

Audit of the Schengen/Dublin further development key ICT project

General Secretariat of the Federal Department of Justice and Police

Key facts

Since 1985, the EU states have regulated their cooperation on justice, police, borders and visas by means of the Schengen agreement. The supplementary Dublin agreements define the responsibilities for asylum applications. They are intended to permit border-free travel within the Schengen Area for the region's roughly 500 million inhabitants.

The European Union (EU) continually adjusts the Schengen/Dublin acquis to changing circumstances. In order to implement the European Agenda on Security, new legal bases are being drawn up and existing ones modified. This will also affect the information systems of the EU and Schengen/Dublin states. In the IT area, new information systems will be set up and existing systems modernised between 2019 and 2025. Switzerland has been part of the Schengen/Dublin Area since 2008, and has undertaken to implement the changes at national level.

With the Schengen/Dublin further development key ICT project and programme, the General Secretariat of the Federal Department of Justice and Police (GS-FDJP) is implementing these changes. The total costs for the seven projects amount to CHF 121.7 million, of which CHF 98.7 million is earmarked for third-party goods/services. The projects are at either the initiation or execution stage, depending on the administrative unit concerned. Around CHF 6.6 million had been spent by 31 December 2020. The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) audited the programme for the first time.

The "Schengen/Dublin further development" programme is progressing well in general and had produced results on schedule up to the time of the audit. The programme is at high risk of not having the necessary staff on time during both the project phase and subsequent use. Complex interdependencies between national and EU projects are making project management challenging. The management tools should therefore be designed to be more effective.

Resources are and remain the greatest risk

Risk management within the programme is generally well organised and the risk assessment is largely in line with the SFAO's findings. However, the projects do not fully document the identified risks in the lead ICT cockpit and in some cases have not defined any mitigation measures. The GS-FDJP should therefore monitor the implementation of programme objectives more closely. The statuses in the programme are plausible.

The major challenge remains the availability of project resources within the FDJP's IT Service Centre (ISC-FDJP). Owing to timetabling delays in either the EU or Switzerland, it was not possible for these resources to be made available on schedule. The GS-FDJP has implemented measures for more agile planning with the offices involved. However, it will not be possible to completely avert the risk of economic consequences caused by resources not being available on time. In order to reduce this risk to a minimum, it is necessary for a

common understanding to exist as regards agile planning principles and the requisite roles. Agile principles are also applied during further development. For this purpose, the GS-FDJP should develop a joint IT operating concept that can also be used by other FDJP offices.

The programme cannot delegate responsibility for completing the objectives on time

Operationally, the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) and the Federal Office of Police (fedpol) are implementing the projects. The ISC-FDJP is supporting the offices on technical issues and ensuring future system operation. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Federal Customs Administration and the Zurich cantonal police are also involved, and have their own implementation projects. The GS-FDJP has more of a coordination role, and prepares the consolidated reports.

In order to meet the EU's go-live milestones, a variety of technical, organisational and legal criteria must be defined. This requires close cooperation, including as regards the use of systems and specialist organisations (e.g. drawing up a new legal framework, redirecting specialist IT operations in SEM and fedpol). These interdependencies are all known, but they are not recorded consistently and transparently via a "critical path".

At the time of the audit, the programme was on track in the opinion of all those involved, but there were no further planning reserves. Owing to a lack of suitable milestones, it is difficult for an outside observer to assess the programme's progress objectively. To this end, the GS-FDJP should record the different interdependencies via a critical path and monitor them more closely.

The GS-FDJP must actively tackle rising operating costs

Since 2007, the number of specialist applications linked to Schengen/Dublin at the ISC-FDJP has doubled and this will increase even more with the further development programme. At the same time, a number of Schengen/Dublin applications are based on old ISC architecture versions. The FDJP is planning to migrate these applications in the next few years, but until then operating costs will rise even higher. Despite the measures introduced, the ISC-FDJP considers that it will reach the limits of its capacity in the medium term. The Schengen/Dublin application landscape can be simplified with architectural measures and the consolidation of business processes. The potential for process consolidation stems from the improved interoperability of systems and greater cooperation between offices. The offices have identified various ways to optimise the advantages of the Schengen/Dublin systems.

The new cooperation synergies must be taken over into the optimisation of the IT application landscape. The improvement in cooperation and technical systems is part of enterprise architecture management, which the GS-FDJP is establishing as a strategic management tool. The GS-FDJP should use enterprise architecture management to generate effective benefits for the projects and the ISC-FDJP as soon as possible. In this way, medium-term risks with regard to sustainable operation will be reduced, and cooperation will be optimised.

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