

ICE is fingerprinting teen migrants



ICE agents taking an immigrant's fingerprints in 2017. Photo: Brian van der Brug/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials have been tasked since January with fingerprinting teens in child migrant shelters who entered the country without their parents, BuzzFeed News reported and Axios confirmed.

Why it matters: ICE says the data collection is for the children's protection, but it also comes as immigration agencies have ramped up their collection of migrant biometric data.

More than 7,800 child migrants released from shelters overseen by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to family members or other "sponsors" have not shown up for immigration court hearings and have "disappeared," a senior ICE official told Axios in a statement.

- The agency's move is intended, at least in part, "to mitigate and prevent the risk of their victimization by human traffickers and smugglers, and to

reduce misidentification,” according to the senior official. Immigrant registration and fingerprinting are also required by law.

The big picture: Over the last year, the Trump administration has taken multiple steps to ramp up the amount of biometric data they collect on migrants — enabling them to more carefully track and, when necessary, quickly deport unauthorized immigrants.

- In April 2019, Border Patrol began collecting biometric data, including fingerprints, from more migrant children under 14 years old who crossed the border with their parents, AP reported.
- Last month, Customs and Border Protection began a pilot program to collect DNA from some migrants in its custody, CNN reported. Immigrants in any federal immigration agency’s custody could ultimately be subject to having their DNA collected and stored in the FBI’s criminal database.

Between the lines: The trend points to immigration enforcement officials’ frustration at how little information HHS collects — or verifies — before releasing a migrant child to a sponsor.

- “HHS is basically rushing to get kids out of custody,” a White House official told Axios. “When a child goes missing, we have nothing on the child.”
- The senior ICE official called HHS’ current information collection practices “dangerous and irresponsible,” accusing the department of “willfully” relying on suspect documents “for the sole purpose of increasing the speed of placement and ignoring the obvious risks to child welfare and safety.”

The other side: HHS told Axios in a statement that it has extensive vetting processes that do not allow migrant minors to be released to “known fugitives” and that they provide ICE with the address and name of each released child’s new caretaker.

- “These are vulnerable children in difficult circumstances, and HHS treats its responsibility for each child with the utmost care,” it added.

Source:

<https://www.axios.com/ice-fingerprinting-teen-migrants-immigration-e2544f97-0ce4-499b-a292-a52f486bc328.html>

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