A lifeline in a crisis

Issuing secure temporary documents to desperate people in appalling circumstances is something normal passport offices or consulates will likely never encounter. But for organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross it is part of their daily work and whatever the conditions, the temporary documents they issue still have to be correct, reliable and secure. The ICRC Emergency Travel Document is designed to help in a crisis. It may in the future even become a crisis-fit-document, a concept that defines the technical and organisational steps required to make documents survive a crisis in full functionality.

(Images: ICRC, secoia.ltd)

WHAT IS THE ICRC EMERGENCY TRAVEL DOCUMENT?

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) at the last ICAO TRIP Convention in Montreal introduced its new Emergency Travel Document (ETD), which on January 1st 2019 replaced the 2015 version of the document, in order to follow the ICAO guidance on ETDs more closely.

The ICRC ETD is issued for humanitarian purposes to people who do not have a passport or other recognized travel document and find themselves unable to return to their country of origin or residence, or to proceed to a country offering temporary or permanent refuge or asylum. These people could be asylum seekers, refugees, migrants in particularly vulnerable situations or displaced or stateless people. The ICRC issues these documents only as a last resort, and the holder must have the necessary visas and meet the travel requirements.

The new ETD is limited to a single journey to the holder's country of origin or habitual residence, or to a receiving country. It is valid for three months, to allow time to make the arrangements and undertake the journey. The personal information on the document is based on the applicant's own statements and any other identity evidence available. It is issued only by ICRC delegates and is free of charge. There is a photograph, a signature and two fingerprints on the documents, which link it to the bearer without necessarily guaranteeing the correctness of the name. It also contains information about the holder's travel itinerary, has a section for visas and a variety of security

features. As it is a one-way document, the bearer is expected to return it to the ICRC when the journey is completed. It is important to note that the Emergency Travel Document is not a passport or an identity card, or a means to establish or alter the status or nationality of its holder, nor is it valid for a return journey.

A GOOD DOCUMENT FOR A CRISIS

The new Emergency Travel Document was developed with the help of Swiss security consultants SECOIA. It has the format of an A4 sheet folded in the middle down to A5 and again to A6, thus creating a format and layout similar to ID-2.

The personal information, if need be, can even be handwritten with a ball-point pen. Each ETD has a unique, letterpress printed, six-digit serial number, which is tactile, front and back, and which is fluorescent green under UV light. It appears in four different places on the document. On the front and back is a line of microtext, which lists the seven 'Fundamental Principles' of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in English, French and Spanish.

In the section on personal data on the front of the sheet, the bearer's photo is printed in colour inkjet directly onto the document. In extreme cases - the ICRC said this happens in five per cent of all cases - even a normal photo can be affixed to the page. This section also contains information about the document itself (i.e. validity, date and place of issue).

Further biometric identifiers, namely the prints of the two index fingers in red, are on the top right quarter of the page, where the holder also signs the document in blue ballpoint pen. Next to this is a section on the travel itinerary, to inform border control officers. If the relevant information arrives to late for printing, it can be completed by hand. On both the front and back of the document there are sections for visas, entry, exit and/or transit. The section for validating the document with the name and signature of the ICRC representative and the ICRC embossed stamp is at the bottom of the reverse side.

Both sides of the document carry green-blue-green rainbow background printing which changes to blue-green-blue under fluorescent light. There are also UV-fluorescent, multi-coloured fibres, visible fibres and two-level watermarks. The paper itself is UV-dull.

SECURE LOGISTICS AND THE NEED FOR CRISIS-FITNESS

While the document itself is sufficiently secure, the greatest security challenge 'in the field' will be secure storage of the blank documents before completion. In its present state, the document carries almost all security features before personalisation. It is therefore of utmost importance that the document stock is protected from theft during transport and storage.

It is precisely this shortcoming that the concept of a crisis-fit document, developed by the consultancy SECOIA is designed to address. Considering that ETDs are issued in precarious and often insecure conditions, it is prudent to spread the application of security features into several different phases, both physically and by authorisation to access and use. When all these components, physical and digital, are finally present, as close to personalisation as possible, the document is crisis-fit. This means in most cases decentralised production.

SECOIA has assembled a group of highly specialized suppliers to the security printing industry to support its concept. They are united in the Consortium for Robust Official Credentials (CROC). These are European papermaker Lahnpaper, Schreiner Printrust and TraceTag as well as US-based Troy Group with select others to be joining shortly. Starting with the substrate, SECOIA

suggest the synthetic paper *neobond*. This paper consists of paper fibres and additionally a significant percentage of synthetic fibres, and in spite of it being called 'synthetic', it is made on a paper machine and can carry the usual embedded - specially formulated - security features of high-security documents. It can be printed in offset, silkscreen, letterpress and intaglio. It can be personalized by inkjet or toner laser printing. Inkjet inks with UV capabilities and inks that deeply penetrate the substrate are now available and can be used in printers that are often available even in remote locations. Apart from the typical visual data, printable data can include even machine-readable encrypted QR codes and specific patterns created by secure and encrypted algorithms. More sophisticated equipment can additionally print data, including photographs, in UV ink. It is possible to broaden the issuing infrastructure by including buffering power supplies, allowing for continued production during a power failure of several hours.

An important characteristic of a crisis-fit document is the very strong bond between the substrate, the *neobond* paper, and the print, which in a promotional video is very amusingly demonstrated by attaching the paper to the sole of a boot for a 15 km hike, (mis)treating it with a high pressure water compressor, running over it with a 26 ton caterpillar in mud and gravel, etc. Each individual component of the document and the ETD as whole survived this treatment in fully functional condition. (https://croc.secoia.ltd - login-required)

The issuance process and critical data are additionally protected by a security transfer seal, which itself includes numerous security features and unique identifiers. This replaces the conventional rubber-stamp or chop, adding a comprehensive audit-trail to the issuance process, as well as further security to critical data and to the document itself. Finally each component can be additionally secured and tracked by the use of the source-controlled and secure technology of TraceTag. ∎

(below) Schreiner Printrust security transfer seal, including numerous security features and unique identifiers

(right) Lahnpaper's *neobond* with inkjet personalisation from Troy Group

(far right) Sophisticated equipment can print data, including photographs, in UV ink. (Images: secoia.ltd)