

Assessing the identity chain

A quality working document makes all the difference

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In today's information society, identities play an increasingly important role. When it comes to establishing identities and issuing ID documents, the state holds final responsibility and sole authority. It would therefore appear that one of our fundamental rights – the right to an identity – is well protected. To make sure that we can continue to enjoy this right, the quality of the identity chain should be reviewed on a regular basis.

The identity verification and registration processes, and the subsequent issuance of ID documents (also known as ID management), increasingly rely on IT solutions. In turn, this has culminated in the emergence of an identity chain. Technological developments, including the use of digital networks and process interfaces, place increasingly tough demands on the organisation and management of this identity chain. Moreover, the application of IT systems and biometric solutions only serves to increase our dependence on reliable registration, verification and issuance processes as well as well-protected travel and ID documents (including the verification thereof). To complicate matters further, the interdependence between different process components makes increasing demands on the parties involved in the identity chain.

Identity fraud

As the use of, and importance assigned to, identities increases, so does the scale on which they are misused. In February, the European Commission organised a roundtable conference entitled 'Identity theft: a new threat for civil society'. As such, identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the world. Its growth, which costs the international taxpayer billions of euros each year, is not in any way impeded by national boundaries. From a criminal's perspective, ID fraud is a prerequisite for other crimes. In other words, it is a precursor to different types of crime, including acts of terrorism. This being the case, ID fraud presents a considerable societal threat; one that should be thwarted with all means at our disposal.

United Nation Resolution 1373

Some time ago, forensic document experts from Portugal and the Netherlands assessed the identity chain of an unnamed Asian country (pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1373). The aim of the assessment, which was conducted on the instructions of the European Commission, was to conduct a SWOT analysis of the identity chain. The assessment included a review of (i) the identity registration process and (ii) the use of ID documents such as passports, driving licences, ID cards, etc.

The assessment model

As the organisational and technical complexities of the project were considerable, the team made use of an assessment model that was specifically developed with the identity chain in mind. The model (or working document) was developed by the IDManagement Centre and allowed the forensic team to obtain a comprehensive and reliable overview of the identity chain within a comparatively short period of time. The document also enabled the team to answer the following questions: 'which parties play an important role in the identity chain?', 'how are the various work processes organised?', and 'which documents are issued and who is charged with inspecting these documents?' Based on the information thus obtained, the forensic experts were able to ascertain the identity policy of the country in question, the organisation of the various processes within the identity chain, the roles played by the various parties, and, of course, the risks inherent to the overall process. The working



document additionally enabled the team to gain an insight into the information needed to assess the transformation process (from the current situation to the desired situation). This insight was used as a basis for the proposals, which, in turn, defined the measures to be introduced.

The issuance of quality advice demands a clear understanding of the actual functioning of the identity chain, which is not only influenced by practical considerations, but also by the prevailing legal framework, the identity policy and available (financial) resources. The working document used by the forensic team covered the following stages:

1. Determine (i) the identity policy defined by the country in question and (ii) the desired policy
2. Analyse the actual situation
3. Draw conclusions (differences between 1 and 2) and
4. Define the measures to be introduced (within the context of the desired policy).

Focus areas

Prior to the project, the experts developed a fictitious identity chain on the basis of a series of assumptions. This allowed a working document to be established, which the team used as a 'leitmotiv' throughout the implementation phase. The assumptions formulated in the document were amended (or complemented) on the basis of initial discussions with the parties involved.

The following focus areas were defined:

- Identity management
- Documents
- Immigration
- International influences.

To gain an insight into the identity policy of the country in question, the team collated and reviewed all applicable legislation and regulations. This allowed it to develop a clear understanding of what to expect in practice. The main results of the above review were

recorded in the working document (in accordance with the focus areas defined above).

Collating information

Once the inventory had been drawn up, the team visited a number of locations including:

- Local government offices (for the register of births)
- Central government offices (for the national register of births, deaths and marriages)
- Issuance centres (travel documents and driving licences)
- Border crossing points (airport and harbour)
- Manufacturers of ID documents
- A training institute for document inspectors

The observations made during these visits were also recorded in the working documents (again by focus area). In addition to conducting working visits, the team had many discussions with parties active in the identity chain. These discussions were used (i) to gain a clearer insight into the overall process (improved transparency) and (ii) to verify the validity of the observations made during the previous visits. They also allowed the team to establish the ambitions of the various parties active in the chain. Again, the outcome of these meetings was recorded in the working document.

Evaluation of the information obtained

The fact that the working document was continually updated with new information afforded the experts an increasingly clear insight into the identity chain. Once all facts had been collated, the project proceeded to the evaluation stage, during which the strengths and

weaknesses of various links in the chain were assessed and recorded (the previously-conducted interviews and working visits proved particularly useful here). By assessing various links in the chain – thus approaching the overall chain from several angles – the team was able to establish a clear perception of the prevailing situation. This was subsequently used to define the various stages of the transition process (from the current situation to the desired situation). It should be stressed that the team's overriding objective was to improve the integrity and reliability of the overall chain.

The results

The final stage of the project involved drafting a report for submission to the European Commission (in its capacity as principal). As the working document contained all pertinent information (in the right structure), this task was less arduous than it would appear. Indeed, the working document enabled the team to draft a transparent report, listing the arguments underlying the changes proposed for each link in the identity chain.

The draft report was discussed with parties in the identity chain, who concurred with the impressions gained by the forensic experts. The working document and methods adopted by the team were generally perceived as exceptionally effective and efficient.



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