

Organisation of business trips

Performance audit of the Swiss Government Travel Centre (SGTC)

Key points

The Swiss Government Travel Centre (SGTC) is the entity in the Confederation which is responsible for organising business trips and return journeys for foreign nationals expelled from Switzerland. It also organises travel for guests invited by Switzerland to events. The SGTC negotiates preferential rates with providers (plane tickets, hotels, rental cars and train tickets). The units of the central Federal Administration, extra-parliamentary commissions and independent administrative units without legal personality are obliged to purchase their travel services from the SGTC. In 2014, the SGTC booked foreign travel services amounting to CHF 36 million. In 2015, it employed 31 people (24.9 FTEs) and had a budget of CHF 3.5 million.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) analysed whether the activity of the SGTC relating to travel services for the Federal Administration's personnel was carried out economically, efficiently and effectively. From this perspective, the audit findings were positive.

The services and the reductions obtained for business trips were significant

In general, the people who used the SGTC's services are satisfied with the services provided. The rates applied for flights and hotels are favourable and competitive on the whole.

The SGTC could increase its bargaining power with suppliers by acting on behalf of the Confederation in the broad sense. This would entail integrating the decentralised units of the Confederation which are not obliged to book their travel services with the SGTC in the volume of trade negotiated. It would also be in the interests of these units – over 20, including the Federal Institutes of Technology, Switzerland Tourism and the Swiss National Museum, for example – as they would benefit from the special rates negotiated by the SGTC.

The choice of services does not depend on the SGTC

The risks with regard to economical use of travel services stem largely from the conduct of the people concerned. The current procedure for booking business trips gives SGTC office clients significant leeway, as they have to cover the travel costs with their budget. The SFAO believes that the processes for trip reservations and the reimbursement of expenses should be rethought. For example, these two processes could be integrated into a single information system to simplify matters. This would make it possible to improve the internal control system and ensure compliance with the Confederation's requirements for business trips.

Based on a survey of people who went on business trips in the first half of 2015, the SFAO found that half of them had not used the SGTC's services, in particular when it came to hotel reservations. This is problematic, as it represents a significant volume of services for which federal employees do not benefit from negotiated rates. These people often mention that they are not aware of the SGTC and its services. An information campaign should be conducted to remedy this.

Federal Administration staff seldom use the online booking tools provided by the SGTC. For some categories of people and services, there is a need to promote this type of tool to relieve the SGTC of tasks which do not generate significant added value.



The SGTC provides many special services

Between 2010 and 2014, the SGTC's productivity for organising business trips increased. The picture is different for the repatriation of foreign nationals, given the variations in activity in this area. Organisational measures have already been taken to remedy the situation.

This audit focussed on the potential for outsourcing the work carried out by the SGTC. However, it provides many special services relative to the standard services offered by private business travel agencies. Under these circumstances, outsourcing the SGTC's activities would not necessarily lead to savings or improved services.

In view of the implementation of the new management model of the Federal Administration, the SGTC needs to consider the management indicators to be defined for internal management. In this context, formal reports need to be envisaged for the Directorate for Resources in the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

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