

Met Police's Facial Recognition Criticised

August 21, 2025

— Categories: Human Rights



Download IPFS

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has raised concerns over the Metropolitan Police's deployment of live facial recognition technology (LFR), asserting that it breaches human rights law. The technology scans faces captured on CCTV and compares them against a police watchlist to identify suspects. The EHRC argues that the Metropolitan Police's current policy fails to meet the necessary standards of proportionality and necessity required for lawful use.

Since January 2024, the Metropolitan Police has reported over 1,000 arrests facilitated by LFR, including 773 individuals charged or cautioned for offences such as robbery, rape, and child sexual abuse. The force defends its use, stating that LFR is a vital tool for combating serious crime and ensuring public safety, particularly at major events like the Notting Hill Carnival. A Metropolitan Police spokesperson emphasised that the technology is used lawfully, with policies designed to balance operational needs with privacy and rights protections, as supported by a Court of Appeal ruling affirming police powers to use LFR under Common Law.

However, the EHRC contends that the absence of specific domestic legislation regulating LFR poses risks to fundamental rights, including privacy, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly, as outlined in the European Convention on Human Rights. John Kirkpatrick, EHRC chief executive, acknowledged the technology's potential to address serious crime but stressed the need for clear safeguards to ensure its use is justified and proportionate. The EHRC has been granted permission to intervene in an upcoming judicial review examining the Metropolitan Police's LFR policy, highlighting concerns about its compliance with human rights standards.

Civil liberties groups and privacy advocates have long opposed LFR, citing its potential for misidentification and intrusion into personal privacy. These concerns are amplified by the technology's use in crowded public settings, where errors could lead to wrongful arrests. The Metropolitan Police counters that LFR enhances efficiency in crime prevention, particularly under financial constraints, and maintains that its implementation includes measures to protect individual rights.

The debate over LFR reflects broader tensions between public safety and personal freedoms in the UK. With no dedicated legislation governing its use, the upcoming judicial review will be pivotal in determining whether the Metropolitan Police's approach aligns with legal and ethical standards. The EHRC's intervention underscores the need for robust oversight to prevent misuse of surveillance technologies. As the review approaches, the public and policymakers await clarity on how LFR can be balanced with human rights obligations, while the Metropolitan Police continues to assert its commitment to lawful and effective policing.