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Ramesh Ramakrishnan
VP Delivery,
Secure Government
Services
Mastek



Rashi Malhotra
Sr. Account Manager
Secure Government
Services
Mastek

Tackling Irregular Migration, helped through Digital Transformation

Irregular Migration, the movement of people outside the regulatory norms of formal border entry processes, is a key focus area for the UK's Home Office, particularly in light of the increase in small boat arrivals in recent years. The Asylum system costs the UK taxpayer over £1 billion (FY '20 –'21) (Home Office, 2022), the highest amount in over two decades, with almost £5m a day to house asylum seekers in suitable accommodation, with an average wait time of 449 days to process an asylum claim ¹(Campbell, 2022).

Significant work has been done in transforming Immigration caseworking from its legacy IT platforms to the next-generation ATLAS Caseworking system over the last few years. The transformational objective is to build a resilient immigration platform that provides the capability to process applications far more efficiently throughout their end-to-end journey. It is now necessary to enable an overall reliable “person-centric” view and

seamless handovers to other parts of the immigration operations. Most importantly, it is a digital caseworking journey that does not require paper files and uses technology to realise the end-to-end integration of vital data and automation of tasks wherever possible.

The transformation of the caseworking system and migration of the legacy platform significantly improve the end-to-end workflow of the UK's Asylum system by digitising the application forms, introducing automation to improve accuracy whilst reducing manual errors and expediting the resolution of the Asylum case backlog.

This article highlights some of the critical areas that Mastek focused on during the transformation journey and our approach to delivering business outcomes for the department.

Mastek (hereafter referred to as the Transformation team) supports the Home Office's journey to digitally transform the Caseworking system

and how Asylum and other irregular migration products are designed and managed. We are building efficiency in the business by streamlining Asylum processes, integrating Asylum workflows and aggregating capability from disjointed systems into one integrated system, ensuring enhanced user experience.

Managing Asylum applications, including providing accommodation and payment support, covers some of the most operationally and legally complex and sensitive policies of the Home Office. The government and the department adhere to the international obligations to Asylum seekers and recognise refugees under the UNHCR's 1951 convention and 1967 protocol. ²(UNHCR, n.d.)

Our work in transforming Irregular Migration products is helping the Home Office transform services for various front-line business units such as UK Visas and Immigration, Asylum and Complex Human Rights Caseworking

¹ Campbell, C., 2022. BBC NEWS. [Online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-62266259>

² UNHCR, n.d. The 1951 Refugee Convention. [Online] Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/1951-refugee-convention.html>

TACKLING IRREGULAR MIGRATION

and Immigration Enforcement.

Working in collaboration with the Home Office, we applied the following approaches to transform the Irregular Migration products and usage by the Home Office users:

- 1. Digitisation of the workflows**
– The complex workflows experienced across the systems, involved many paper-based forms that get completed during the Asylum seekers' journey through the application process. Such paper-based forms required

significant manual intervention and inevitably introduced delays in case processing time. As a first step in the transformation journey, we identified the paper forms used in the end-to-end workflows and digitised them. As part of the digitisation, we also transformed these forms to capture structured data, enabling improved processing time and resulting in operational efficiencies and future analytics on such data

- 2. Driving automation at every opportunity** – While building and transforming capabilities, we reviewed the existing business processes to identify automation opportunities. Irregular Migration operates in a dynamic environment catering to diverse stakeholder communities and managing their priorities. There is an inherent need to deliver capabilities on time with great accuracy. In such situations, increasing automation in every



instance possible helps expedite the turnaround time to deliver such capabilities

One such example was the usage of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) tools to automate when there was a need to reconcile an extensive data set in a short time. During the supplier transition of the accommodations and

payments provider for Asylum seekers, there was an urgent need to reconcile tens of thousands of records, ensuring accuracy while delivering them within a tight deadline. The transformation team introduced an RPA solution to make the change and reconcile the data with higher accuracy enabling a seamless transfer

- 3. Innovate to deliver efficient business outcomes** – Our approach to innovation is to create new assets and capabilities and significantly uplift existing ones that primarily deliver tangible and measurable outcomes. We use data-driven matrices to prioritise innovation of records to the new provider before the deadline.

candidates to suit an imminent opportunity or obstacle at hand or take a long-term view. The transformation team's Innovation Board meets quarterly, assessing innovation candidates against business and culture matrices, creating a scorecard of impact and then prioritising the ones to work on that deliver maximum business benefits/added value.

We had a situation where our business stakeholders experienced a high turnaround time for creating working prototypes for policy sign-offs during product implementation. To solve this problem, we created a drag and drop configuration tool, providing a user-friendly interactive visualisation with an edit capability to configure new and existing products in an expedited manner. The tool resulted in significant cost saving for the department for creating rapid prototypes in the Caseworking system (saving £1 million+), receiving expedited feedback from the policy and the business community and improving the GO TO market time (8x faster deliveries) for these products.

4. **Build resilience to deliver amidst uncertainties** – Complex products coupled with a dynamic stakeholder landscape require flexibility for our transformation team to respond quickly and embrace change with a positive mindset. We engaged with the product management team and the relevant stakeholders during the planning stages and recognised the uncertainties early in the planning cycle. The team keeps well-informed of

impending legislative or judiciary decisions and prepares to accommodate these last-minute high-priority asks. Our ability to course-correct and reprioritise helped us to deliver critical ministerial priorities in the Irregular Migration domain.

5. **Responding to Policy reforms** – With immigration and Asylum policy a key priority for the UK government, the transformation team's primary role is to respond to these policy changes rapidly and build a system that caters to the demands of regulatory and policy changes periodically. Mastek's transformation team recently implemented the Nationality and Borders Act-related New Plan for Immigration (NPI) policy change. The objectives of the NPI policy reform are i) to increase the fairness and efficacy of our system to protect and support people in genuine need of Asylum, ii) to deter illegal entry into the UK, thereby breaking the business model of people smuggling, and encouraging Asylum via a safe and legal route and iii) remove more easily from the UK those with no rights to be here. ³(Home Office, 2022)

The NPI policy reform received Royal Assent towards the end of April ⁴(UK Parliament, n.d.), and the transformation team was ready to implement the policy change within two months. During the policy implementation, we engaged with several stakeholder communities across the business and policy operation areas, tested solutions, and prepared the training materials to improve user adoption

resulting in the successful implementation of the NPI policy in the system.

The transformation we have embarked on with the Home Office to digitise and optimise the business workflows for Asylum products is a journey. The lessons learnt throughout the transformation will be iterated and improved upon to deliver continuous improvement capabilities faster, accurately and cost-efficiently.

We intend to co-create effective products and platforms with the Home Office, which enable the delivery of the complex Asylum Policy with confidence.

Ramesh Ramakrishnan is a Senior Leader in Mastek, delivering digital transformation programs of Critical National Importance with an in-depth understanding of immigration, borders and biometrics. He joined Mastek in Aug 2017 to lead their digital transformation portfolio in the Home Office.

Rashi Malhotra is a Senior Account Manager in Secure Government Services at Mastek, with 15+ years of experience in Client Management, Business Development, Presales and Bid Management. She is responsible for supporting business growth and delivering innovation to customers.

³ Home Office, 2022. GOV.UK. [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration/new-plan-for-immigration-policy-statement-accessible>

⁴ UK Parliament, n.d. Nationality and Borders Act 2022. [Online] Available at: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3023/news>