

Helping government manage immigration needs

The role of technology in immigration



Executive summary

National preparedness with regard to a common immigration policy has been tested recently by the mass movement of people from one country to another. There are complex challenges involved when numerous governments, agencies, non-government organizations (NGOs) and private entities must interact to deal with a humanitarian crisis. It is extremely difficult for processes and systems to transition from normal to extreme operations.

Effective immigration policy managers should consider these three steps:

- Review capabilities needed to implement the immigration policy to manage mass migration
- Implement a visitor identity plan
- Provide effective border control

IBM® can help government clients lessen the immediate impact of massive migration. The use of technology to address the immediate crisis can also help clients prepare for the future.

Background

In an era of economic strife, regional conflict and terrorism, hundreds of thousands of people in need embark on dangerous journeys hoping to arrive at a place of refuge and eventual opportunity. The sheer number of people seeking a chance for a better life can overwhelm even the best border control and immigrations systems.

The number of people in need can also exceed the capabilities of relief, social and healthcare services to adequately meet immediate and longer-term needs. Yet another challenge is the requirement to vet people in need and to combat criminal elements that might take advantage of overwhelmed border control systems.

Governments have developed policies to manage who enters the country, how long they stay and what they can do when they are there. Border agencies are equipped with sophisticated tools such as advanced passenger risk assessment, biometric gates, ePassports and visas, and asylum management processes to enable them to implement these policies.

For some countries, however, these tools have been ineffective in dealing with the immediate needs of mass migration. Many of the people who arrive at the border have travelled by unorthodox routes—such as using human traffickers—to arrive at nonstandard points of entry with insufficient documentation.

Client needs and challenges

According to a recent UN report¹, at the end of 2015, 65.3 million people—half of them children—were either refugees, asylum seekers or internally displaced. This represents an increase of five million in one year. It is estimated that each minute 24 people are forced either to flee or embark on a journey in hopes of finding a better life. This scale of migration represents one in every 113 people on the planet.

The number of people on the move is likely to increase not only in Europe but also in other parts of the world. Most of these people have no documents, tickets or visas.

As a result, nations on both the immediate frontier and the eventual host nations are challenged to process these people through their immigration systems. They must also try to provide for the needs of those in transit, allowing them to continue on their journey. At the same time, they must develop the ability to identify potential risks. Stronger border controls can help reduce potential threats, but they do not help nations cope with the vast majority of legitimate migrants.

With the increasing number of people presenting themselves along the borders of frontier countries and eventual host countries, governments need to coordinate with many different agencies, such as NGOs, to provide the appropriate level of service.

To overcome the logistical and system challenges, border control, immigration and social service agencies are mobilizing operations so they can better address the needs of those entering their country along frontier areas. These systems identify, enroll and allocate people to appropriate programs at the point of need.

Once emergency situations are addressed and people are moving to their final destination countries, additional services provided by multiple agencies need to be engaged. In most environments, the evaluation of need and deployment of these services are carried out by separate agencies.

Service needed	Typical provider or agency
Identify the migrant	Interior
Allocate social assistance measures	Social security
Assess skills competencies and find a potential employer	Labor and public employment agencies
Provide a tax identification number	Tax agency
Provide local assistance services	Local municipalities

This process requires system integration and coordination of multiple data sources and applications that so far have been managed by government agencies operating in isolation from each other (information silos). With the vast scale of the current influx of people in need, these public agencies and supporting NGOs need to organize in new ways. The focus should be on integrating the exchange of information based on the needs of the individual in order to engage and deploy services in a more timely and coordinated manner.

IBM solution and capabilities

The role of IBM technology

Many nations face the need to patrol and secure a frontier that has seen the traditional concept of national border control evaporate. The agencies charged with protecting national borders need the capability to prevent asymmetric threats ranging from “lone wolf” terrorists to organized mass attacks. They also need tools to help them counter transnational crimes such as smuggling, while verifying identity and evaluating the legitimate needs of people in transition.

- IBM has online self-assessment portals and vetting systems already in use by several governments and is also developing mobile identification technologies and smart phone apps that help streamline the border control process.
- Similar technology, augmented by cognitive computing, can be used to vet migrants before and during their journey. Such technology could allow the migrants’ new homeland, however temporary, to more quickly identify cases of genuine need.
- Technology ranging from mobile apps, analytics, case management, biometrics, cloud-based computing and process management services can assist with speeding the identification, processing and delivery of critical services.
- Cloud-enabled, field deployable analytics can better enable data sharing, help minimize risk and provide better insight into who individuals are and what services they need.
- Advanced image processing techniques can make the best of poor-quality data samples. Privacy-enabled biometric systems can store these records and minimize the risk of identity theft of the enrolled population. Links to facial, fingerprint and palm-print databases of civilians and criminals can help identify known threats trying to hide in the migrant flows.
- Predictive analytics and logistics systems can be deployed to enhance strategic planning and distribution systems. Cognitive technologies can help identify radicalized individuals using open source intelligence, social media and phone records. Case management and assessment tools can further assist in differentiating a war refugee from an economic migrant.
- Agile development for mobile apps can provide caseworkers with mobility that helps in the early migration stages and also helps service large numbers of immigrants when they apply for work or for social assistance.
- IBM Social Programs Management solutions can help social agencies manage migrants’ social inclusion and coordinate the work of different government agencies and NGOs.

Three steps governments can take

Every nation defines its own immigration policy and evaluates whether their information and communications technology platforms can support the implementation and needs of the stated policy.

In most cases, national policies call for some information technology to help determine who is visiting, when they enter, when they leave and what they do during their stay. They need a visitor identity plan that makes it easier for visitors to identify themselves when required or when asked.

Finally, multiple agencies need to collaborate, share insights and quickly serve the needs of people as they move and as they arrive at their final destinations.

Conclusion

National preparedness with regard to a common immigration policy is tested whenever a mass movement of people occurs. There are complex challenges involved when numerous governments, agencies, NGOs and private entities must interact to deal with a humanitarian crisis. It is extremely difficult for processes and systems to transition from normal to extreme operations.

To plan and manage faster and more coordinated emergency responses, managers need information and insights that help them develop a common operating picture and adapt to rapidly changing situations.

As long as people are motivated to leave their homeland, they will continue to attempt to cross frontiers. Border management can do nothing to reduce their motivations to leave, but it can help to secure their journey by combating human traffickers, directing them to the places of greatest sanctuary, and assessing those on the move to help provide them with the services they need, while more quickly detecting potential threats.

Why IBM?

IBM and its partners have an extensive network of relationships with policy makers and government ministers. We are trusted advisors to many governments, where we consult on the “art of the possible.” We advise them on the capabilities of technology. In turn, their feedback on its impact on their policies helps IBM to innovate with relevance.

- IBM also provides humanitarian support as it develops points of view to support government needs.
- IBM Corporate Citizenship Team (CCT) has plans for humanitarian support through grants, including the development of a mobile solution to gather health data from migrants.
- IBM CCT also funds project managers to deploy Sahana—an open source disaster management tool.
- IBM has proven solutions that help governments implement effective and efficient border controls.
- IBM supports governments with tools to enable assessment of identity for migrants and supports a fair review of their eligibility to enter.

For more information

To learn more about the role of technology in the migration crisis, please contact your IBM representative or visit:

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1 <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>



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