Audit of the key ICT project renewal of the biometrics system platform
State Secretariat for Migration

Key facts

In the third quarter of 2018, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the programme for the renewal of the biometrics system platform (ESYSP) for the second time.[1] The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) intends to renew the central platform components for biometric data entry and also procure new data entry devices with this key ICT project. At the same time, the specialist applications that use the data to create a passport, for example, will be adapted and further developed. All the projects in the programme are in the implementation phase. The total costs are estimated at CHF 46.6 million.

At the end of August 2018, the ESYSP programme was on course in terms of both costs and timing. However, due to a delay in the WTO procurement of the data entry devices, postponements of the milestones in the overall programme and subsequent additional costs can hardly be avoided anymore. In the event of a delay, the existing system will have to continue to be operated after the end of its lifespan. While the 2020 operating costs for hardware are budgeted at around CHF 4 million and those for software at CHF 519,000, the operating organisation for the following year depends on the provider's goodwill.

A new architecture with potential for the future

The future solution will be modular and service-oriented, in line with the federal strategy. Any future substitution or replacement is thus unlikely to be as extensive as the ESYSP programme. Since individual devices or applications can have their own life cycle, a change no longer has to take place all at once.

Provided the necessary organisational and regulatory prerequisites can be created, disentanglement beyond the federal levels will also be possible. This will allow the cantons greater autonomy in the procurement of data entry devices, which will have a positive impact on innovation.

Earned value analysis is used in an exemplary manner, but cumulatively does not have enough informative value in reporting

Reporting on the ESYSP programme as at 31 December 2017 for the Federal Council and the Finance Delegation (FinDel) corresponded to the programme reporting.

Earned value analysis (EVA) is correctly implemented in the ESYSP programme. Through its design and application, it can fully deliver the desired benefits for programme and project steering.

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[1] The initial audit report from 2017 ("Key ICT project renewal of the biometrics system platform", audit mandate 17535) is available on the SFAO's website (www.sfao.admin.ch).

However, the cumulative EVA at programme level required in the semi-annual reporting to the Federal Council and FinDel is not meaningful enough for system-related reasons and could lead to wrong conclusions. Consequently, the SFAO recommends that the Federal IT Steering Unit adjust the reporting specifications in order for the earned value data per project to be shown.

Despite correct execution, procurement is critical for the success of the programme

The requirements for the devices to be procured were properly established and defined. They were broadly based, as well as appropriately reviewed and weighted. The principles of public procurement were observed also with regard to the formal design and processing of the tender.

The tenderer invited to the presentation was unable to meet previously confirmed mandatory requirements. Consequently, the tenderer was facing possible exclusion at the time of the audit. The fact that this was a key lot is jeopardising the success of the programme. More than one tenderer should be invited to present in the case of complex ICT procurements with high costs in order to be able to better absorb the impact of such surprises.

The steering and management of the programme, as well as quality and risk management function well. Expectation management is likewise appropriate. Following a prolonged identification phase, the objectives and scope of the programme are now broadly based. The migration risks will be reduced by the parallel operation during the phased rollout.

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