

Asylum system procurement audit

State Secretariat for Migration

Key facts

The State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) regulates all matters relating to the legislation on foreign nationals and asylum in Switzerland. For this purpose, the SEM operates several federal asylum centres (FAC) in six asylum regions, where all those involved in the asylum procedure are united under one roof. With the sharp rise in asylum numbers since mid-2022 and the additional people from Ukraine seeking protection since spring 2022, the SEM has been confronted with new challenges.

The total external expenditure for the operation of the FACs amounted to around CHF 307 million in 2022 (previous year CHF 215 mn). The two largest items concerned security services (CHF 84 mn/previous year CHF 70 mn) and assistance expenses (CHF 80 mn/previous year CHF 56 mn). These services are procured by the SEM.

Based on a selection of procurements of services in the area of security and assistance, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the needs-based procurement and how efficiently the fluctuating numbers of asylum seekers are taken into account.

The audit findings were positive, with some minor potential for improvement. The SEM has the structures and processes in place to ensure needs-based and cost-effective procurement. The contracts concluded by the SEM have created the prerequisites for meeting the challenges presented by the sharp increase in demand for security and assistance services.

Needs-based procurement

The SEM has centralised guidelines, regulated powers and suitable instruments for the management and verification of procurements.

The assistance and security service case studies audited by the SFAO did not reveal any deviations from processes or violations of procurement law. The needs assessments drawn up by the SEM are comprehensible and the award procedures are documented in a transparent manner.

The SFAO sees potential for improvement in the composition of the teams that check the quality of the service providers in the FACs. The SFAO recommends that the SEM bring in external experts for checks in the FACs in order to ensure independence and encourage an outside view.

Fluctuation-proof framework contracts

The tenders and framework contracts for the assistance and security service providers include an element of flexibility and allow for services to be adapted according to fluctuating needs. Despite this flexibility, the service providers had reached their limits at the time of the audit and in some cases were unable to provide the required resources. In order to ensure normal operations even in the current tense situation, the SEM has occasionally, and with exceptional approval, allowed subcontractors to operate in the security sector, even though they were excluded from the tenders and framework contracts. As a further

measure, the SEM has awarded contracts to other successful tenderers and can make increased use of people on civilian service and members of the Armed Forces. In addition, temporary adjustments were made to the requirement profiles in the assistance service. The SFAO considers the SEM's approach to securing the necessary resources in a crisis situation with sharply rising asylum numbers to be comprehensible and effective.

The SFAO recommends that the SEM examine whether subcontractors should be permitted in future tenders for security services – in the same way as for assistance services. This could ensure the rapid provision of sufficient resources in crisis situations and reduce the administrative burden for exceptional approvals at the SEM.

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