



Audit of the key ICT project SNAP-EESSI Federal Social Insurance Office (FSIO)

Key facts

In accordance with the Federal Council's directives for key ICT projects, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the programme Swiss National Action Plan for EESSI (SNAP-EESSI) from November to December 2013. The audit's aim was to assess the programme status and risks with regard to the achievement of targets. The audit is based on the study of the project documentation and interviews.

EESSI (Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information) is a project created by the European Union, the aim of which is to ensure that the EU-wide exchange of social security information, which is currently paper-based, is performed electronically in the future. Switzerland participates in EESSI in accordance with the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons, which dates from 1999.

Difficult framework conditions for implementation in Switzerland

The EU had originally planned the launch of EESSI for summer 2012. Due to various problems, the launch date was then changed to 2014. The date has since been postponed indefinitely.

In Switzerland, the Federal Social Insurance Office (FSIO) assumed responsibility for coordinating the implementation of EESSI. Therefore, the FSIO created the programme SNAP-EESSI and secured funding of CHF 10.63 million through an ICT growth loan. Due to the lack of specifications on the part of the EU, the FSIO has refrained from initiating further implementation projects for the time being, except in the areas of "subordination" (ALPS project) and "pensions" (PENSION project).

The fact that the ICT environment in the area of social insurance is decentralised and very diverse makes the implementation of nationwide projects such as SNAP-EESSI inherently difficult. This also means that SNAP-EESSI has to pursue solutions that do not undermine the autonomy of social insurance areas. There are currently no plans to consolidate IT in the Swiss social insurance system. The SFAO believes that an IT strategy needs to be drawn up, at least for the social insurance branches under the FSIO, and standardisation should be pursued with the aim of increasing efficiency and reducing costs. Furthermore, an analysis should be carried out on whether nationwide standardisation would also result in synergies that could be used for future projects and current operations.

Overall impression: programme management is adequate for current situation

Given the fact that project work is under way in the areas of "subordination" and "pensions" only, the programme is able to cope well with the current challenges. However, should the programme reach full implementation, the current pragmatic approach would be stretched to the limit. Together with the necessary expansion of the programme management, the uncertainty regarding scheduling and the question of whether sufficient funding is available are considerable factors. Given the EU's uncertainty, the programme has only laid weak foundations in these areas to date.

For this reason, it is not possible at the moment to assess whether the programme can be completed with the available resources in the desired time frame.

The FSIO should therefore use the current stage in particular to develop the framework conditions and instruments that are not yet in place but that are identified in the report as necessary for successful programme implementation. Parallel to this, the Federal IT Steering Unit (FITSU) should complete the anticipated measures for assuring the quality of key ICT projects (e.g. HERMES 5 scenario for key ICT projects).

Despite the current uncritical situation with the SNAP-EESSI programme, the following points need to be addressed given the future challenges:

- The legal situation in Switzerland for the exchange of information required by the EU has not yet been fully clarified.
- It is not clear if the FSIO has the authority to implement nationwide solutions. It is possible that success factors for the programme lie outside its sphere of influence.
- The scope of the programme has not been conclusively defined and there is uncertainty concerning the work to be carried out and funded by SNAP-EESSI. Depending on the scope, significant costs (as in the case of PENSION) could be incurred outside the programme.
- The FSIO assumes there will be additional costs, particularly as a result of the EU's delays. As the scope of the programme has not been finalised and there is no well-founded overall budget, the accuracy of this opinion is questionable.
- A qualitative, national benefit has been identified for both the PENSION and ALPS projects. However, business cases illustrating this were not included.
- The ICT growth loan was not applied for as a guarantee credit as prescribed and its intended purpose was not described in detail because of the scarce information available at that time. This means that there is no basis for proving that existing investments for improving the process in Switzerland were charged to the ICT growth loan in accordance with the specifications. The General Secretariat of the Federal Department of Home Affairs (GS-FDHA) has stated that, as agreed with the Federal Finance Administration, a guarantee credit will not be applied for retroactively as this would create no added value. In addition, parliament has been informed of the status of the SNAP-EESSI programme and been given reasons and additional documentation.
- The FSIO's overall scheduling shows that SNAP-EESSI can be launched on time following the announcement of the EU's introduction date. However, this schedule has not yet been coordinated with all of the parties involved. The commitment needed for implementing this programme should therefore be secured in good time.
- There was no plan for the procurement carried out to date, which ultimately led to a step-by-step approach, with the result that procurement regulations and economic aspects were left aside to a large extent. The sum in question for this procurement is CHF 2.7 million with one contracting party.

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