LIBERTY

PRIVACY INTERNATIONAL

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCHED

How policing surveillance technology impacts your rights

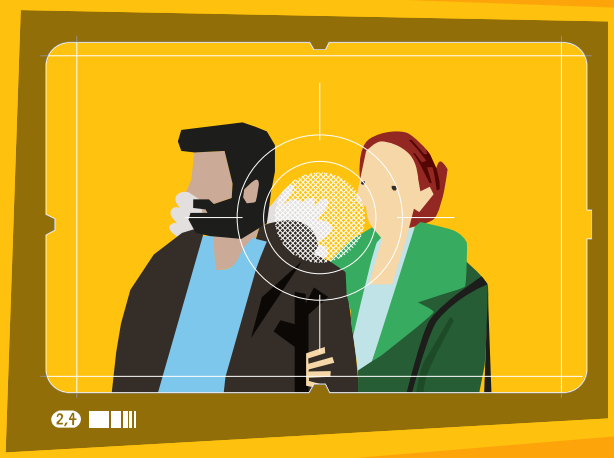
FACIAL RECOGNITION

WHAT IS FACIAL RECOGNITION?

Facial recognition technology uses cameras loaded with software to match live footage of people in public with images on a 'watch list'. It is unclear who might be on a watch list or where the police obtain the images.

Facial recognition cameras are far more intrusive than regular CCTV. They scan distinct, specific features of your face, such as face shape, to create a detailed biometric map of it – which means that being captured by these cameras is like being fingerprinted, without your knowledge or consent.





WHERE IS FACIAL RECOGNITION BEING USED?

The technology has been used at music concerts and football matches, shopping centres and high streets, festivals and protests. It could be rolled out across all public spaces eventually.

In March 2018, South Wales Police deployed facial recognition at a peaceful protest for the first time. Cardiff resident Ed Bridges attended this protest. Now he and Liberty are taking South Wales Police to court to force it to stop using facial recognition in public places.

In October 2018, it was revealed that the Trafford Shopping Centre in Manchester had secretly used facial recognition for six months, using images provided by Greater Manchester Police, and scanned the faces of approximately 15 million people.

WHO IS USING FACIAL RECOGNITION?

Facial recognition is currently being 'trialled' by the Metropolitan Police in London and South Wales Police – but it is likely these trials will be used to justify nationwide use.

WHERE DO THE WATCH LISTS COME FROM?

Watch lists are put together by the police. The images in a watch list could come from a range of sources and do not just include images of people suspected of criminal wrongdoing. For example, the images may come from a custody images database, which contains pictures of people who have come into contact with the police, including thousands of innocent people. And the Met Police has previously put together a watch list of people with mental health issues.

Images could also come from social media.

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

There is no law giving the police the power to use facial recognition, nor are there any Government policies or guidelines – so forces make it up as they go along.

HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT FACIAL RECOGNITION

Each police force across England and Wales has an elected Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). PCCs should be a vital way for the local community to hold their local police force to account. Your PCC should listen to and represent your views about how the police work in your area.

Find out who your local PCC is and how to contact them here. In Scotland, you can contact the Scottish Police Authority.

WHAT ABOUT MY RIGHTS?

Privacy

The use of facial recognition in public spaces makes a mockery of our privacy rights.

It is a hugely disproportionate crime-fighting technique, scanning the face of every single person who passes by the camera, whether or not they are suspected of any wrongdoing.

And the biometric data it snatches can be as uniquely identifying as a fingerprint or DNA – which are usually only taken from you if you've been arrested. But this is taking place on the street without your consent – and often without you knowing at all.

Because there is no law covering police use of facial recognition, there is nothing to stop forces from holding onto your image once you've been scanned.

Freedom of expression and association

Being watched and identified in public spaces is likely to lead us to change our behaviour, limiting where we go, what we do and who we spend time with.

For instance, several protest groups have told us they would avoid demonstrations if facial recognition was used in the area.

Discrimination

It has been found that facial recognition software is more likely to misidentify women and black people.

But even if facial recognition becomes more accurate, this rights-abusing technology has no place on our streets.

The police have a habit of using facial recognition to disproportionately target certain communities – for example, the technology was deployed at the Notting Hill Carnival by the Met Police for two years running, and twice at a Stratford shopping centre in East London as a response to 'gangs'.

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