

Working Group B Report

Working Group B addressed Memoranda of Understandings (MoUs) including a stock take of Bi-Lateral or Multi-lateral passport information sharing MoUs. The working group was attended by representatives from Sri Lanka, East Timor, Turkey, Niue, Thailand, Bangladesh, Kiribati, Pakistan and Singapore

The approach adopted by the participants was to share experiences and stories of attempts undertaken to share information for the purposes of border control, including any experience in concluding agreements for this sort of activity.

Initial discussion amongst the working group members focused upon broad discussion of existing MoU and privacy laws in the various attending economies.

Issues

Within the working group this led to the identification of a number of challenges:

- Initial discussions identified that the different countries' systems for collecting and holding passport were at various stages of sophistication, from manual records to highly technical e-passports.
- The responsibility for the issuing of passports and the responsibility for border control more often than not lie with separate agencies, which complicates any dealings with the information.
- Generally the countries demonstrated an ability and indeed a willingness to share information on a case by case basis for law enforcement purposes, and passport verification.
- Requests for information to be shared internationally were, however, mostly channelled through consulate offices rather than directly through immigration or border control agencies. There was a lack of ability and capability to share passport information in a systemic way.
- There was an awareness of the Interpol processes and a favourable disposition for their use, although variable uptake of the opportunity to do so. Information sharing through Interpol for law enforcement purposes was engaged in readily and without domestic impediment.
- Even among those economies that retain comprehensive electronic records of passport data there was little expressed enthusiasm for systemic sharing of such information for general border security/ integrity purposes. In most economies there was a general expectation of reciprocity in the divulging of any information.

Recommendations

Given the above issues the recommendations discussed therefore, tended to be at the level of encouraging countries to build closer relationships between their passport and border control agencies, and the setting up of direct immigration agency to agency relationships between economies for the fielding of and response to ad hoc law enforcement and passport verification inquiries internationally.

Any future bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreements may need to focus primarily on relationship principles, and begin with case by case individual disclosure of information for law enforcement or passport verification purposes.