Audit of the IT skills shortage

Federal Office of Personnel

KEY FACTS

IT has steadily gained in importance at the Federal Administration over the last few years, and now counts around 3,500 IT jobs. However, the skills shortage has meant that, in 2023, it was difficult to fill the roughly 600 IT job vacancies. These recruitment difficulties increase the risk of delays to and additional costs for important digitalisation projects, and of an even greater reliance on external contractors. Against this background, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) carried out its first audit of the recruitment and retention of ICT specialists in the Federal Administration.

In 2030, the current retirement wave will reach a peak, and further exacerbate the skills shortage. The Federal Administration therefore needs to optimise personnel marketing and recruitment, in order to keep pace with the strong competition in the future. However, the decentralised HR organisation model and insufficient steering of measures tailored to specific IT target groups make it difficult to combat the skills shortage. In the IT area, the Federal Administration is at a disadvantage compared to its main competitors.

Unfamiliar IT service providers

The Federal Administration has a strong umbrella brand, which is managed by the Federal Office of Personnel (FOPER). It offers attractive working conditions for IT specialists. However, new recruits to the IT profession often have no knowledge of the Federal Administration's departmental IT service providers. But the service providers do not have strong employer brands and have less of a social media presence than the state-affiliated enterprises. In 2023, the IT service providers were unable to fill a quarter of advertised vacancies. The SFAO recommends that the FOPER and IT service providers strengthen the Federal Administration's social media presence and communicate the attractiveness of their IT jobs better.

University internships in IT are not particularly attractive. The SFAO recommends factoring this into the 2024–2027 personnel strategy, and exploring alternatives to the existing IT university internships, such as qualification programmes.

Lack of basis for taking target group-specific measures

The IT skills shortage affects many administrative units. However, there is no overall picture of how far the individual units are affected by the skills shortage, which profiles are particularly hard to find and where there is potential for improvement in recruitment. As a result, there is no basis for justifying, planning and reviewing specific measures for individual professions such as IT. Moreover, the available data is of insufficient quality. The SFAO recommends that decentralised data management be improved and that the challenges in recruiting ICT specialists be continuously monitored. This is the only way to implement timely measures as needed.

Target group-specific recruitment strategies are not sufficiently implemented

The Federal Administration does not have any specific strategy to combat the skills shortage in IT. Essentially, the FOPER, the departments and the existing networks in the HR area do not pursue any specific goals for individual professions such as IT. Nonetheless, for several years there has been a desire to strengthen target group-specific marketing and recruitment measures. The SFAO welcomes this approach, but is not able to adequately ascertain how the focus on target groups is implemented in practice, and who is responsible. The SFAO recommends that the personnel marketing concept be made more detailed in this regard.

In the view of the SFAO, the strategic goals for target group-specific personnel marketing in the Federal Administration are not sufficiently implemented. It attributes this to the decentralised organisation model and insufficient management. The SFAO recommends calibrating the marketing tools more precisely for the IT market segment, in order to highlight the attractiveness of IT jobs. It also recommends that the FOPER and the departments work together to improve the planning, management and review of target group-specific measures for IT. This will improve the level of engagement during implementation.

Willingness to provide training exists

The Federal Administration values vocational training for ICT apprentices highly. The IT service providers train more apprentices than other administrative units. The high retention rate of 59% indicates that the quality of the training is good. The promotion of new talent is helping to combat the skills shortage, but cannot resolve the recruitment problem in high-spec IT jobs for experienced professionals.