

Audit of the key ICT project ASALneu
State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)

Key points

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the unemployment insurance payment system (ASAL) back in 2012 (preliminary analysis ASALneu) and 2014 (quality and project management). In addition to checking the implementation of earlier recommendations, this audit also included aspects for a key ICT project.

ASAL is used for administering the receipt of unemployment benefits. It is owned by the Supervisory Commission for the Unemployment Insurance Fund, which is also responsible for it. It was developed externally from 1989 onwards and put into operation in 1993, and has been maintained on an ongoing basis ever since. Every day, 2,000 users work with it in 34 locations. Operation, maintenance and further development are financed by the unemployment insurance fund. As the compensation unit, SECO takes care of operational work associated with project implementation and operation.

Within the framework of strategic risk considerations, the Supervisory Commission for the Unemployment Insurance Fund instructed SECO in 2004 to take the measures necessary to eliminate the supplier and technology dependence as soon as possible. In the autumn of 2013, the contract for reprogramming up to 2016 was concluded for a sum exceeding CHF 22 million. Together with necessary investments and internal expenses, the total budget for the project is around CHF 35 million.

The ASALneu project is in difficulty and risks being aborted

In the summer of 2014, it was apparent that the completion deadline of 2016 could not be met. At the end of 2014, the system developer (CSC) informed SECO that the migration procedure which had been commenced would not be successful in the planned time frame. At the time of the audit, the project was in difficulty and ran the risk of being aborted. Intensive clarifications were carried out to find possible solution scenarios for ensuring the operation of the current system and the continuation of the project procedure.

Question marks regarding the achievement of the independence target

In order to gain independence from CSC and the use of old technology, ASALneu has to be programmed in such a way that maintenance and further development can be put out to tender in the future. An assessment of the Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication (FOiTT) concerning the software code already written concluded that the requirements for maintenance by third parties not involved in writing the code were not yet met. The SFAO also wonders whether individual software with the complexity of ASAL can generally be maintained on competitive terms by third parties not involved in the creation process.



The project no longer seems urgent

The project was initially classified as urgent for two reasons: firstly, the fear that the technology used would not be available beyond 2020 and secondly, concerns that a revision of the Unemployment Insurance Act would come right in the middle of the realisation phase or application requirements would arise that could not be implemented. Following the current clarifications, the SFAO however believes that the risks that justified the ASALneu project have been mitigated.

Depending on the scenario (continuation – with adjustments – or abandonment), there are different effects for further activities and any necessary contract amendments.

Despite the project's difficult situation, the project management specifications may not be neglected and outstanding issues are to be implemented quickly.

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