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Press release

Swiss Federal Audit Office extends its monitoring of economic support measures during pandemic

Bern, 20 May 2022, 11:00 – The Finance Delegation and the Federal Council have taken note of the annual report of the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO). The SFAO continued its monitoring of the measures taken in connection with the pandemic and found that the volume of whistleblowing reports concerning these measures remained high. Overall, the SFAO's work should lead to savings of several tens of millions of Swiss francs in the long term.

The SFAO continued its monitoring of the federal measures taken during the health crisis. The SFAO's specialists analysed the quarterly data on support for the cultural sector, loss of earnings compensation, short-time working compensation, hardship cases for companies, and joint and several guarantees. The results of the analyses were submitted to the competent authorities, such as the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), as part of the fight against the misappropriation of funds and to identify errors.

In terms of short-time working compensation, a total of 498 whistleblower reports relating to short-time working compensation had been submitted to SECO by the end of 2021. Of this total, 84 cases have already been closed, with 54 cases of unjustified or incorrect payments, including seven cases of fraud. Reimbursement requests totalling CHF 9.9 million have been issued. At the end of 2021, 414 cases were pending with SECO.



Likewise in connection with the health crisis, the SFAO published an audit of the recapitalisation of Skyguide Swiss Air Navigation Services Ltd. The Confederation wants to inject CHF 500 million into the company by 2022. The SFAO considers this refinancing requirement to be realistic given the liquidity situation and the pandemic context, but warns that the injection may not be sufficient.

Further potential savings of over CHF 20 million

Aside from the pandemic, the SFAO noted that the Federal Office for Customs and Border Security (FOCBS) was treating cantons differently. The FOCBS, which is part of the Federal Department of Finance (FDF), is responsible for border control at the international airports in Geneva and Basel, despite this activity being a sovereign task of the cantons. The agreements concluded between the FDF and the two cantons in question should provide for remuneration to the Confederation for the cost of checks on individuals.

This service is worth between CHF 17 million and CHF 22 million a year for Geneva and around CHF 5 million for Basel. The SFAO recommended that these cantons reimburse the full cost via a service level agreement.

Number of whistleblower reports still high

The SFAO received 402 reports on its secure whistleblowing platform in 2021, versus 484 in 2020. This large number was mainly due to reports related to the health crisis and the Confederation's support measures. With the exception of the COVID-19 reports, the SFAO dealt with these disclosures in its audit activities. The SFAO also forwarded them to other authorities, including the cantonal public prosecutors' offices.

The SFAO published 61 audits and evaluations in 2021 and responded to 88 formal media requests. There were seven requests for access to audit reports under the Freedom of Information Act (FoIA), and the SFAO granted full or partial access in two cases. The main reason for the refusals was that the audits had not been completed at the time of the requests.

At the end of 2021, the SFAO had a staff of 135 (123.7 FTEs), versus 129 (117.3 FTEs) a year earlier. Its expenses amounted to CHF 30.7 million.

Further details

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The SFAO's annual report for 2021 is available on its website: www.sfao.admin.ch.