

Audit of the key ICT project Renewal of the biometrics system platform

State Secretariat for Migration

Key facts

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the programme for the renewal of the biometrics system platform for the third time¹. The programme will procure and introduce new standard systems for recording biometric data for the Swiss passport, the identity card and residence permits for foreign nationals. The systems need to be replaced because essential components are reaching the end of their lifespan. The main focus of this audit was on the revised overall planning, which became necessary due to the termination of the collaboration with the main supplier.

Originally, the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) planned to invest CHF 46,6 million in this system renewal. In 2017, Parliament approved a guarantee credit of CHF 33 million for this purpose. Contrary to the original forecast, the FDJP now expects total costs of CHF 63 million and a postponement of the end date by 32 months to the end of 2023.

The SFAO found that much of the impact in terms of time and costs can be attributed to the change of supplier. At the time of the audit, the new overall planning appeared to be reliable. However, problems involving further time and cost consequences in the integration/test and rollout phases cannot be completely ruled out.

Lessons learned from the change of supplier need to be analysed further

In the 2017 and 2018 audits, the SFAO found the programme was appropriately designed and the progress of work was in line with expectations. However, the programme suffered a major setback in 2019, as the Confederation terminated its contractual relationship with the main supplier due to disagreements over service performance.

The programme drew initial consequences from the termination of the collaboration with regard to the future course of action. However, further analysis is warranted. The SFAO recommends analysing possible improvements for future WTO procurements as part of the programme's conclusion and communicating these in an appropriate manner, for example to the federal procurement offices.

Immediate implementation of the integration and rollout phase is essential

In the SFAO's view, the reports to the Federal Council and Parliament as at 30 June and 31 December 2020 reflect the status of the programme. The revised overall planning of June 2020 which saw CHF 16 million in additional costs and programme completion postponed by 32 months is comprehensible. The new planning appears to be as reliable as it can be, given the latent risks in the integration and test phase and in the upcoming rollout.

¹ "Key ICT project Renewal of the biometrics system platform" (audit mandates 17535 and 18490), available on the SFAO website (www.sfao.admin.ch)

The risk and quality management, which is appropriate overall, should therefore be systematically pursued. For example, in the SFAO's opinion, the risk of delays or failures in the supply chain should be better covered through supplier guarantees. Compliance with milestones and the critical path must continue to be closely monitored and, if necessary, enforced.

So far, the new planning has just about been adhered to during the course of the programme. The offices involved and the cantons should make every effort to complete their projects on time and to a sufficient standard of quality.

From a cost perspective (annual fixed costs of CHF 2.5 million), it is also essential that the existing systems can be decommissioned as quickly as possible, by the end of 2023 at the latest. In order to keep the operating costs as low as possible, an analysis should be made as to how and whether the users can be persuaded to replace the systems quickly by offering them incentives. Payment of CHF 2.5 million annually for only a few sites that have not yet been converted to the new environment should be avoided.

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