

How use of biometric data prevents irregular migration to Ukraine



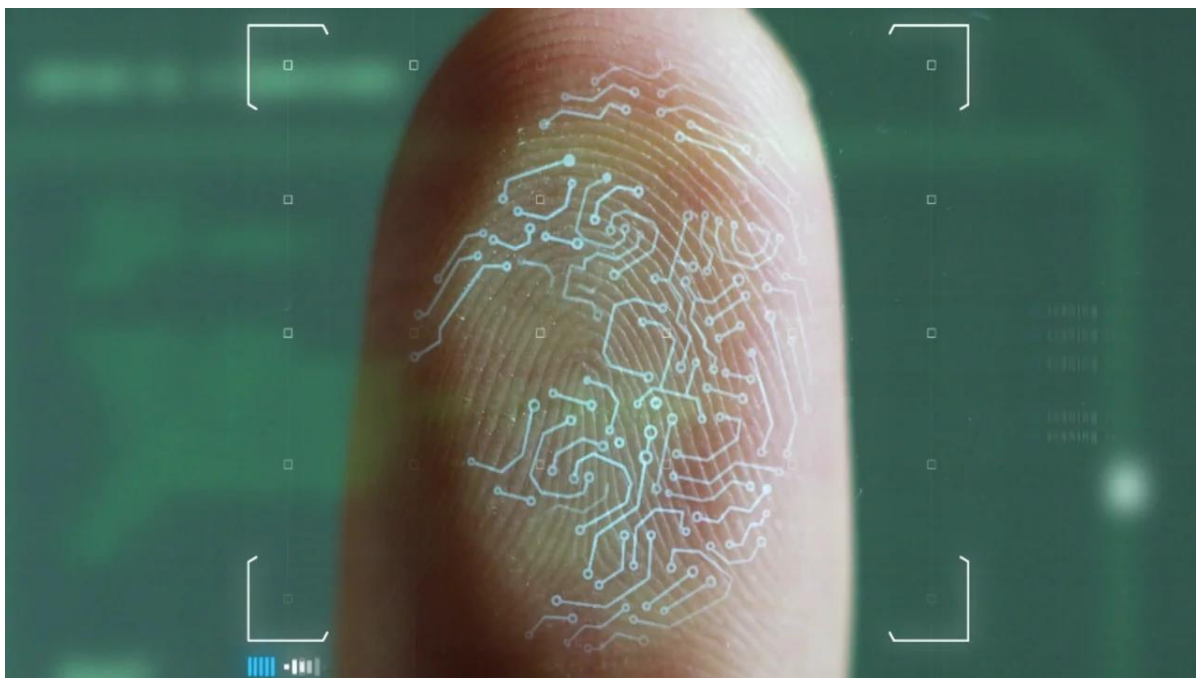
To cross the border in an irregular manner, offenders can employ a range of methods including changing appearance, changing official details in the passport or using a passport belonging to someone else. Modern biometric matching systems assist in reducing the scope for deception.

Find out what biometric data is and how Ukrainian government agencies use it to address irregular migration. The article is prepared within the project "Support for Migration and Asylum Management in Ukraine" (IMMIS) funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

What is biometric data?

Biometric data (parameters) refer to the unique physical traits of a person that make it possible to identify them. These include fingerprints, facial features, iris and retina, voice, etc. What is important - biometric data do not change throughout life and it is almost impossible to forge them or transfer them to others, unlike keys or passwords.

Although the term "biometrics" (comes from the Greek and means "to measure life") appeared about 130 years ago, the earliest evidence of the use of biometric data is dated as far back as nearly three thousand years ago. It is known that with the help of palmprints and fingerprints, the authenticity of documents was attested and criminals were identified even in ancient China and Babylon.



European scientists began to study fingerprints at the end of the 16th century: in 1686, Italian anatomist Marcello Malpighi first saw papillary patterns through a microscope. A hundred years later, German professor Johann Christoph Andreas Meyer discovered that everyone has unique papillary ridges. Subsequently, a classification system for fingerprints was developed, allowing them to be used in forensic science.

How is biometric data used today?

Thanks to biometrics, life has become much easier and safer. Laptops, smartphones and other gadgets instantly recognize their owners by fingerprints or facial features. Biometric technologies also control access to important premises, keep track of working hours, allow transferring money and paying for purchased goods.

Most importantly, biometric identification helps prevent fraud. After all, the availability of only alphanumeric information (last name, first name, patronymic, date of birth) and of a photo of a face in the databases allows fraudsters to use other people's documents to open bank accounts, take loans, etc.

In almost all developed countries, biometric data is used to manage migration. In particular, such EU information systems as SIS (Schengen Information System), VIS (Visa Information System), EURODAC (EU's asylum fingerprint database) are founded on biometric data. The use of biometric passports is also the main condition for visa-free regimes between different countries.

To apply the best international practices, since the end of 2016, the European Union has been implementing the IMMIS project in Ukraine with a total budget of EUR 27.2 million. The project significantly expanded the technical capabilities of government agencies, involved in migration and border management, to collect and process the biometric data of foreigners and stateless persons.

How is the biometric data of foreigners collected?

Government authorities that are involved in the migration management in Ukraine mainly use fingerprints and digitized facial images. The fingerprints are recorded with a special biometric scanner. The scanned image turns into a template (in fact, it is a digital code) and is stored in the system in this way. A photo of the face is taken, and then, using software, the contours of the eyes, eyebrows, nose and lips are selected in the picture and the distances between them are calculated. Based on this data, an image is built. It is also converted into a digital code for comparison.

Starting from 2018, foreigners from 70 migration risk countries, are required to be fingerprinted during border control at checkpoints across the state border of Ukraine. The rest of the foreigners have their fingerprints taken only when more careful check is required (the so-called "second line check").



Heads of states and government of foreign countries, members of parliamentary and government delegations, persons under 18, cruise tourists, crew members of carriers, diplomatic personnel, officials of international institutions are exempt from the requirement to give biometric data.

In addition, biometric data are recorded by the State Migration Service when a temporary or permanent residence permit is granted to foreigners and stateless persons. Foreigners, who obtain an official permit to stay or reside in Ukraine, now receive protected plastic cards with an electronic chip, which stores their digitized photo, fingerprints and the owner's signature.

When the law adopted in March 2021 comes into force, foreigners and stateless persons will also submit biometric data (fingerprints) when applying for visas to enter Ukraine. This

enhanced check will make it impossible to manipulate identity: if an applicant is denied a visa to Ukraine for certain reasons, they will no longer be able to try their luck again by submitting documents issued in a new name.



Where is foreigners' biometric data stored and how is it used?

In 2018, the National System for Biometric Verification and Identification of Ukrainian Citizens, Foreigners and Stateless Persons was launched. The State Migration Service of Ukraine administers the system. The State Border Guard Service collects biometric data at border crossing points and accumulates them in its own system.

Within the framework of the IMMIS project, the EU has financed the improvement of the National Biometric Verification and Identification System, so that authorized government bodies, if necessary and within their authority, are able to compare the digital codes (templates) of fingerprints and the image of the face stored in the system with fingerprints and the image of the face of a person. The updated system meets international standards and will be used as soon as the required legislation is passed in Ukraine.

Cross-checking of biometric data at all stages of the migration process ensures accurate identification of a person and, in particular, prevents persons who are on the Ukrainian or international wanted lists from crossing the Ukrainian border, including the cases when the forged documents are used.

For example, if employees of consular offices of Ukraine record the foreigner's fingerprints at the consulate when processing an application for a visa, then the biometric data of this person will be checked when they are crossing the border, and it will be checked again if/when they apply for a residence permit in Ukraine. Thus, at each stage, employees of Ukrainian government

bodies can make sure that they are dealing with the same person who received the visa to enter Ukraine.

Is biometric data stored securely?

There is no reason to be concerned about illegal use of biometric data. The set of numbers that is stored cannot be printed and somehow used.

All IT solutions implemented with the support of the EU and IOM are developed based on the principle of reliable protection of personal data. Only relevant officials have access to the information. The list of data that can be provided under enquiries is clearly defined by technical regulations. With the help of an electronic digital signature, the systems keep records of all enquiries, and this makes fraud and abuse of authority impossible.

Data also cannot disappear. The EU has invested heavily in backing up all electronic data of Ukrainians and foreigners processed by the State Migration Service and the State Border Guard Service.

Find out how many foreigners visit Ukraine annually, as well as how innovations have improved the work of government agencies that interact with foreigners, following the link (the first article link).

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