

Biometric passports: no fingerprinting of under-twelves

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Children under twelve should no longer have their fingerprints included on passports issued in the European Union, the EP Civil Liberties Committee agreed in a co-decision report adopted on Monday. But they should have their own passports, containing data on their parents, so as to combat trafficking in children, say MEPs.

The committee was voting on plans to amend a 2004 regulation laying down biometric features to be included in passports and other travel documents, including the holder's fingerprints.

Experience has shown that children's fingerprints are not of sufficient quality, especially those of the youngest children, which can change greatly as they grow older. In its draft text, the European Commission therefore suggested an exemption for children under twelve. A similar exemption was agreed for people deemed physically unable to give fingerprints.

Fighting child trafficking

To combat trafficking in children, the draft legislation proposes introducing the principle "one person, one passport": until now a passport issued to a parent has often also covered the children by adding their names - but the microchip contains only the parent's biometric data.

The co-decision report by Carlos Coelho (EPP-ED, PT), adopted unanimously by the Civil Liberties Committee today, supports the Commission text with a few changes. A number of compromise amendments, negotiated with the Council, state that passports issued to minors must include a special heading showing the name of the parents. In addition, if a child is to be allowed travel outside the EU with a person other than the one mentioned on its passport, that person must provide written authorisation.

The cost of issuing a passport for a minor, valid for five years, should be no more than 50% of the cost of an adult passport, say MEPs.

Strengthening data protection

The Civil Liberties Committee also voted to limit access to biometric data to the authorities responsible for issuing and controlling passports. They banned any transfer of the data to other authorities or to third countries. Moreover, the data may only be stored on the passport and not in a database.

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