

International Working Group
on Data Protection
in Telecommunications

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P R E S S R E L E A S E

Working Paper on Biometrics in Online Authentication adopted

The International Working Group on Data Protection in Telecommunications, chaired by the Berlin Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information, Ms. Maja Smoltczyk, has at its 60th meeting on 22-23 November 2016 in Berlin (Germany) adopted the following Working Paper:

The **Working Paper on Biometrics in Online Authentication** examines the data protection and privacy implications of biometrics as a type of authentication factor. The management of user identity and access to computer systems is of critical importance in ensuring the security and functionality of those systems. In order to protect privacy and data security, access control (identification, authentication and authorization) is required to ensure that the right users gain the right access to IT systems and the personal data stored therein.

However, a careful consideration of the different facets of access control is required to ensure that an appropriate level of both security and privacy is maintained. Selecting which authentication factors (if any) are required for a particular task has a direct impact on the security of the system but also on the privacy of the users. Password-based authentication is increasingly replaced or augmented by so-called multi-factor authentication. In this context, the use of biometrics in online authentication offers one possibility to address some of the shortcomings of current password-based authentication.

The purpose of the Working Paper is to highlight the privacy risks when biometrics are used for authentication and how these risks can be managed in an appropriate manner. The paper assists service providers and users in the decision whether to employ biometrics. It provides recommendations to legislators regarding the legal framework for the application of biometrics, as well as to developers, service providers, and users regarding privacy-friendly implementations and use.

The paper is available for download at <http://www.berlin-privacy-group.org>.

About the International Working Group on Data Protection in Telecommunications (“Berlin Group”)

The International Working Group on Data Protection in Telecommunications (IWGDPT, a.k.a. “Berlin Group”) includes representatives from Data Protection Authorities and international organisations dealing with privacy matters from all over the world. It was founded in 1983 in the framework of the International Conference of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners at the initiative of the Berlin Commissioner for Data Protection, who has since then been chairing the Group. The Group has adopted numerous recommendations (“Common Positions” and “Working Papers”) aimed at improving the protection of privacy in telecommunications. Since the beginning of the 90s the Group has focused particularly on the protection of privacy on the Internet.

More information about the Work of the Group and the documents adopted by the Group are available for download on the website of the Group at <http://www.berlin-privacy-group.org>.

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The Working Group has been initiated
by Data Protection Commissioners
from different countries in order
to improve privacy and data protection
in telecommunications and media