

DOCUMENT EXAMINATION ISSUES AT BORDER CROSSING POINTS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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Abstract. *Document examinations conducted by the Latvian Border Guard Service at border crossing points are important for ensuring security and control of people crossing the state border. However, existing border check processes often face challenges such as traffic congestion, slow border check speeds, human errors, and the risk of document forgery. These issues can lead to delays, reduce the efficiency of border checks, and increase the risk of travelers with forgotten or illegal documents crossing the state border of the Republic of Latvia. This study aims to analyze the existing problems in document examination and identify possible solutions. The research used several methods, including analysis of documents and normative acts and interviews with experts who regularly conduct document examinations at border crossing points. The study's objectives are to examine current problems and challenges, collect and analyze experts' opinions concerning document examination.*

Keywords: *border checks, border crossing point, border guard, document examination.*

Introduction

Effective document examination at border crossing points is a crucial process for verifying the identity of travelers and ensuring compliance with entry and exit requirements. This process includes checking and verifying various documents, such as passports, visas, residence permits, and other travel-related documents. Document examination is necessary to ensure national security, and prevent illegal immigration, criminal activity, and other risks. Therefore, the process must be efficient and thorough. However, modern examination methods face several problems, including long queues, human error, and the use of forged travel documents. This paper reviews the main issues related to document examination and suggests possible solutions to improve its efficiency.

The Document Examination Procedure at Border Crossing Points

Border checks are the checks carried out at border crossing points to ensure that persons, including their means of transport and the objects in



their possession, may be authorized to enter the territory of the Member States or to leave it (Schengen Borders Code, 2016).

Border check procedures at border crossing points are primarily carried out by border guards to ensure that individuals crossing the border meet the entry requirements for the Schengen area. The document examination procedure at border crossing points may vary depending on the country and its established rules and requirements. However, in general, the document examination process includes the following key steps:

1. **Presentation of Documents to the Border Guard:** The traveler must present their set of travel documents to the border guards. This is usually a passport, identity card, visa, residence permit, or other documents that meet the entry or exit requirements.
2. **Document Check:** Border guards conduct a careful inspection of documents to ensure that they are authentic and compliant. This includes a visual check that evaluates the physical features of the documents, such as holograms, security features, ink, and paper quality. In addition, technical equipment, such as scanning devices, may be used to verify biometric data or other security features.
3. **Traveler Identity Verification:** Border guards verify the identity of the traveler to ensure that the person is who he or she claims to be. This may include facial recognition, fingerprint scanning, or other biometric identification methods to compare the traveler's data with the information recorded in the documents.
4. **Data Verification and Information Exchange:** Border guards check the traveler's data against databases and information systems to ensure compliance and mitigate any risks. This includes verifying whether the traveler is on a watch list, whether alerts or arrest warrants have been issued, and whether the traveler is linked to criminal activity or terrorism.
5. **Decision Making:** After checking the documents and data, border guards decide whether the travelers should enter or leave the state. If the travel documents are authentic and the person meets the requirements, they are allowed to cross the border. If there are suspicions about the authenticity of the travel documents (e.g., forgery) or other violations, border guards may carry out second-line check. Second-line checks are further checks that may be carried out in a special location away from the place where all persons are checked (Practical Handbook for Border Guards (Schengen Handbook), 2022).

In general, the document examination procedure at border crossing points includes the presentation of travel documents, their verification, traveler identification, data verification, and the decision to cross the state

border. This procedure is carried out to ensure national security and prevent illegal immigration, criminal activities, and other risks. To provide effective and thorough document examination, border guards must be trained and competent in detecting forged documents.

Issues in Document Examination and Potential Solutions

Document examination at border crossing points is a critical security measure needed to protect national borders and regulate the flow of people. Despite its importance, this process presents serious challenges. First of all, there is a constant risk of encountering improperly executed or forged documents. Secondly, modern examination technologies often have shortcomings, such as the lack of accuracy and reliability in scanning and recognition systems. Third, the high number of travelers places a significant strain on the examination infrastructure, complicating document processing and increasing the likelihood of errors. In addition, fatigue of staff working under constant stress (pressure) can undermine their alertness and efficiency, further impacting the accuracy of document examination.

This section analyzes the problems related to document examination problems that exist in different units of the State Border Guard's border control.

According to the explanation provided in the scientific literature, a survey is a method of collecting preliminary information that involves asking the research subjects oral or written questions related to the empirical level of the research problem, as well as statistically processing the obtained answers.

The survey method is recognized as one of the most effective ways to gather various types of information – about what people think, their preferences, needs, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions.

The authors examine the responses of officials from the State Border Guard's border control units to questions related to document examination issues and explore potential solutions to these problems.

A total of 100 respondents from various border control units were interviewed to investigate issues related to document examination and identify potential solutions.

Within the scope of the study, officials from the State Border Guard were asked the following questions, which were subsequently compiled:

1. Does your unit face issues related to document examination?
2. Can you describe the specific challenges you face during document examination?
3. What improvements would you recommend to enhance the quality of document examination?

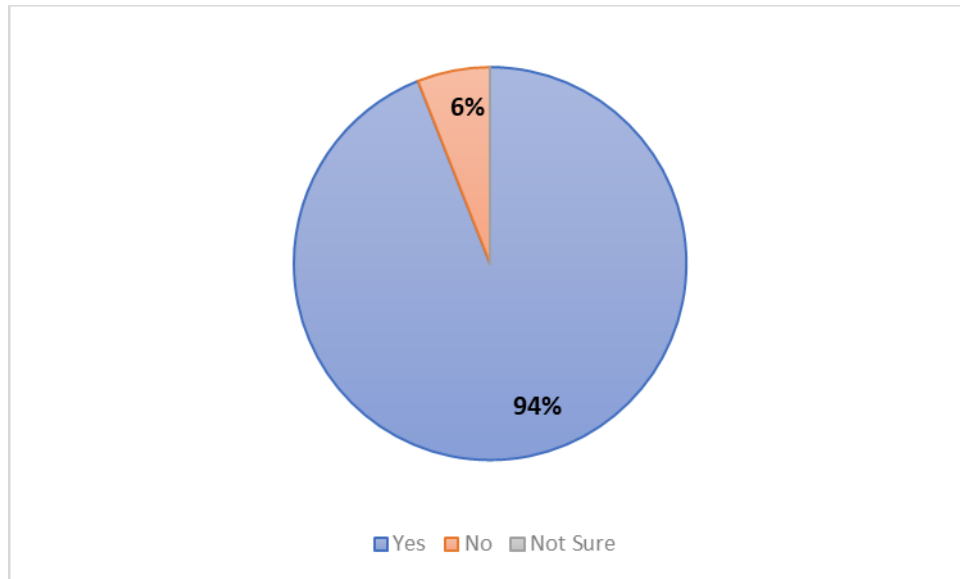


Fig.1 Does your unit face issues related to document examination?
(compiled by authors)

The survey conducted on potential problems with document examination in border control units provides insights into the staff's experiences and opinions regarding these issues.

The survey results indicate that a significant portion of respondents have encountered issues related to document examination. 94% of respondents acknowledged that there are certain complications, suggesting that the document examination process is not entirely straightforward and efficient. Meanwhile, 6% of respondents indicated that the problems are either negligible or minimal.

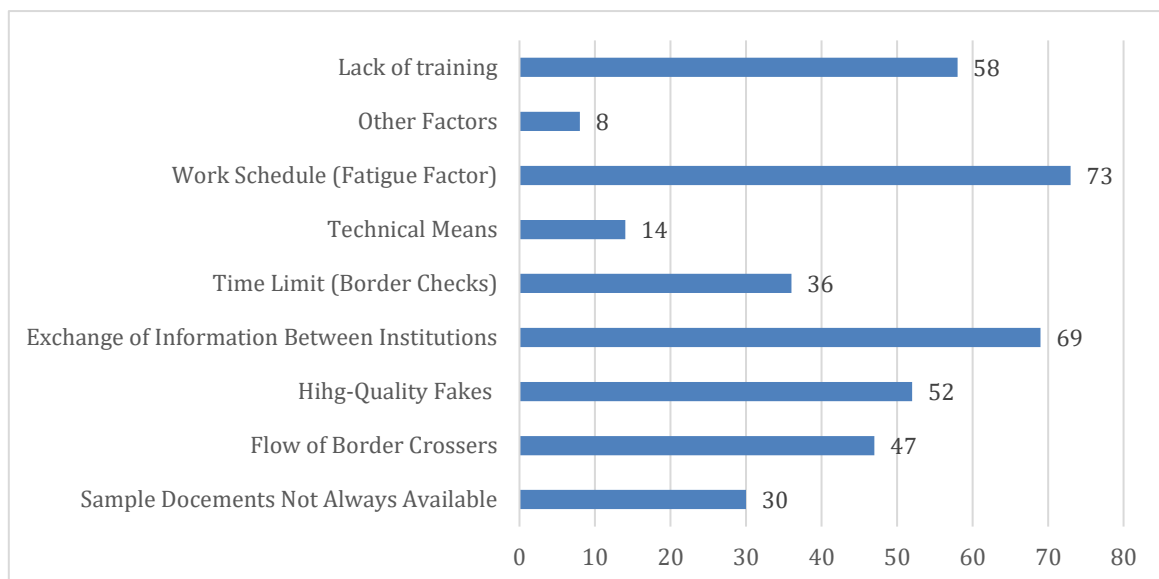


Fig.2 Can you describe the specific challenges you face during document examination? (compiled by authors)

Respondents' answers highlighted several significant challenges during document examination, which can be categorized into different groups. The percentage distribution indicates the extent to which each issue was recognized as significant by the respondents.

Key Issues:

1. **Work Schedule (Fatigue Factor):** 73% of respondents identified fatigue due to work schedules as a major issue impacting the quality of document examination. This indicates that overwork and exhaustion can negatively affect the accuracy and thoroughness of the examination process.
2. **Information Exchange Between Institutions:** 69% of respondents cited insufficient information exchange as a key problem. This suggests fragmented communication or a lack of collaboration between different institutions, which hinders effective document examination.
3. **Lack of Training:** 58% of respondents emphasized the need for better training, indicating that staff felt they lacked the knowledge or skills to effectively detect forgery or other violations.
4. **High-Quality Fakes:** 52% of respondents recognized that they face difficulties in identifying high-quality forgeries. This indicates that advances in forgery technology are creating significant challenges on the document examination process.

Medium - Level Issues:

1. **Flow of Border Crossers:** 47% of respondents identified the high volume of border crossers as a serious problem. This suggests that processes need to be improved to better manage the high volume of work.
2. **Time Constraints for Inspections:** 36% of respondents noted a lack of time during document examination. This suggests that the limited time for border checks can negatively affect the quality of the travel document verification process.

Less Common Issues:

1. **Lack of Updated Document Samples:** 30% of respondents indicated that updated document samples are not always available, which could hinder their ability to identify forgeries.
2. **Technical Equipment:** 14% of respondents pointed out a lack of technical equipment. While this is an important factor, it is not considered as widespread a problem as others.

3. **Other Factors:** 8% of respondents mentioned other issues not specifically covered in the aforementioned categories.

Overall, it can be concluded that the main issues faced by State Border Guard officials are related to human resource management (fatigue and work schedules), inter-agency collaboration and information exchange, as well as employee training and technological support. Potential solutions could include better management of employee workloads, improved collaboration between institutions, more frequent and intensive training, and enhancements in technical resources.

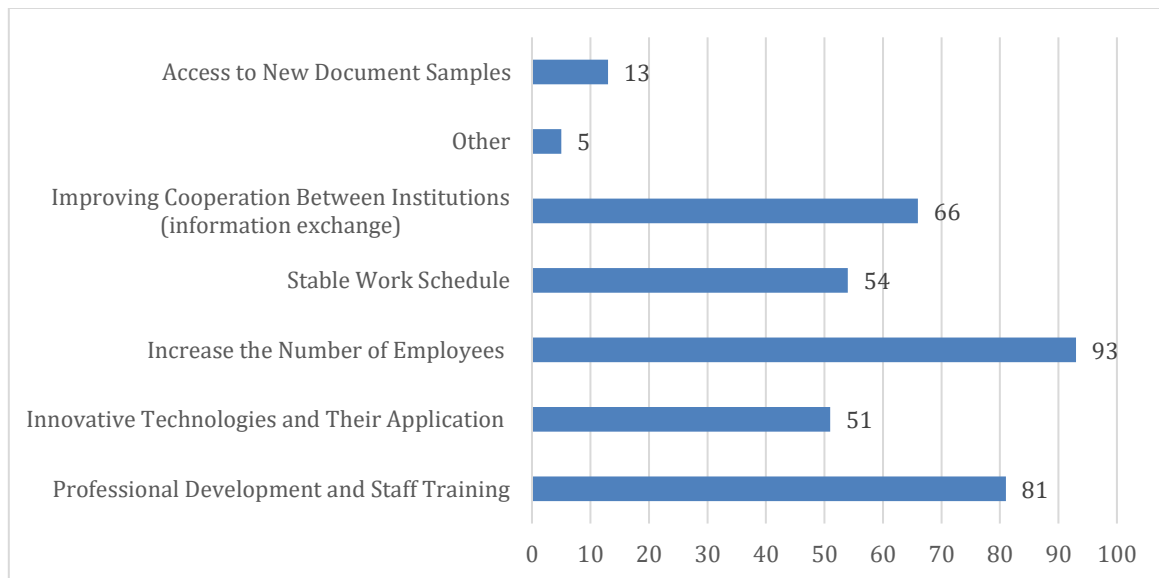


Fig.3 What improvements would you recommend to enhance the quality of document examination? (compiled by authors)

93% of respondents believe that additional staff could significantly enhance the document examination process by reducing workload and improving efficiency.

Meanwhile, 81% of respondents consider that training and professional development opportunities are crucial for improving the quality of document verification.

51% of respondents recommend using modern technologies to improve the efficiency of border check procedures, including technical equipment, databases, and digital verification systems.

66% believe that improved cooperation between institutions could expedite information exchange and enhance the document examination process.

54% of respondents believe that a stable work schedule could help improve the efficiency of document examination.

13% of respondents believe that access to new versions of document samples could be beneficial.

5% of respondents proposed other solutions that were not detailed.

Overall, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents believe the document examination process could be significantly improved by increasing personnel resources and enhancing training. The use of modern technologies, improved inter-institutional cooperation, and a stable work schedule are viewed as key factors that could boost efficiency.

Conclusions and suggestions

The study clarified the essence of the topic, identified the main aspects, and provided recommendations for border control unit officials to enhance the effectiveness of document examination. As a result, the following conclusions and suggestions were developed:

1. Optimize the number of staff performing border control functions to increase the efficiency of border check processes, thereby reducing fatigue and improving the quality and efficiency of the service.
2. Regularly update and replenish the State Border Guard's electronic resources with the latest document samples from other countries, thus ensuring a higher quality of document examination.
3. Regularly train the staff on the latest trends in document forgery to ensure a more efficient border check process.
4. Improve the information exchange mechanism between institutions to facilitate faster decision-making during the document examination process.
5. Continue developing technical support for border check processes (e.g., automated inspection systems, biometric data usage systems, artificial intelligence) to enhance efficiency, accuracy, quality, and speed in the document examination process.

It may be noted that the European Traveler Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) is planned to be implemented shortly, which will provide opportunities to improve border check procedures. This system will allow the analysis of traveler data, which will help to identify potential risks and violations even before entering the country.

The aim of ETIAS is not only to speed up the border check procedures but also to improve security by ensuring that all necessary data is verified at the state border. This will lead to a more efficient and faster border check procedure, which will help to reduce the number of illegal entries into the country.

The implementation of the aforementioned recommendations will significantly improve the quality and efficiency of border control units, ensuring more reliable monitoring of state border crossings. The use of modern technologies, combined with continuous staff training, will accelerate and enhance the accuracy of document examination, minimizing the risks of forgery. Standardizing procedures and strengthening interagency cooperation will also contribute to more coordinated and effective work among all entities responsible for border checks, ultimately leading to enhanced national security and stability.

According to the authors, the implementation of these recommendations will be a key step toward improving border checks and ensuring a higher level of security.

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