

Subsidy audit in the field of peacebuilding and human security policy

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

Key facts

In the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the Human Security Division (HSD) is responsible for the implementation of Switzerland's policy on the promotion of peace and human rights. This is done within the framework of the Federal Council's foreign policy strategy. The HSD's activities include the security of individuals and their protection against violence, war and acts of arbitrary treatment. Its financial resources amounted to more than CHF 400 million for the period 2012 to 2017¹.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) analysed the processes, tools and resources implemented by the HSD and examined their efficiency and the measurement of their effectiveness. This task was delegated to KEK-CDC Consultants in Zurich. This synthesis report summarises the main findings and makes recommendations.

The HSD has the tools to ensure that the strategy pursued is implemented

The HSD has a range of sufficient instruments to promote peace and human security in accordance with the terms of the Federal Council's dispatch. These tools are chosen according to the context and are coordinated with other federal players. Knowledge management is likewise an ongoing challenge for this entity. This management is also an opportunity to reduce internal training and recruitment costs.

The HSD has human security advisors, who have in-depth knowledge of the field and cooperate with local partners. Moreover, their presence onsite guarantees serious support for projects and better monitoring of the results. However, short fixed-term contracts and limited career prospects cause significant fluctuation among these specialists. This high turnover is often synonymous with a loss of internal knowledge and can lead to a deterioration in the relationships of trust with local partners.

The SFAO recommends that the HSD should reflect on the role and career prospects of human security advisors, who have a wealth of knowledge that needs to be better managed, preserved and leveraged.

Indicators to be developed and a partnership concept to be reviewed

At the time of the audit, the division was developing an impact measurement model that included qualitative indicators, as well as new quantitative indicators. In the SFAO's opinion, finalising the development of this impact model is a priority.

¹ These funds were released as part of the dispatch on the continuation of measures to promote peace and human security in 2012–2016 ("dispatch 11.045 " of 29 June 2011) and the dispatch on international cooperation in 2017–2020 ("dispatch 16.022" of 17 February 2016).

The role of strategic partnerships is another important point. Strategic partnerships are a key component in accessing specific know-how to enable the implementation of the HSD's strategy. However, the current concept should be supplemented with a definition and the necessary number of strategic partners, concrete entry and exit criteria, a clear distinction between basic contributions and project contributions, and a time aspect.

The SFAO likewise recommends reviewing the current contract duration practice. The establishment of longer-term contracts would be in line with the strategy implemented and would allow administrative costs to be lower further.

A miracle solution does not exist

The SFAO believes that a regular exchange of information and working methods with the various countries is necessary and important. This exchange could offer new approach perspectives and would encourage the HSD to reconsider matters regularly.

Finally, the SFAO agrees with the external consultant regarding a possible reduction in the number of subsidies and systematic tendering for measures to be taken. Concerning the latter point, it appears that the intrinsic cost of a call for tenders is considered high, as the requirements in this area are constantly increasing. The situation is identical in Norway and Germany. In this respect, neither a possible reduction in the number of subsidies nor systematic tendering would create added value and increase the effectiveness of the HSD's actions.

Original text in French