

## **DETAILS ABOUT THE BIOMETRIC SYSTEM**

The British Biometric Visas and Passports technology Programme will increase the integrity of the immigration process by fixing the identity of visa applicants and make a crucial contribution to the fight against international terrorism and organised crime.

Fingerscan technology is being increasingly widely used in the commercial world. Uses include: access control to buildings; replacing access passwords on computer systems and banks are using finger-scan identification for deposit box holders and numbered accounts.

It is hoped that this technology will also help to simplify passenger travel: the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates and Hong Kong are planning a trial project to establish the feasibility of single biometric enrolment in one country, for use many times and in different countries. This would help speed trusted and frequent travellers through immigration in countries participating in any eventual scheme.

The United Kingdom ran a successful biometric visa pilot operation in 11 countries, to prove and test the finger-scan matching systems, The countries involved were: Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, The Netherlands, Vietnam, and Democratic Republic of Congo. Embassies collected finger scans and matches against previous asylum and visa applications were confirmed by computer connection within 48 hours. This processing time has now been reduced to 30 minutes.

Results from the pilot countries were positive and statistics demonstrated that immigration officials were able to identify 1128 previous asylum applicants applying for visas and 832 visa applicants who subsequently claimed asylum on arrival in the UK.

The Biometric Visa Programme is, however, not aimed at preventing asylum seekers from getting to the United Kingdom, but about supporting the UK's asylum and immigration strategy, providing secure and integrated border controls and protecting the identity of genuine travellers.

Should someone apply for entry clearance and provide biometric information, this would have no bearing on any subsequent application for asylum. Asylum applications will continue to be considered in accordance with Britain's international obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.