

Horizontal audit of the implementation of the Swiss transitional measures for Horizon Europe

State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, Swiss National Science Foundation, Innosuisse

Key facts

Since 2021, Switzerland is no longer associated to the European Union (EU) framework programme for research and innovation. This is the EU's most comprehensive programme for the joint promotion of science and innovation.

The end of the association means that Switzerland is excluded from participating in around a third of all programme areas. Swiss participation is still possible in around two thirds of the programme, but this must be financed directly by the Confederation. The transitional measures are intended to cover the inaccessible areas of the programme in national calls for proposals and fill the resulting shortfalls in research funding for Switzerland. The budget for the transitional measures for 2021 and 2022 totalled around CHF 1.2 billion, and in May 2023 further measures amounting to CHF 625 million were agreed. However, Switzerland is working towards re-association and implementation is therefore not permanent.

The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) is implementing the measures in collaboration with the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and Innosuisse, as well as other partners. It is responsible for the direct financing of the accessible areas of the programme and for supervision. The SNSF and Innosuisse are responsible for the calls for proposals and the supervision of the individual projects funded in Switzerland.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) evaluated the overall system for enforcing measures. It found that the structure and implementation of the measures are appropriate and effective. However, the unclear time horizon for the measures is a burden on the institutions.

Tasks are divided appropriately, and the project selection processes and supervision work well

Implementation is organised appropriately and existing expertise is put to good use. At the same time, the division of tasks enables a cost-efficient scaling back of measures in the event of re-association. The areas of responsibility of the enforcement institutions are clearly delineated, so there is limited potential for synergies. The only area where synergies could be utilised is in the risk assessment of applicants within the framework of an exchange of information between SERI and its partner institutions.

The SFAO found that the project selection processes and supervision are working well. The institutions are aware of the risks and are putting measures in place.

The transitional measures are a burden on the organisations

The fact that the transitional measures are implemented in practice in existing institutions makes sense, but this increases the burden on them. SERI's tasks have changed fundamentally. For the SNSF and Innosuisse, the measures mean a significant increase in the volume of work. At the beginning, the actual workload could only be estimated. This led to side

effects such as large management spans, high overtime figures and frequent staff turnover due to fixed-term appointments. The SFAO noted that the stakeholders are very aware of this and that measures are being taken to counteract this.

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