

Audit of the implementation of measures for Integrated Border Management

State Secretariat for Migration, Federal Office of Police, Federal
Office for Customs and Border Security

Key facts

As an associated member of the Schengen Area, Switzerland is required to adopt the European Union's rules on controlling the Schengen external borders and their further development. The further development of the Schengen acquis requires close co-operation between the border control authorities at cantonal and federal level. The Confederation and cantons deploy up to 470 employees to control the external border.

The 2027 Integrated Border Management (IBM) strategy and the associated action plan form the basis for the joint management of the Schengen external borders by Switzerland's border management bodies. For the first time, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited how the 2027 IBM action plan is managed and implemented, and how the results achieved are monitored. The audit revealed room for improvement, particularly in the management of the action plan, as well as in the organisation of the key measure reFRONT and in quality assurance in national border management.

Swiss border management is not holistically steered

The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) is responsible for the design and compliance of border controls. It is primarily responsible for developing the national strategy for integrated border management. The operational performance of border controls in Switzerland, with its federal structure, is carried out at cantonal and federal level by eight differently structured border control authorities. Their cooperation is institutionalised in the Border Steering Group, which primarily ensures the exchange of information. However, neither the steering group nor the SEM hold any decision-making or enforcement powers vis-à-vis the border control authorities. Therefore, there is no coordinated strategic management of the overall system. Switzerland's federal structure means that the international requirements are not fully met.

Insufficient commitment to the key measure reFRONT

The fragmented implementation of Swiss border management results in long timeframes for realising institutional changes. As part of the most important key measure "reFRONT – Review of cooperation on border controls", the Border Steering Group identified structural inadequacies in border management and highlighted opportunities for optimisation. The recommendations contained in the final report are supported at federal and cantonal level, but are not yet very detailed. At the time of the audit, there were no clear project structures and there was no planning for the intended follow-up projects as to how improvements could be realised. The SFAO recommended solid programme or project planning in order to ensure greater commitment and implementation of the sub-projects within a reasonable period of time.

The dynamic action plan lacks a clear link to the current context

On the recommendation of an external review of the first strategy process, the 2027 IBM action plan was dynamically developed in order to better respond to current developments in the migration and security context. New measures can now be included in the action plan during an ongoing strategy period. However, the need for action is not continuously assessed in the Border Steering Group. The SFAO recommended that the available information on current developments be used more systematically in the steering group in order to select and prioritise measures in the action plan in a transparent manner.

Limited participation of border control authorities in intergovernmental bodies

According to the 2027 IBM strategy, participation in intergovernmental bodies should be based on Switzerland's interests and scarce resources should be deployed in a targeted manner. There is no measure associated with this objective. It is generally specified which federal authority is responsible for representing Switzerland in the various bodies. However, the fragmented division of border control tasks makes it difficult to involve the cantonal authorities. The federal authorities share knowledge with each other.

Strategy implementation cannot be assessed without performance reviews

Due to its limited steering and enforcement powers, the Border Steering Group refrains from using instruments for top-down steering for standard measures of the 2027 IBM action plan. This means that the IBM-specific administrative burden for the inter-office planning, monitoring and review of measures can be kept to a minimum. However, if the success of the strategy and individual measures is not monitored, there is no central instrument for managing the action plan. It therefore remains unclear whether the results achieved justify the effort invested. The SFAO recommended systematically reviewing the success and benefits of measures, and using the findings to steer integrated border management.

Quality assurance in border control is not effective enough

The national audit recommendations for the operational implementation of controls at the external borders are not binding for the border control authorities. This currently limits the benefits of quality assurance for optimising border management. Against this backdrop, the SEM decided at the end of 2023 to monitor the implementation of the recommendations with a follow-up to the audits carried out, and to regularly discuss them in the Border Steering Group.

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