

Press release

Swiss Federal Audit Office publishes its 2019 annual report

Bern, 29.5.2020 – The Finance Delegation and the Federal Council have taken note of the annual report of the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO). With the easing of the current health crisis, the SFAO is resuming its publications and is releasing its first interim report on the federal measures related to the spread of COVID-19.

In 2019, the SFAO published 49 audit and assessment reports, slightly more than in the previous year. The supreme financial supervisory body of the Confederation also granted access to seven reports requested by journalists on the basis of the Freedom of Information Act (FoIA).

A huge field of activity

SFAO employees answered some complex audit and evaluation questions in 2019. Why were reservations expressed about the federal financial statements? What should be done with protected sanitation installations left over from the Cold War? What lessons can be drawn about risk management at Swiss Post in the wake of the postal bus affair? Is there enough supervision of milk testing subsidies? Is there gender discrimination in the allocation of funds to the professors at the ETHs? How will the management and supervision of air traffic deal with major challenges? Where are the savings promised from competitive tenders for energy efficiency measures? How will the Armed Forces' future drones be protected against cyberattacks? Did defence company RUAG earn too much margin with its public military contracts? Many of the answers can be found in the SFAO's annual report published today. The SFAO is also publishing nine audit reports whose release had been postponed due to the COVID-19 health crisis.



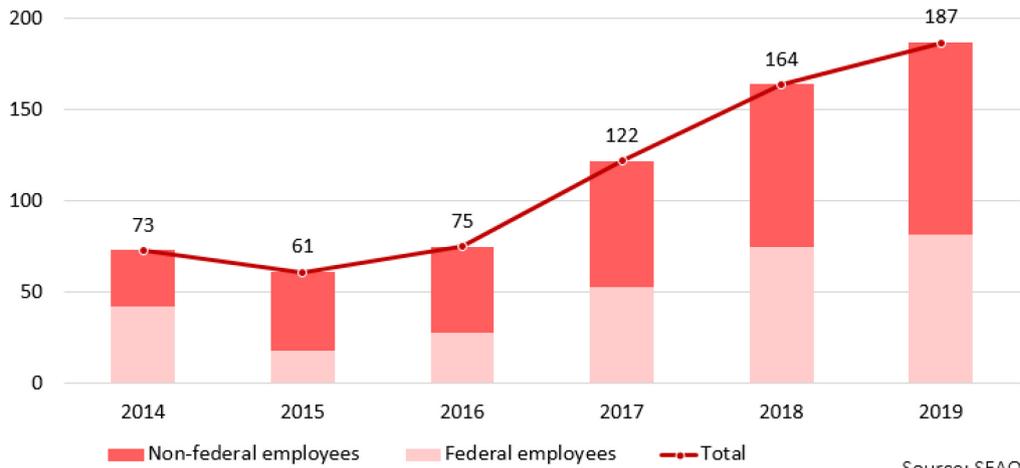
Three serious shortcomings reported to the Federal Council

By supervising the federal finances, the SFAO fulfils its task as auditor of the authorities, federal enterprises and subsidy recipients. In 2019, its audits highlighted many areas for improvement for auditees. The Federal Council was informed of serious shortcomings on three occasions, compared to once in 2018.

Whistleblower numbers on the rise

Reports from whistleblowers continue to increase, with 187 reports in 2019 versus 164 in 2018. The SFAO uses this information to carry out verification work. 115 reports flowed into audits already under way or future audits, or else triggered new investigations in the not-too-distant future. According to the SFAO, over 62% of the reports were useful and are helping to improve how the Administration functions.

Reports from whistleblowers received by the SFAO (2014–2019)



SFAO recovers funds

Over the last decade, the SFAO's audits have generated nearly half a billion Swiss francs in receipts for the Confederation. In 2019, the SFAO cost Swiss taxpayers more than CHF 26 million, versus CHF 24.3 million in 2018. The institution employed 119 people (108.3 FTEs) as at 31 December 2019.

COVID-19 health crisis: first audits and initial results

Since the beginning of the health crisis, the SFAO has suspended the majority of its audits, in order to cast a critical eye over the measures taken by the various federal departments and offices. A first interim report has been submitted to the Finance Delegation. The SFAO is publishing this report today. The second report will be released at the end of June.

Despite some organisational teething problems owing to the urgency of the crisis, the SFAO was able to launch its programme of audits with the help of the federal entities. Overall, the initial findings are positive and a first set of sensitive cases has been identified. These largely involve bridging loans to companies in liquidation or access to short-time working for public sector entities. The SFAO is coordinating the follow-up activities with the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs. The audits to be carried out in areas such as civil aviation or bridging loans for start-ups are in preparation.

Information: Michel Huissoud, Director of the SFAO, tel. 058 463 11 11

The 2019 annual report is published in French, German, Italian and English on the SFAO's website (www.sfao.admin.ch). The other reports mentioned are also available on its website.