

AUDIT

Audit of the synergies in the use of artificial intelligence, with the example of chatbot solutions

Federal Statistical Office, Federal Chancellery, Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication

KEY FACTS

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) examined the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the Federal Administration using chatbot solutions as an example. The aim was to evaluate whether synergies between the projects could be utilised and to what extent the hoped-for benefits could be achieved. The role of the Competence Network for Artificial Intelligence (CNAI) was also to be evaluated. The SFAO identified 21 AI chatbot solutions in the Federal Administration. These include both operational applications and projects at various stages. The majority are chatbots on public websites with low costs and risks. More complex solutions, which require a high level of data sovereignty and security standards, are in the minority and are all still in the development phase. The implementation costs of the projects are currently between CHF 9,000 and 3 million.

The audit showed that knowledge is shared between projects and that this also helps to identify possible synergies and utilise them. The CNAI played more of a facilitating role. It did enable initial contact between those in charge of the project, but was no longer involved as it progressed. With severely limited resources, the CNAI has not yet been able to fulfil its mandate in full. This was previously demonstrated by the FSO in an independent evaluation. Based on this, the Federal Council ordered measures to be taken.

Framework conditions are still pending, reusable fundamentals would be available

The Federal Council has launched strategic initiatives for the use of AI and ordered various administrative units to address AI-related topics. The Federal Office of Communications is drawing up a report on the possible regulation of AI in Switzerland, while the Federal Chancellery is developing an AI sub-strategy for the Federal Administration.

The CNAI was set up in 2021 to promote innovation and learning in the field of AI. An evaluation report on this shows a need for action and recommends strengthening the coordination of AI. The Federal Council has commissioned the preparation of a corresponding proposal. These framework conditions are critical for the efficient use of AI in the Federal Administration. They are now to be developed by the end of 2025. This is important to prevent uncontrolled growth and to standardise management approaches (e.g. with regard to legal and ethical issues, data protection, integrity of AI systems, etc.).

Due to a lack of sufficient support from the CNAI, the Federal Administration took an experimental and self-organised approach in its AI chatbot projects. This has led to synergies and the bilateral exchange of knowledge. Nevertheless, the SFAO considers it important to now consolidate the knowledge gained. Based on the consolidated results, tools for topics such as legal bases, data protection or infrastructure are to be provided as quickly as possible in order to better support ongoing chatbot projects. Such instruments allow efficient resource utilisation to be promoted until the final design of the overarching control system.