The Immigration Program is another Post activity to which the application of modern computer based methods has been applied to produce increased effectiveness in programme delivery and substantial resource savings. A software package has been developed called IRIS (Interactive Record Indexing System) that is already in use in London and Paris for the Immigration Program and will also be employed in Bonn. In a major new development the Department will be proceeeding with a prototype project in Hong Kong. The study recommending the prototype identified substantial potential financial and personnel savings for the Post from the introduction of the prototype and identified potential savings at other Posts where similar installations have been proposed.

The Consulate-General in New York was selected as the site for a pilot to assess the impact of office automation equipment on the effectiveness and efficiency of foreign service officers and support staff. The MITEL KONTACT was selected, and equipment was installed in April 1984. The first assessment, completed in September 1984, showed that many of the group were adapting to the technology, and some had developed innovative and creative applications for use in their programs, while a few were not making much effort to exploit the capabilities of the system.

Two other posts, Prague and Amman, are involved in smaller pilots involving automation of a number of post programs. The project in Prague is still in the acquisition stage. The project in Amman is modest, and it is not expected that it will be able to meet all of the post's requirements. When the Consulate-General in Munich was opened in the Spring of 1983, it was equipped with modern office automation equipment produced in Canada, in order that, among other things, the post could serve as a showcase to demonstrate Canadian office systems to potential European buyers. CIDA intends to automate a number of processes relating to aid administration, and initially four posts (Dar-es-Salaam, Kinshasa, Bridgetown and Bangkok) have been selected. This equipment will also be available to support other post programs.

Word processing capability is now available at some 60 Posts.

4.5.4 CONSIDERATIONS

There is no doubt that the the Department will continue to operate in conditions of financial restraint during the rest of the decade. The wider use of Informatics, therefore, offers a way of processing an increased workload with little or no increase in personnel resources and, in some cases, of improving Posts' efficiency while lowering costs. This approach is more attractive in light of the already high and growing cost of deploying personnel abroad. (A program PY costs approximately 3 times more at a Post abroad than it does at Headquarters). However, although the acquisition costs of computer hardware may be falling, there are related items such as customized software, training, support, maintenance and building modifications that can be expensive and have to be approached with care to ensure that efficient use is made of the resources available. In the case of Posts, this will require strong emphasis on standardization to keep down costs for training, maintenance, and software development.

All Posts have a number of common tasks that could be performed more efficiently with the assistance of EDP systems. Several have taken the initiative to use existing technology (usually word processors) to automate a number of routine tasks.

There is much more that can be done. Among the unclassified tasks that could be automated are:

- maintenance and retrieval of information about Canadian business and other organizations,