

Statewatch Report: Increasing Use of Biometric Technologies at EU Level Drives Forward Ethnic Profiling



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European Law Forum: Prevention • Investigation • Prosecution

Report

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The ongoing rollout of biometric identification systems is likely to see ethnic minority citizens and non-citizens subjected to a growing number of unwarranted intrusions into their everyday activities, says a [report by Statewatch](#) that was presented at the end of February 2022. “Building the biometric state” examined the development and deployment of biometric identification technologies by police and border forces in Europe over the last two decades. It also includes case studies from France, Italy and Spain demonstrating the challenges to fundamental rights if the technology is more widely used in the EU. According to the report, the increasing use of the technology, which is driven forward by the EU’s interoperability plans (→ [euclid 2/2019, 103-104](#)), is likely to exacerbate existing problems with racist policing and ethnic profiling.

The report first outlines the gradual development of an overarching biometric identity system at EU level, starting from the establishment of Eurodac (storing asylum-seekers’ fingerprints) at the turn of the century, to the ongoing construction of the Common Identity Repository (CIR) within the EU’s interoperability framework. Subsequently, it is examined how public funding from the EU’s research and innovation programmes has contributed to the development of biometric identification technologies, in particular those that have later been incorporated into initiatives such as “smart borders”. In this context, the report states that the EU has awarded some €290 million in public funding to the development of biometric technology since 1998. The majority of research funding has focused on public security applications for biometrics.

The following sections of the report analyse how the networks of policing refined the use of the new technologies and how they are being deployed using ethnic profiling and easing identity checks.

The authors argue that renewed efforts on multiple fronts are needed to ensure that state authorities are held publicly and politically accountable and it is necessary to develop alternatives to the status quo. Potential measures should include:

- “Know your rights” campaigns and community organising;
- Administrative and legal complaints to uphold privacy and data protection rights;
- Adequate resources and independence for data protection authorities;
- “Firewalls” between policing and public services;
- Critical research and investigative journalism to inform campaigns and complaints;
- Publicly-funded research that acts in the public interest;
- Efforts to ensure transparency in law, policy-making and enforcement.

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ISSN: 1862-6947

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The project is co-financed by the [Union Anti-Fraud Programme \(UAFP\)](#), managed by the [European Anti-Fraud Office \(OLAF\)](#).



**Co-funded by
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