by the Ministry of Interior in 2013. From this year we can see that their total number has risen rapidly. The data is shown in the following table.

Table 1
Categorization of VMFB from 2013

Category	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
A1	33	0	0	3	2	3
A	170	78	78	99	100	106
B	225	533	646	797	884	946
C	457	653	652	590	613	698
Sum	457	1264	1376	1489	1599	1753

Source: Statistics VFP SR

Municipalities that were included in one of the categories in 2017 did not have to re-apply for the 2018 category. The inclusion in 2017 continues to apply, the change would only occur if the municipality applied for inclusion in another category. In Table no. 2 is the categorization of VFB for 2018.

Table 2
The current state of categorization of VMFB SR

County	Category			
	A1	A	B	C
Bratislavský	0	3	35	14
Trnavský	0	28	114	39
Nitriansky	0	5	77	53
Trenčiansky	0	16	130	75
Žilinský	1	14	189	108
Banskobystrický	0	9	108	138
Košický	2	12	86	78
Prešovský	0	19	207	193
Sum	3	106	946	698

Source: Statistics VFP SR

Currently, voluntary fire brigades are constantly developing and their numbers are rising. This is largely due to the state that supports voluntary fire brigades, as well as various European projects. A subsidy system has been put in place to achieve the continued operability of voluntary municipal fire brigades. It is for the fire brigade to secure funds that should be used mainly to cover operating costs. Today, most of the voluntary fire brigades are now incorporated into a nationwide deployment of forces and fire fighting units. Every year, the Ministry of Interior provides financial assistance to the fire departments included in this system in the form of financial contributions. Funding for individual categories is reassessed each year, depending on the requirements of the fire and rescue corps, voluntary fire protection, and the Ministry of Interior. The amount of financial subsidies depends on the category to which the fire brigade is assigned. In the Amendment to Decree No. 611/2006 Coll. on fire brigades, which entered into force on 1st March 2017, the amounts of the financial contributions were increased as follows:

Table 3
Financial contribution for VMFB by category

Category	To 2017	Up 2017
A1	5 000 €	7 000 €
A	3 000 €	5 000 €
B	2 000 €	3 000 €
C	700 €	1 400 €

Source: Statistics VFP SR

In 2017, the sum of € 3,826,400 was planned to be distributed to 1486 voluntary municipal fire brigades. Such flat-rate financial support is paid to the municipality once a year.

Finance can be used either for purchasing the fire fighting techniques and fire fighting equipment, or for training members of a fire brigade. Even special fire brigades receive flat-rate financial support from the state once a year, which will serve to ensure its operability.

Financial support of voluntary municipal fire brigades consists not only of a flat-rate financial support, but also of other financial contributions. In 2014, the voluntary fire protection of the Slovak Republic began, on the basis of its financial possibilities and also on the basis of the need of individual voluntary municipal fire brigades, to make payments for fuel substitutes and risk substitutes. In the event that VMFB will make an emergence upon requesting assistance from the Fire and Rescue Service Operational Centre outside its cadastral territory, it means that outside the municipality that is its founder, it has the right for reimbursement of fuel and risky compensation for such an emergence.

The help and support of the Ministry of Interior is not just about financing. Voluntary municipal fire brigades were also pleased about the greatest exchange of fire fighting equipment in the last period. This is mainly due to the support from the European Union funds. Thanks to them there were successfully purchased vehicles that were later assigned to individual municipalities. By 2017, municipalities were handed over to 670 Iveco Daily vehicles, 921 sets of flood rescue services, and approximately 65 km of hoses were reallocated.

150 repaired Tatra 815 and Tatra 138/148 vehicles from the FRS property were passed to the municipalities and 150 other vehicles from the municipalities' and cities' assets were restored. Thanks to this technique, almost every other municipality or city can better deal with fires, floods or other undesirable events today. In the future, the Ministry of Interior is ready to hand over the new technique to other municipalities. It is also prepared to fully support the reconstruction of fire stations to which municipalities and cities can request a subsidy.

In February 2017 the government adopted a Bill Amending Act No. 526/2010 Coll. - the Act on Granting of Subsidies within the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic. The draft law came into force on 1st July 2017. Thanks to this law, municipalities can apply for subsidies, the main purpose of which is to strengthen and increase fire protection. Subsidies will be used to build, renew and modernize a fire brigade or station. If the fire brigade does not have a fire station, then it can use the subsidies to take up such a building. Subsidies can also be used for any other modifications to these buildings and constructions that will lead to its valuation. These are, for example, an addition, an exchange of doors or windows, the exchange or renewal of heating, water supply, sewerage, fencing, and many others.

In 2017, the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic presented a Call no. 7. This is a call for submission of grant applications from the state budget with the help of a part of the budget of the Ministry of Interior. The main objective of this call is to improve fire protection, with the help of construction and any repairs of fire brigades, and the acquisition of buildings in which a fire brigade or fire station will be established. An application for subsidy for this purpose may be sent by a municipality or a civic association included in the nationwide deployment of forces and means. This project should last from 2017 to 2021.

The municipality or civic association may use the grant for:

- a) construction, repairing and modernization of the building and any work that will result in the valuation of the building or the equipment of a fire station or fire brigade will be increased and improved
- b) to acquire a building that will serve as a fire brigade or fire station
- c) implementing measures to reduce energy costs such as renewal of the external coat, replacement of windows and doors, and thus improvement of thermal insulating properties, replacement of boilers, air conditioning and other technical, energy and technological equipment and its parts
- d) project and engineering work performed for the given project

The total subsidy for a fire brigade or station is at least € 5,000 and not more than € 30,000. The co-financing of the applicant is 5%.

In 2018 the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic submitted another call. This is basically the same call as in 2017, which also aims to increase fire protection by providing subsidies for the reconstruction and construction of fire brigades. [8]

CONCLUSION

The statistics of the voluntary fire protection of the Slovak Republic clearly show the growing number of fire units of voluntary municipal fire brigades. The fire brigades are often helpful to professional fire fighters, who consider their work necessary and beneficial. [5] The same view is expressed by the wide lay and professional public. [3]

Although this type of fire fighting unit is based on volunteering and willingness to help, to ensure the readiness, adequate preparation and operability of the corps is not possible without financial resources. The flat-rate financial contribution covers only the basic expenses of the fire brigade unit. It is therefore difficult to acquire the additional technique and material means that are a prerequisite for inclusion in higher category and the basis for participating in specific tactical exercises. The basic training of VMFB members is the same for all categories, although their activity is often incomparable.

In the context of lifelong learning, the use of e-learning is not at all used, although this preparation should demonstrate and adapt to the changing world. [4] Practical issues include unresolved issues of insurance of members, documentation of interventions themselves, problems with information and telecommunication means. However, a positive fact is that the state is interested in the continued support of VMFB in Slovakia.

NOTES:

¹ VMFB= DHZO in Slovak Republic.

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