

Implementation of the Open Government Data Strategy for Switzerland at the Confederation – cross-section audit

Swiss Federal Archives

Key facts

With the adoption of the 2014–2018 Open Government Data Strategy for Switzerland (OGD strategy), the Federal Council set the stage for the free provision of certain types of government data, i.e. that in which there is great interest and where a certain benefit can be expected. The Swiss Federal Archives (SFA) was commissioned with implementation from 1 January 2015. The objectives of the strategy have only been partially achieved so far. The central implementation organisation's costs are in the low seven-figure range. Despite scarce resources, the core elements of an infrastructure for government data have been established with considerable commitment from the SFA and other parties involved.

The General Secretariat of the Federal Department of Home Affairs (GS FDHA) is currently devising a follow-up strategy for 2019 to 2023. The first audit of this topic by the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) will contribute to the process of developing further principles for the implementation of open government data (OGD) at the Confederation.

Open government data has since become a natural component of modern public management in many places, both internationally and at cantonal and communal level. However, this awareness still varies greatly in the Federal Administration and is highly dependent on the specific mandate of the administrative unit and its understanding of requirements, benefits and impact. In the context of various strategic initiatives (digital Switzerland, e-government, data policy), it is necessary to create a binding, effective framework for OGD.

The OGD strategy is binding, but this was not perceived as such everywhere

Within the framework of eGovernment Switzerland, the SFA currently assumes subject leadership and is also centrally responsible for implementation at the Confederation. The interviews conducted in all seven departments, as well as at the Federal Chancellery (FCh) and Swissmedic, during this cross-section audit revealed a need for action at various levels.

The OGD strategy was not perceived as binding everywhere. Better and more stringent objectives and measures are needed, together with a stronger focus on the demand for data and its potential benefits. The issue of the resources required, their provision and the evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness must be improved.

The differences in the implementation of open government data are still too great

A comparison of OGD activities in the administrative units questioned revealed a mixed picture: the granting of access to government data is taking place at two speeds. On the one hand, there are offices that are already far ahead and where data delivery has long been part of the core business (e.g. weather data, geodata and data on aid funds). On the other hand, the topic and its potential have not yet been sufficiently understood or are being addressed rather hesitantly in other offices.

However, certain differences inevitably result from the current special statutory basis, which influences practicability more or less significantly. This concerns the issue of fees, for example, where little progress has been made towards standardisation or even abolition.

The establishment of a stronger and comprehensive culture of openness and transparency, including in the case of data delivery, should be given priority in further work. In addition, potential synergies within the Administration can be exploited in the implementation process, taking account of the advanced offices' experience. Enterprises affiliated with the Confederation also provide open data services, but these were not included in the audit.

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