

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROGRAMMES AND FINANCE

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MIGRATION INFORMATION AND DATA ANALYSIS SYSTEM:

FUTURE SCOPE AND PRIORITIES

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Introduction

1. As part of its migration management capacity-development mandate, and in line with its Strategic Vision for 2019–2023, IOM provides capacity-building and support in the field of border and identity management to interested Member States. Borders are physical and legal spaces where international migration and wider cross-border mobility challenges intersect. Effective traveller identification at borders using a computerized border management information system helps to optimize the economic, social and political benefits of international migration and mobility, and to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.¹ IOM promotes the principle that safe, orderly and regular migration benefits both migrants and society. Well-organized, protection-sensitive and efficient border management procedures help promote safe, orderly and regular migration and cross-border mobility, protect vulnerable migrants and boost economic development, in part thanks to the positive impact of enhanced cross-border trade on economic growth and poverty reduction.

2. First developed by IOM in 1997, MIDAS (Migration Information and Data Analysis System) is a user-friendly and fully customizable border management information system for States seeking a non-commercial, cost-effective yet state-of-the-art and comprehensive solution. It is designed to comply with International Civil Aviation Organization and International Organization for Standards international standards, and MIDAS-based solutions are currently operational in 24² States, having been implemented in 33. As detailed in document SCPF/38, IOM's border-management activities, including MIDAS (referred to at the time as the Personal Identification and Registration System, or PIRS), are developed and implemented under the guidance of IOM's Immigration and Border Management Division. MIDAS projects are supported by development partner contributions, self-financing, or a combination of the two. In 2019, nearly one out of every five projects run by the Division's Border and Identity Solutions Unit had a MIDAS component. IOM, if the Member State concerned prefers and so requests, can also assist with core capacity-building activities in support of other existing border management information systems.

3. MIDAS, which is designed to meet the highest standards of personal data security, allows States to collect, process, store and analyse traveller information and share data in real time across an entire national border network and with other relevant national authorities active in border management (e.g. customs, health, phytosanitary agencies), as required. It enables them to monitor effectively those entering and exiting the national territory by land, air and sea. It also provides a sound statistical basis for migration and mobility data and thus supports policy planning for related national and regional priority-setting in the light of cross-border mobility and migration, including in the areas of trade or health. States have full and exclusive control over any data recorded by MIDAS. IOM develops and supports software enhancements, provides training on the use of the system and then hands it over to States; it does not run MIDAS or process any of the recorded data; it does not have the right to access, store or share the data, for example.

¹ Target 9.1: Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all. Target 10.7: Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

² Belize, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chad, Congo, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ecuador, the Gambia, Guinea, Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Marshall Islands, Niger, Nigeria, Paraguay, Somalia, South Sudan, Trinidad and Tobago and Uganda.

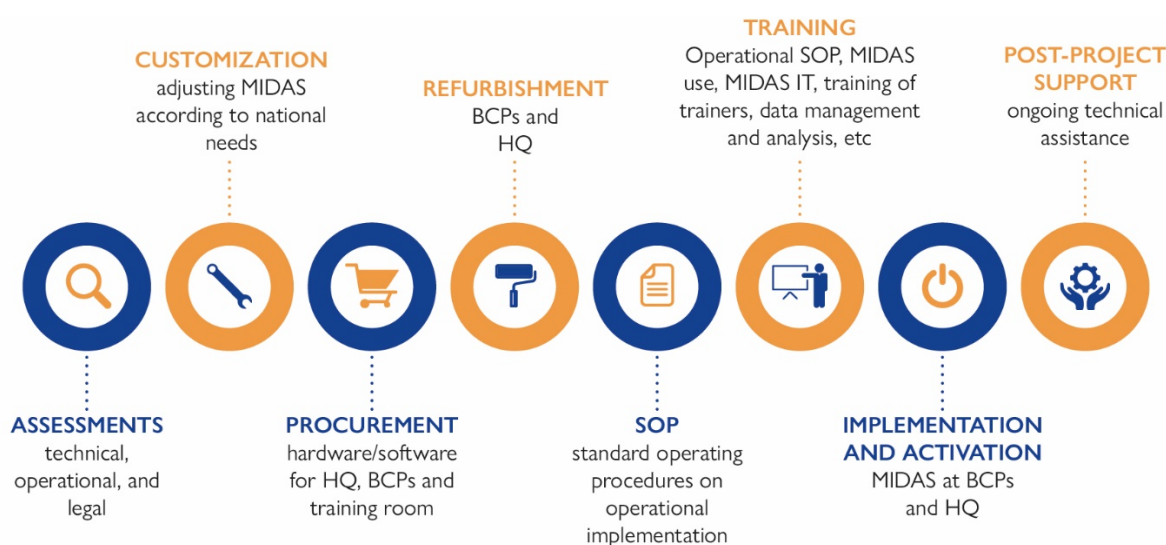
4. In addition to more effective immigration controls, the benefits of an automated border management information system such as MIDAS include the following: (a) improved beneficiary/customer service; (b) greater efficiency and productivity; (c) enhanced performance management through process tracking and reporting; and (d) broader scope for joint approaches to transnational organized crime, thanks to improved data-sharing between relevant agencies and – if the States concerned so decide – between countries, where appropriate and justified, and subject to relevant privacy requirements and applicable legislation.

MIDAS: supporting effective border management

5. IOM helps governments manage their borders and strike a balance between the need for security and the economic benefits of facilitating migration, business, trade and tourism. Within the United Nations, other IT solutions have been developed to help Member States perform border-related functions; examples are the UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA), an integrated customs management system for international trade and transport operations, and the goTravel³ system, a software solution owned by UNOCT (United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism) and implementing the end-to-end process to obtain advance passenger information. INTERPOL also has dedicated solutions, which are already interoperable with MIDAS. All support the efforts of interested States to adopt a more comprehensive and integrated, collaborative, and principled approach to border management.

6. All MIDAS activities are designed as partnerships with governments to identify needs, determine priority areas, and shape and deliver interventions. As part of the MIDAS project development and launch process, IOM reviews potential human rights issues, in line with the United Nations human rights due diligence process. Standard MIDAS implementation comprises the elements set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Standard elements of MIDAS implementation



7. In States using traveller identification and risk assessment continuously throughout a traveller's journey, an analysis of all relevant information can help inform decisions about whether cross-border travel should be allowed to start or continue. MIDAS helps States to curtail security risks

³ <https://www.un.org/cttravel/goTravel>.

by automatically checking all recorded entry and exit data against national and INTERPOL alert lists.⁴ Thanks to these features, MIDAS helps States to ensure that those attempting to cross the border do not pose a threat to national or international security, and to protect vulnerable persons, for example when it is used to locate missing children and adults. IOM is also promoting the analysis of larger, anonymized data sets by developing a government-owned and operated MIDAS Data Analysis Module to better visualize data for risk analysis and management purposes.

8. MIDAS currently allows States to create different reports according to the types of traveller data needed, such as country of origin, age, gender, travel purpose, presence on an alert list or visa overstay. Processing and analysing the data collected will enhance understanding of a country's migration dynamics and mobility patterns. Border data obtained through MIDAS, when combined with other forms of administrative data, are critically important for policymaking, not only in the area of migration, but also in terms of tourism, employment, trade, health and investment, to name but a few.

9. In addition, and as exemplified by the global COVID-19 pandemic, using MIDAS to check travellers against national health alert lists can be an efficient means of containing an outbreak without having to completely end all cross-border travel. IOM has developed a MIDAS health module which can collect health information at ports of entry, presenting an opportunity to digitally substitute paper-based passenger information sheets and support governments in their traveller referral, tracking and tracing efforts.⁵

10. MIDAS promotes full government ownership and long-term sustainability by providing companion capacity-building packages, ranging from MIDAS user and IT installation training, to data management and data protection, data and risk analysis, and travel document inspection training. To ensure transparency, IOM offers States the possibility to have full access to the MIDAS source code. To further ensure sustainability, coherence and efficiency, at the request of the State concerned, MIDAS can be interconnected with other border management information systems operational in the country, to facilitate the collection and real-time exchange of data between different border crossing points (BCPs), further enhancing consolidated data management to inform policymaking.

Future scope and priorities

11. MIDAS has evolved from a standard border management information system to an advanced one that can issue visas and print visa stickers, receive and process advance passenger information (API) in batch format, perform facial recognition, verify travellers against national ID databases, issue and extend residence permits and visas, and be linked to the MIDAS e-Visa system and MIDAS Foreigner Registration Module developed for migrant regularization purposes. In 2019, Mobile MIDAS Kits or MIDAS-equipped vehicles were used by the national immigration authorities in the Member States concerned to register travellers and migrants in even the harshest, most remote locations with no physical border infrastructure.

12. These developments are the result of constant innovation, quality control, compliance with international standards and system functionality upgrades in line with user demands as overseen by IOM's Immigration and Border Management Division. This centralized management ensures that the innovations required by one country can be replicated in different environments, and enables economies of scale, including regarding lessons learned.

⁴ Notably the INTERPOL Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD) and Travel Documents Associated with Notices (TDWAN) databases.

⁵ The MIDAS health module is currently being piloted in Jordan.

13. Overall, when combined with MIDAS expertise on the responsible use of biometrics in the context of border management and in line the IOM Strategic Vision for 2019–2023, especially the “mobility” pillar, this further confirms IOM’s role as an innovation leader and trusted partner for the use of digital technology to establish and verify identities, and to facilitate access to immigration and related services, while ensuring that migrants’ rights to privacy and data security are upheld.

14. The sustained growth of MIDAS requires further priority-setting in three distinct areas – partnerships, consolidation, and innovation – in terms of both focus and operating model.

15. **Partnerships.** IOM has explored connectivity with existing United Nations tools to assist Member States to enhance the efficiency of wider border management procedures. In July 2019, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between IOM and UNCTAD, with a view to promoting interoperability with their ASYCUDA system, an integrated customs management system for international trade and transport operations. The aim is to provide Member States with a new data exchange solution, enabling the combined use of the respective organizations’ customs and border management solutions.

16. Building on its extensive experience in rolling out complex IT systems such as MIDAS, IOM is also cooperating with UNOCT to explore how best MIDAS, as a receiver of passenger data, can support the efforts of the goTravel programme. It will be up to each Member State to decide whether to link the two.

17. **Consolidation.** A key priority for IOM is to enhance Member State capacity to absorb and maximize proper and responsible use of MIDAS. This entails building a technological platform that promotes work on policy, legal, operational and administrative frameworks supporting enhanced border management. The stated outcome is to promote complex and long-term programming in the field of capacity-building for migration management. This could include the provision of commercially neutral technical advice, capacity-building and technical assistance in areas such as civil registries; foundational document integrity and security strengthening; procurement tender management for travel documents; or assessment of national traveller identification management practices. As such, MIDAS can provide technical support for efforts in the area of legal identity and will be key for the operationalization of IOM’s forthcoming institutional strategy on legal identity, including through ongoing pilot projects supporting consular registration for identity registration and verification.

18. **Innovation (thematically).** As evidenced above, IOM has been constantly innovating when it comes to application of the MIDAS platform. Recognizing the importance of balancing facilitation of movement and security while ensuring the protection of persons in situations of vulnerability and personal data, and mindful of the call for enhanced regional integration in many parts of the world, IOM is now looking to enhance the facilitation element by supporting the promotion of free movement protocols. A current IOM initiative, supported by the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, is looking at enabling cross-border traders to use their phones to receive travel authorizations. If the pilot is successful, the next priority would be to replicate it in other parts of Africa or within interested regional economic communities.

19. **Innovation (operational model).** IOM’s projectized nature sometimes limits the scope of its support for Member States. The Organization is therefore exploring various ways of making MIDAS available to interested Member States, be it through public–private partnerships or by facilitating access to reimbursable funding of the kind provided by international financial institutions. This would allow it to better serve Member States interested in MIDAS solutions on a fee-recuperation basis, and has the added benefit of reinforcing State ownership of the system.

20. Looking forward, IOM will continue to offer neutral and independent border management advice and expertise to its Member States. The sharing of such expertise could be further promoted and maximized by setting up an informal and voluntary technical working group on border management. Such a group could be made up of experts from interested Member States and the United Nations entities concerned, with IOM serving as the secretariat. It would complement the work of other international working groups dealing with more specialized or regional aspects of identity or border management. The proposed working group could be a useful locus for States and organizations to help others share good practices and coordinate efforts when faced with emerging challenges, such as the careful reopening of borders following a pandemic.