

COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY

The use of computer technology at the Agency to store and process information is becoming more and more widespread. The nominal data relating to current conflicts is now generally computerised.

The Agency introduced computers in 1980, and the first major operation using data processing was the construction of a fully computerised card index containing over 600,000 names of Indo-Chinese refugees.

The computers now carry out operations that were previously tedious and time-consuming to do by hand, such as the selection of particular groups of people and the drawing up of lists.

It is however nothing more than a tool, a highly technical instrument, to match information.

The implementation of data processing uncovered two main problems not faced by other computer users: the Agency's field of activity – helping the victims of unexpected or volatile international events – means that general planning is highly hazardous. The Agency therefore has no means of predicting volumes of information to be processed.

Another problem is that the data to be processed sometimes come from hazardous sources or with wrongly spelt names, meaning that some of the information must be treated as unreliable. Add to this the fact that the Agency's work is often carried out at times when no efficient civil administration exists, and the information handled covers different linguistic and semantic systems.

To solve this "unreliability" problem the Agency opted for a "relational" data base computer. One computer application has been developed, that meets the long-term needs of the Agency, with variable capacity and working on the extended logical linking of basic information, rather than the precise results required, for example, for financial calculations.

