

Screening – a more effective approach?

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One of the Norwegian ID Centre's main tasks is to contribute to a more holistic, effective and sustainable ID-work in the governmental administration.

We continuously strive towards a smarter and more accurate approach to verification of identity.

Before I begin my presentation, I would like to share a video presenting the Norwegian ID Centre.

Link to video: <https://www.nidsenter.no/en/about-us/about-norwegian-id-centre/>

2014

The oldest asylum cases still in backlog for document examinations were registered several years ago.

Tens of thousands of documents are still waiting for verification of authenticity.



why?



Every year

- a huge amount of ID- and breeder documents go through the immigration and the police.
- these documents have been presented to prove identity, nationality, age, itinerary etc.
- technical reports on authenticity are used in the asylum process, and at a later stage when applying for permanent residence rights.
- I guess we all agree that a good ID-control at arrival is important, with regards to:

- the applicant
- the legitimacy of the asylum institute
- safety in society
- and prevention of crime

The traditional policy has been that all ID-documents should undergo a complete examination with a technical report, without any individual pre-assessment of the actual risk connected with the case.



SO...



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A typical laboratory examination includes:

- Reference search and –collection – this is information on how genuine documents are supposed to look like
- The technical examination of the document and comparison with references – this is done in the laboratory, using microscopes, radiation, measuring tools etc.
- Recording of the results
- Quality control
- And writing of the report

This could take from half an hour to several days, before the final conclusion regarding authenticity and, in some cases, a reconstruction of the modus operandi, is ready.

Normally, the backlog of cases consists of a variety of documents from different countries.

The next case may not be similar to the previous one.

This means that when opening a new case, the document examiner must:

- Reset
- Collect new references
- Study descriptions of modus operandi and alerts
- Check if similar documents have been examined previously, and make sure the examinations are harmonized
- And consider if the new case implies a new technical approach than the previous one

So, who are performing these examinations?

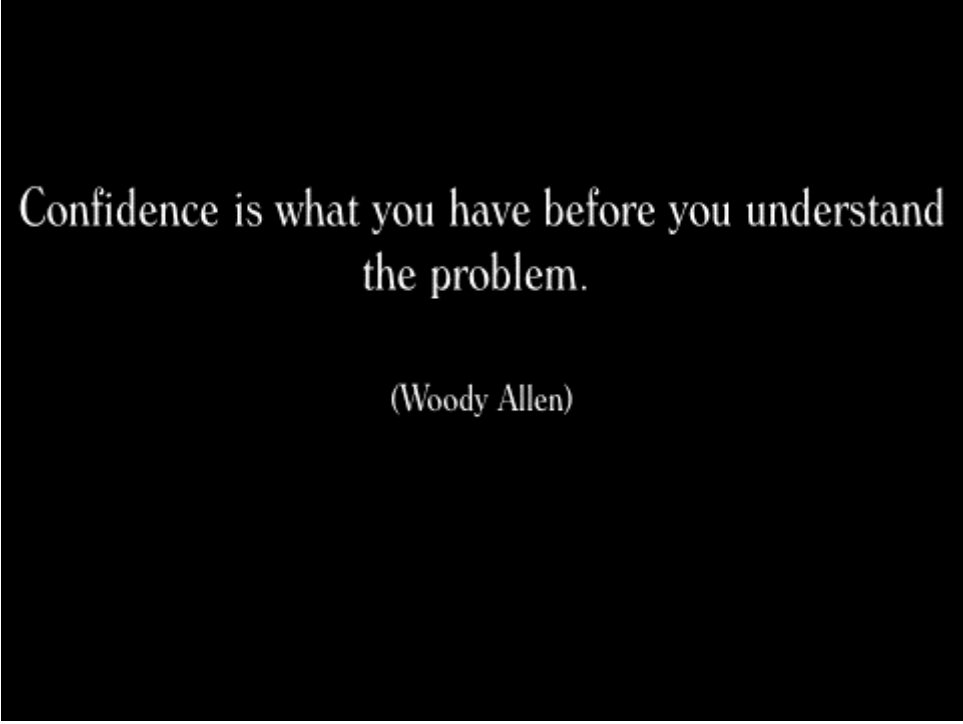
They are performed by competent, experienced and often specialized document examiners at:

- The National Police Immigration Service, who bear the brunt of the total caseload
- The Norwegian ID Centre
- The National Criminal Investigation Service
- The major airports and police districts
- And the ID experts at the Foreign Ministry

The traditional premise has been that all documents should be examined completely, regardless of the specific risk profile.

Depending on who you ask, some will reply that this is manageable. We just have to work faster and intensify the effort when needed.

They have confidence in the current situation.



Confidence is what you have before you understand
the problem.

(Woody Allen)



the issue



The problem is that a deep examination of every single document within an accepted time limit and with the available resources will never be possible. The caseload will accumulate. In fact, the caseload is actually accumulating in the current situation.

In reality, this means that-

- Decisions must be made before the ID-documents are examined
- The size of the caseload is growing
- -and the time for the administrative procedure is slowing

This:

- -compromises the need to know who we give specific rights and benefits
- -it compromises the need to stop and return persons with bad intentions
- -and it compromises the need to enlighten the case before the decision is made

Both society and the individual are potential victims.




According to the Norwegian ID Centre's annual report on statistics, around one thousand false documents were detected in Norway last year (2016).

The significance of each detection is, of course, big in the actual case and for the society.

It is hard/impossible to estimate the potential public cost for one fake identity. The predictions contain many variables and great uncertainty. However, it is not controversial to claim that the potential cost for society is big, both financially and regarding security.

It is also hard to determine how representative the number of detected false documents is. We still have no reliable data on the number of documents that go below the radar. We can only assume that the real number is higher than 1000.

We will never reach a situation where all attempts of document fraud are being intercepted. What we do know, is that increased competence increases the effect of ID-control. Higher competence and knowledge makes it more difficult to get away with fraud. But high competence is to no use if the documents are not being examined.

One thousand false documents is, in itself, a high number. But try to see this number in conjunction with the total number of documents going through the system every year. You will see that false documents are the exception, after all.

The great majority of asylum cases deals with law-abiding, decent men, women and children with nothing to hide. They are loyal to the process and should expect a quick, fair and correct treatment of their applications.

It is, of course, important that also these are able to clarify their identity, and undergo a vetting. You don't necessarily know in advance which applicant is clean as a whistle and which is not.

Of course, it is absolutely critical that as many as possible of those trying to enter on a fake identity, are stopped as early in the process as possible.

We know that one unjustified asylum status occupies the possibility for another.

Same risk in all cases?





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My rhetorical question is:

Do the immigration authorities really need a thorough laboratory report in absolutely all cases?

Our claim is that the whole point of a good ID-control is to find the needle in the haystack.

And not to account for the haystack's many other qualities.



ctr+alt+del



Let's do a restart.

Do we have a more effective and accurate approach, that do not jeopardize the quality, and that may even increase the quality?

We have done some research, exchanged experiences and discussed this challenge with colleagues in Norway as well as internationally.

We have also done some practical testing on real cases, in connection with the qualification of resettlement refugees in Lebanon, and in cooperation with The National Police Immigration Service at home.

Our reply to the question is yes, such an approach exists.

In the cooperation with the National Police Immigration Service on reducing the caseload, we have established a production line with the intent to identify and immediately forward documents with no need for a deep laboratory examination.

By doing this, the focus and effort can move towards the risk documents, and the caseload will not be clogged with bona fide documents.

The process is best described in three steps.



1) First step is a screening

We do a quick and immediate assessment of all documents, by the use of:

- Basic, equipment (UV-light and other light sources, magnifier, stereo microscope)
- Reference information
- Watch lists (databases containing numbers of documents reported stolen or lost)
- Knowledge of specific risk factors
- And knowledge of known modus operandi

In order to make the screening as effective as possible, a pre-sorting of the cases is done.

This way we ensure, as far as possible, that the documents on the table are of a similar type. We try to work on big batches of similar documents at the same time, and thereby the need for “resetting” of the document examiner is reduced.

The screening is done by experienced document examiners, who sort the cases in two directions, or “currents”, which is our metaphor for this process.



2) Most of the documents, normally more than 90 %, end up in «Green current».

After a qualified assessment, these documents are considered no- or low risk documents, and the screening did not detect anomalies.

No report is written, but it is recorded that the document has undergone a simplified assessment by document examiners, and found to be ok.

Especially three keywords are important to communicate to the further treatment of the case, by entering into the system:

- That the assessment is done by a qualified document examiner
- That the assessment is simplified (it's not a deep examination)
- And that the document is considered to be genuine.

These cases are now ready for immediate treatment in the system.

They leave the caseload and can be settled without a long wait for the result of the examination.

When the case worker at the National Police Immigration Service or the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration is ready to work on the case, the result of the document assessment is already in the system.

These documents (90 % of the total number) would otherwise stay in the caseload, waiting for a full laboratory examination.

For some of these cases, the need for a more thorough examination may occur in the future, for example in connection with court attendance, new information in the case etc.

They may of course be re-submitted to the laboratory at any point of the process for a full examination.



3) Obviously false documents, documents with indications of forgery or documents where the result of the screening indicate a demand for a closer look, will go into the “Red current”.

Normally, we are talking about less than 10 % of the total number of screened documents.

These documents will enter the queue for a deep laboratory examination.

And remember, this queue will now be 90 % shorter than it used to.

After examination, a full written report will be entered into the system.



-and the
profit?

The motivation for this approach is an expected profit on several areas.



#resources



By using this process, we avoid spending a disproportionate amount of time kicking in open doors.

We will spend far less time on documents that are genuine.

And, most importantly, we can use our resources on the risk documents.



#productivity



By continuously examining big volumes of similar cases, the need for the document examiner to reset, will be minimized.

Because:


- Repeated experiences and routines from previous cases become muscle memory
- The references are already on the table
- And the risk factors are known

The process makes it easier to harmonize assessments and conclusions. This is important in order to assure that similar cases receive similar treatment.


The Norwegian ID Centre aims toward a situation where the different document laboratories try to agree on, and implement, uniform routines and ways of expressing their opinion on authenticity.

This will be useful later in the process, and help the caseworker understanding the technical reports and conclusions.

The Norwegian ID Centre promotes the idea of constantly sharing information, discussing challenges and open for short-term exchange of personnel.



#focus_on_risk



We want to spend our time on the case-profiles most exposed to manipulation and documents most likely to be false.



#lower_the_
threshold



This approach does not imply that we open the gates for fraud.

We are convinced that working on big volumes of similar cases will result in fewer false documents going undetected.

Also, the basis for relevant information to the first line will be strengthened.




#trends_and_ risk




It will be far easier to identify tendencies, trends and risk factors.

If we also do an effort of sharing this information, it will benefit the first line.

This way, we increase the impact of the first line control, and the possibility to stop fake identities as early in the process as possible.



#intelligence



The process will make the work on intelligence information more effective.

A good registration of information, and classification of different modi may connect cases together

-and


The document examiner will be better prepared to take action immediately, based on available intelligence information.

Intelligence information is used to


-detect forgeries

and

-investigate and prosecute criminal networks producing false documents.



#experience



This approach will help building and maintaining a professional collective memory. Today, too much information is not being shared.

We cannot depend on exclusive knowledge stored in the heads of the ones who have gained the experience.

No new observation should be done in the lab, without asking yourself: Could this be useful for others to know?

We have a good toolbox, but today, it's only half open.

This process will help us to use more of the tools in the box. If we succeed in an effective screening, the upside will be big.

The worse a situation
becomes, the less it takes
to turn it around, and the
bigger the upside.

(George Soros)

Thank you!

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