
**Information technology — A study of
the differential impact of demographic
factors in biometric recognition
system performance**



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Contents

Page

Foreword	iv
Introduction	v
1 Scope	1
2 Normative references	1
3 Terms, definitions, symbols and abbreviated terms	1
4 Understanding demographic factors in biometric systems	3
4.1 Introduction.....	3
4.2 Biometric system components.....	4
4.3 The influence of demographics on biometric recognition.....	4
4.3.1 The influence of sex and gender.....	4
4.3.2 The influence of age and ageing.....	4
4.3.3 The influence of race and ethnicity.....	5
4.4 Measurement and analysis.....	5
5 Impact of demographic factors on facial recognition systems	5
5.1 Existing literature on demographic factors impacting facial recognition systems.....	5
5.1.1 General notes.....	5
5.1.2 Factors that influence algorithm performance in the Face Recognition Grand Challenge.....	6
5.1.3 Face recognition performance: Role of demographic information.....	6
5.1.4 Issues related to face recognition accuracy varying based on race and skin tone.....	6
5.1.5 Report on the FG 2015 Video Person Recognition Evaluation.....	6
5.1.6 Demographic effects on estimates of automatic face recognition performance.....	7
5.1.7 US National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) FRVT test.....	7
5.1.8 Demographic effects in facial recognition and their dependence on image acquisition: An evaluation of eleven commercial systems.....	11
5.1.9 The effect of broad and specific demographic homogeneity on the imposter distributions and false match rates in face recognition algorithm performance.....	12
5.2 Summary of demographic impact on facial recognition systems.....	12
5.3 Recommendations for facial recognition systems.....	12
6 Impact of demographic factors on fingerprint systems	13
6.1 Existing literature on demographic factors impacting fingerprint systems.....	13
6.1.1 General notes.....	13
6.1.2 IDENT/IAFIS image quality study.....	13
6.1.3 Impact of gender on fingerprint recognition systems.....	14
6.1.4 Impact of gender on image quality, Henry classification and performance on a fingerprint recognition system.....	14
6.1.5 Impact of age and ageing on sample quality and performance in fingerprint recognition systems.....	14
6.2 Summary of demographic impact on fingerprint systems.....	15
6.3 Recommendations for fingerprint systems.....	15
7 Impact of demographic factors on iris recognition systems	15
7.1 Existing literature on demographic factors impacting iris recognition systems.....	15
7.1.1 General notes.....	15
7.1.2 The Canadian NEXUS system.....	16
7.1.3 Impact of demographics in NIST IREX IX.....	18
7.2 Summary of demographic impact on iris recognition systems.....	18
7.3 Recommendations for iris recognition systems.....	18
8 Summary of the differential impact of demographic factors in biometric recognition system performance	19
Bibliography	20

Foreword

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Any feedback or questions on this document should be directed to the user's national standards body. A complete listing of these bodies can be found at www.iso.org/members.html and www.iec.ch/national-committees.

Introduction

Automated systems (including biometrics) are increasingly used in decision-making processes. In recent years, systemic performance differentials reflected in several automated decision systems have been reported and hotly debated. In the context of this report, an algorithm exhibiting performance differentials produces statistically different outcomes or decisions for different groups of individuals, for example, based on gender, age and race/ethnicity. In the context of biometric recognition, this means that probabilities of false positives and/or false negatives can differ among the demographic groups. The impacts of such performance differentials on the affected individuals can range from mere inconvenience in cooperative access control systems, to consequential harms such as varying arrest rates for certain demographic groups based on decisions produced by facial recognition systems.

Although such systems are almost certainly not designed to be explicitly differential against any group, implicit differences can occur independently of the intentions of the system designers. They can be exhibited and propagated at many stages of the decision-making pipeline, including but not limited to training data itself as well as the data processing. Due to the scalability of such systems, a higher quantity of erroneous or inaccurate decisions can be generated than in the typical, human-based processes. Consequently, in recent years, measuring and ensuring the fairness (i.e. lack of differential performance) of such systems has often been discussed in the media and political circles, with research and commercial interest increasing accordingly. With increasing deployments of the technology, it is important to consider whether it performs similarly for all users. This document helps to identify where recognition performance differences related to demographic factors can exist in biometric systems.

Information technology — A study of the differential impact of demographic factors in biometric recognition system performance

1 Scope

This document introduces the effects of population demographics on biometric functions. It:

- establishes terms and definitions relevant to the study of demographic factors in biometric recognition system performance;
- identifies areas where biometric systems can exhibit different performances based on different demographic factors of the individuals submitting the biometric samples;
- explains how different demographic factors can influence the biometric characteristics captured by different biometric modalities and how these influences can affect biometric performance measures;
- presents a case study on existing scientific material that explores the impact of demographic factors on biometric system performance. Only biometric modalities where quantitative information is available on the impact of demographic factors are considered.

Outside of the scope of this document are:

- effects of disease and injury on biometric performance; and
- how religious and cultural norms can affect biometric operations.

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

ISO/IEC 2382-37, *Information technology — Vocabulary — Part 37: Biometrics*