

Biometric ID

The US is introducing compulsory photographing and fingerprinting at its airports for many business visitors and tourists. Will this help security? What happens to the data?

1 Have you experienced any of the following ways of identifying somebody for security purposes? Which do you feel is the most / least effective? Discuss your answers with a partner.

photograph thumb print voice pattern fingerprinting
passwords iris scanning signature

2 Work in two groups, A and B. Group A makes a list of the arguments in article 1 and group B makes a list of the arguments in article 2. Now work with a student from the other group and compare lists.

(1) Farewell freedom From October most of us wishing to go to the States will be photographed and fingerprinted, before being checked against a list of terrorist suspects and criminals. Our details will be stored on a database. What now? I already need a machine-readable passport – the next step is a ‘smart’ passport, one that contains biometric details like a fingerprint or an iris scan. The European Union has already authorised airlines to give passenger information to US security services in advance – home and e-mail address and credit card details.

The UK is ready to pilot biometric ID cards, but these are not 100% reliable in confirming identity. Such cards will not help reduce illegal immigration, as employers who are willing to break the law will simply continue to hire workers illegally. Few terrorists use false identification anyway. The government will create a national database of sensitive personal information such as medical records. Who has access to this information? ID cards are an infringement of my personal freedom.

(2) A secure future Given the rise in terrorism, I have no problem being photographed or fingerprinted when I go to the States. 9/11 changed everything. Plans to store biometric data about an individual simply ensures that people are who they say they are. It will mean that stolen passports cannot be re-used by criminals. By next summer, iris-scanning technology as a means of identification will be in use at UK airports. The technique is already being used at Amsterdam’s Schiphol and Canadian airports.

Plans to introduce biometric ID cards in the UK are welcome; they will be essential in the fight against identity fraud. In my own company, we have tightened security and all visitors now need to produce identification. Employers have a secure way of knowing if people are actually allowed to work. Social security, tax codes – everything will be in one ID card. This, in my view, will reduce crime and make the world a safer place.

3 Match the following words to make collocations taken from the articles. Can you make other collocations?

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| (a) biometric | (1) immigration |
| (b) false | (2) records |
| (c) personal | (3) identification |
| (d) identity | (4) ID cards |
| (e) illegal | (5) information |
| (f) national | (6) fraud |
| (g) medical | (7) database |

4 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- (a) Describe the security measures for visitors in your company. Are they adequate, or should they be reviewed?
- (b) Should personal information be stored on a national database? Why / why not?
- (c) Will your country introduce biometric passports / ID cards? Do you think this is a good development?