

Audit of the federal financial supervision in the asylum sector

State Secretariat for Migration

Key facts

Since 2008, the Confederation has been paying the cantons approximately CHF 1 billion per year for the care of the asylum population. The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) calculates quarterly lump sums according to the number of asylum seekers received in each canton. The SEM is required to check the quality of the data used to calculate the lump sums and the proper and effective use of these funds by the cantons. Five years after its last audit,¹ the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) again audited the calculation of these lump sums and the effectiveness and efficiency of the SEM's financial supervision.

The results of this audit were generally good. The calculation of the lump sums is in line with the legal framework and documented. The SEM's data quality controls are effective thanks to its focus on risk and good coordination with the cantons. Since 2016, financial supervision has also expanded into the verification of information on gainful employment and the scope of compliance and efficiency criteria. The legal requirements on coordination of financial supervision with the cantons are partially fulfilled. The SEM organises its financial supervision in an efficient manner, taking into account the limitations of the information systems in the asylum sector. However, four potential areas for improvement have been identified.

Adjustment of the social assistance and support share of the lump sums

For reference, the share of social assistance and support represents two-thirds of the subsidies paid by the Confederation to the cantons. Despite a recommendation by the SFAO in 2017, the SEM has not made any real adjustment to this share. Since 2008, it has only been indexed annually to the consumer price index.

The failure to adjust this share of the lump sums for social assistance and support is linked to the insufficient reliability of social assistance statistics in the asylum sector. A modernisation project should ensure that the quality of the social assistance statistics is sufficiently high by 2026 to serve as a basis for assessing the actual costs.

Risk-based approach is insufficiently focused on the cantons

The SEM takes a risk-based approach in its financial supervision, but this is not sufficiently focused on the cantons. Furthermore, the alignment of risks with supervisory activities is not guaranteed.

Strengthening the risk-based approach in line with the requirements of the revised Subsidies Act will ensure that financial supervision resources are better targeted towards the sectors and cantons most at risk.

¹ The report for audit mandate 15339 is available on the SFAO website (www.sfao.admin.ch).

Communication of cantonal audit results is not systematic

Article 95 of the Asylum Act (AsyIA) requires an exchange of information between the financial supervisory bodies of the Confederation (SEM and SFAO) and the cantonal audit offices. Drawing on their legal frameworks, almost one third of the cantonal audit offices do not forward their asylum sector audit reports to the SEM.

The SFAO recommends that the SEM work with the cantons to define the modalities for fulfilling the legal requirements on the cantonal audit offices' communication of audit results.

Increased efficiency by overhauling Finasi in coordination with ZEMIS

The overhaul of the Finasi calculation system and the widespread automation of manual corrections to financially relevant data will improve the efficiency of the SEM's financial supervision resources.

The SFAO welcomes this step. It emphasises that this is only an intermediate step and must be coordinated with the modernisation of the Central Migration Information System (ZEMIS) and the harmonisation of statistical activities within the SEM.

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