

COVID-19 audits: Interim report as at 1 May 2020

The Confederation's measures

Key facts

Around CHF 58 billion – that is the magnitude of the Confederation's financial commitment so far. Part of this is being spent on combating the pandemic itself, but the lion's share has gone towards managing the knock-on effects – the so-called "measures to cushion the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic".

It is important that funds are swiftly paid out to the people and institutions that really need them. Yet where speed is involved, mistakes can happen. When things move fast, it cannot be excluded that money goes to someone who is not entitled to it, instead of those truly in need.

As regards specialist questions on which measures are appropriate, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) will refrain from comment in the current crisis situation. However, since March it has been actively involved in preventing, or at least rapidly detecting, abuses in the payment of funds.

The COVID-related measures, too, require the use of forms, contracts, directives, agreements, etc. Completely new procedures or unprecedented volumes suddenly have to be dealt with overnight, so to speak. As the measures will be in place for some time to come, it is worth continuously correcting and adjusting the rules and processes. In the areas where the SFAO can exert an influence, its input has had a favourable reception. The feedback from the federal offices shows that the SFAO's involvement is worthwhile and has been welcomed.

The implementation is increasingly revealing scope for interpretation, unregulated cases, a lack of clarity or impractical rules, which must be dealt with swiftly by the offices, above all in areas where funds need to be rapidly paid out to a large number of people in need. This is not yet working everywhere, and the lists of questions are growing. The SFAO has observed that cantonal differences also exist with regard to the implementation of COVID-related measures. It is a vicious circle: the greater the number of open questions or points needing clarification, the higher the risk of errors or unequal treatment. This in turn increases the risk of subsequent appeals and resource-intensive corrections. So providing clarity quickly is not a luxury but a necessity. However, when reviewing the dossiers, the SFAO noted that whenever it points out errors or unclear areas, the offices are happy to rectify them – albeit sometimes only after a delay.

If, in theory, a recipient can draw funds from several "pots", dependencies are often defined. According to the rules, payments should be subsidiary or offset against each other. De facto, it has not yet been possible for the Administration to check this. The SFAO is playing a key role in solving this problem: it will reconcile the data, where available, and carry out overarching audits. The path will be strewn with technical, organisational and legal obstacles, which the SFAO will clear away in collaboration with the Administration.

And speaking of collaboration with the Administration: that is working well despite – or perhaps because of – being in crisis mode.

Original text in German