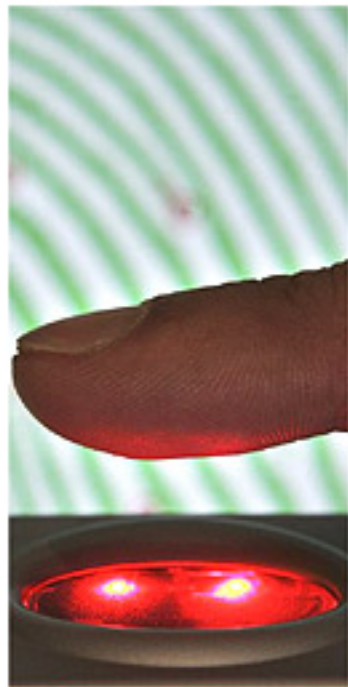


Millions of children to be fingerprinted

Jamie Doward, home affairs editor

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A portable fingerprint scanner on display. Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty

British children, possibly as young as six, will be subjected to compulsory fingerprinting under European Union rules being drawn up in secret. The prints will be stored on a database which could be shared with countries around the world.

The prospect has alarmed civil liberties groups who fear it represents a 'sea change' in the state's relationship with children and one that may lead to juveniles being erroneously accused of crimes. Under laws being drawn up behind closed doors by the European Commission's 'Article Six' committee, which is composed of representatives of the European Union's 25 member states, all children will have to attend a finger-printing centre to obtain an EU passport by June 2009 at the latest.

The use of fingerprints and other biometric data is designed to prevent passport fraud and allow European member states to meet US entry visa requirements, but the decision to fingerprint children has disturbed human rights groups.

The civil liberties group Statewatch last night accused EU governments of



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