



Home Office

Immigration Enforcement - Live Facial Recognition Legal Mandate

The legal considerations for IE deployment of overt Live Facial Recognition technology to identify persons of interest attempting to return to the UK in breach of a Deportation Order.

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1.Introduction

This IE Facial Recognition Legal Mandate sets out the legal considerations and mitigations taken by IE ahead of the proof-of concept pilot at a UK Port.

Live Facial Recognition Technology (LFR) is primarily used by Immigration Enforcement (IE) as a precision tactic to locate people who are attempting to return in breach of an extant Deportation Order (DO).

Intelligence from Immigration Enforcement (IE) and Border Force (BF) has identified a UK port where there is intelligence which indicates that persons are returning in breach of a Deportation Order. IE have a key role to play in this area, providing operational cover at the port on an intelligence-led basis. The use of Live Facial Recognition (LFR) technology can enhance intelligence capability by comparing disembarking passengers against a watchlist of individuals subject to extant Deportation Orders. LFR should add an additional layer of assurance, particularly in identifying individuals who may have changed their names or used false identities to evade detection, which intelligence indicates is a current threat to the UK border.

2. Legal Basis Overview

LFR for law enforcement purposes is not subject to dedicated primary legislation but is regulated by several sources of law as well as national and local policies and guidance. The various sources of law combine to provide a multi-layered legal structure to use, regulate and oversee the use of LFR by law enforcement bodies.

Tier one: Legislation	Powers to use LFR	a) Immigration Act 1971, b) The Immigration (Collection, Use and Retention of Biometric Information and Related Amendments) Regulations 2021 and/or c) Common law power
	Regulating the use of LFR	a) Equality Act 2010 b) Human Rights Act 1998 c) Data Protection Act 2018 (Parts 2 & 3) d) UK General Data Protection Regulation e) Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
	Requests for information in relation to LFR	a) Freedom of Information Act 2000 b) UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018 (Subject Access Requests)
Tier two: Code and guidance	Use of LFR	a) Secretary of State's Surveillance Camera Code of Practice b) Information Commissioner's Office Code of Practice for Surveillance Cameras and

		related published ICO opinion - The use of live facial recognition technology by law enforcement in public places- ICO-opinion-the-use-of-LFR-in-public-places .
Tier three: LFR documents	Regulating the use of LFR	a) Policy Document b) Equality Impact Assessment c) Standard Operating Procedures d) Operational Guidance and Briefing e) Community Impact Assessment f) Legal mandate g) Signage and Leaflets

Legal basis

To use LFR, IE will rely upon implied powers from the Immigration Act 1971 (“1971 Act”). The UK Supreme Court in *New College London v SSHD* [2013] UKSC 51 confirmed that the 1971 Act provided a range of ancillary and incidental powers to administer the system of immigration control.

Section 24(A1) of the 1971 Act provides that it is a criminal offence for a person to enter the UK in breach of the deportation order. An implied power from the 1971 Act exists to identify such persons, which it is considered the use of LFR falls within. In the alternative, IE would rely upon a common law power to utilise the LFR. In *Bridges v SWP* [2019] EWHC 2341 (Admin), the High Court confirmed that common law powers were sufficient for the police to operate LFR. This finding was not disturbed on appeal.

To compile and use the watchlist, IE relies upon an express power in regulation 4 of the Immigration (Collection, Use and Retention of Biometric Information and Related Amendments) Regulations 2021.

3. Compliance with relevant legislation

This LFR deployment is being conducted with a partnering police force using a dedicated Immigration Enforcement watchlist that has been specifically prepared and verified for the purposes of the proof-of-concept pilot. The re-entry of a person in breach of an extant Deportation Order is a criminal offence under section 24(A1) of the Immigration Act 1971 and is currently punishable by up to five years imprisonment.

The Court of Appeal has recognised that the formal legal frameworks which regulate the deployment of LFR, combined with published guidance, can provide sufficient safeguards for the use of LFR to be clear and foreseeable, which is required by Article 8 ECHR:

Bridges v SWP [2020] EWCA Civ 1058. IE will satisfy this requirement through the publishing of the IE LFR Policy and the Standard Operating Procedures documents so that our deployment of this technology is clear and foreseeable to the public.

4. Immigration Act 1971¹

An Immigration Officer may arrest a person without a warrant under section 28A of the Immigration Act 1971 if the person has committed an offence under Section 24 of the Immigration Act 1971 or the Immigration Officer has reasonable grounds that the person has committed such an offence. Entering the UK in breach of a deportation order is such an offence under section 24(A1) of the Immigration Act 1971.

This provision therefore allows IE officials to arrest and detain individuals found to contravene their DO by re-entering the UK.

5. Human Rights

The primary aim for the pilot will be a law enforcement purpose, that is to identify and, where feasible, seek to prosecute individuals returning in breach of a Deportation Order, an offence under section 24(A1) of the Immigration Act 1971, as amended by Nationality and Borders Act 2022.

The Human Rights Act 1998 sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms that everyone in the UK is entitled to. It incorporates the rights set out in the European Convention on Rights (ECHR)² into domestic British law.

LFR technology engages the ECHR as it can interfere with an individual's Article 8 ECHR rights - the right to respect for private and family life. It is well-established that the reach of Article 8 ECHR is broad. The case of *S v. United Kingdom* (2009) 48 E.H.R.R 50 confirms that this can relate to a person's biometric data and any storing of data relating to it. The Bridges case in the High Court and Court of Appeal considered Article 8 ECHR, specifically in the context of LFR technology, and underlined that operations must be "in accordance with the law" and confirmed that there is an interference with Article 8 ECHR

¹ [Immigration Act 1971](#)

² [The European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998](#)

when someone passes through the Zone of Recognition. All IE use of LFR must therefore be proportionate to comply with the ECHR.

In respect of “in accordance with the law” under the ECHR, this can broadly be described as requiring the use of LFR being clear and foreseeable to the public. To satisfy this requirement, IE will publish guidance and SOP which set out who may be placed on a watchlist, where it will operate and relevant safeguards. It will also inform the public of the LFR trial through appropriate channels, including signage placed before individuals enter the LFR camera’s zone of recognition, and leaflets available both before and within the zone of recognition. Notification of deployments will be posted on Immigration Enforcement’s dedicated LFR webpage. These notifications will be sufficient to inform the public of the general intent, location and timing of the trial, without undermining the objectives or operational imperative of the deployment.

In respect of proportionality, LFR interferes with all persons’ Article 8 ECHR rights, even those whose images are instantly deleted: Bridges. The LFR technology is being deployed in a publicly accessible space where there is existing CCTV and members of the public would expect to have a reduced level of privacy – accordingly the level of interference is considered to be relatively low. The choice of deployment space is based on IE objectives and quantifiable evidence of a breach of DO encounters, providing a strong likelihood of people on the watchlist being in the area. The use of the technology is therefore rationally connected to the objective. It is not considered that a less intrusive measure could achieve the objective. Considering all of these matters, including that individuals will be able to opt-out of the LFR, the proposed deployment is considered to strike a fair balance between the public interest and the rights of people who will pass through the LFR.

6. Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010³ provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. The Equality Act 2010 broadly prohibits discrimination on the basis of a protected characteristic. The prohibition of discrimination applies to both direct and indirect discrimination. As a public authority, IE must comply with section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 which is most commonly known as the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

³ [Equality Act 2010](#)

IE has completed a detailed EIA to address the PSED which will be published. IE is confident that the use of LFR will not lead to any discrimination/bias.

Immigration Enforcement has adopted a 'human in the loop' approach to ensure that no engagement will occur with a member of the public unless at least one officer has reviewed an LFR system-generated potential match and reached their own opinion that there is a match between the member of the public and the Watchlist image. This means that the LFR system is not making any decision to engage with the public, the officer is making this decision drawing on an image to person comparison, Home Office system records, and their training and experience. Additionally, the officer is best placed to consider the impact of any subject, system and environmental factors which may have influenced the LFR system when it generated an Alert, and if such factors combine to mean an engagement with an individual is not appropriate in the circumstances.

All officers who are part of the LFR trial will have been briefed on the operation of the LFR system, including consideration of factors that can impact performance, and their subsequent conduct, and they will have already received officer training relating to unconscious bias that will support them in undertaking their key role in the Engagement decision-making process.

The National Police Chief's Council, national and local Police Force senior officers have been closely consulted and engaged to secure the necessary assurances that the technology selected for use in the pilot has been independently assessed to ensure it does not contain unacceptable bias (e.g. on race and gender grounds). This has been reflected in the Equality Impact Assessment prepared for this LFR trial in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, which demonstrates the consideration of the Public Sector Equality Duty. IE will be using staff and equipment supplied and managed by [South Wales and Greater Manchester] Police and any deployment of their staff will also follow their own guidance and policy.

Immigration Enforcement will develop and maintain robust governance and oversight arrangements that balance the technological benefits of LFR with their potential intrusiveness. These arrangements will meet the Home Office Biometric Strategy's requirement for transparency, whilst taking into account guidance from the Surveillance Camera and Biometric Commissioner. The arrangements will also focus on implementing a transparent and visible internal inspection, audit, and compliance enforcement regime.

7. Protection of Freedoms Act 2012

The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 (PoFA) has seen the introduction of a new surveillance camera code issued by the Secretary of State (the Code) and the appointment of a Surveillance Camera Commissioner:

This includes consideration of the 12 guiding principles that system operators should adopt. The Code makes a number of specific points in relation to automated recognition technologies which IE have had regard. In particular, with respect to LFR, the Code provides:

When using a surveillance camera system for live facial recognition (LFR) purposes to find people on a watchlist, chief police officers should:

- *set out and publish (a) the categories of people to be included on a watchlist and (b) the criteria that will be used in determining when and where to deploy LFR, having regard to the need only to do so for a lawful purpose;*
- *ensure that any biometric data that does not produce an alert against someone on the watchlist by the LFR system is deleted instantaneously or near-instantaneously;*
- *have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty, in particular taking account of any potential adverse impact that the LFR algorithm may have on members of protected groups;*
- *establish an authorisation process for LFR deployments and identify the criteria by which officers are empowered to issue LFR deployment authorisations*

These points are covered in our policy and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) which will be published alongside this document.

8. LFR watchlist

The legal power for comprising the watchlist gallery is provided by Part 2 of the Immigration (Collection, Use and Retention of Biometric Information and Related Amendments) Regulations 2021⁴. In relation to this pilot, these are the legal powers used

⁴ [The Immigration \(Collection, Use and Retention of Biometric Information and Related Amendments\) Regulations 2021](#)

to take photographs of deportees prior to removal, and which allow their use for immigration and law enforcement purposes (under Regulation 4).

The Policy document and SOP prepared for the LFR trial set out clear criteria for watchlist inclusion, including the intelligence-based rationale on which it is based and the validation and authorisation processes that must be observed in compiling and using the watchlist. To ensure compliance with the SO, the deployment request must be sent to the Authorising Officer and the Record of Authorisation made by that officer should confirm that the deployment adheres to the principles within it around watchlist generation and compilation, including the criteria that applies to which images may be included on the Watchlist, in what circumstances and for what purpose, to ensure that the necessity and proportionality criteria for the Watchlist are satisfied.

9. Lawful under data protection legislation

The purpose for this processing is covered by section 31 of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 18), which defines “the law enforcement purposes” as “the purposes of prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences or the execution of criminal penalties, including the safeguarding against and the prevention of threats to public security”.

The processing of personal data in the case of LFR is considered sensitive as it is aimed at uniquely identifying an individual using biometric data. The lawful basis for this sensitive processing is section 35(5) DPA 18 – noting that:

- the processing is strictly necessary for the law enforcement purpose (of preventing, investigating and detecting the criminal offence of persons returning in breach of a Deportation Order);
- a Schedule 8 sensitive processing purpose is met (here being (1)(a) and 1(b) – being necessary for the exercise of a function conferred on IE by an enactment (Immigration Act 1971) and necessary for reasons of substantial public interest (the detection and prosecution of persons returning in breach of a Deportation Order being a substantial public interest)); and
- at the time when the processing is carried out an appropriate policy document will be in place.

Section 42 of the DPA 2018 details the requirements of an appropriate policy document. Alongside a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) that has been reviewed by the Office of the Data Protection Officer, Immigration Enforcement has produced and will publish on GOV.UK a dedicated Policy document, which allows the public to understand details of:

- the data being processed by the LFR system, how often it is processed and whose data is processed;
- procedures, safeguards and accountability principles for complying with the data protection principles when relying on a condition from Schedule 8 to process biometric data both for those on the Watchlist and those passing an LFR system;
- Immigration Enforcement's policy for the retention and erasure of personal data for LFR processing.

The law enforcement basis for the proof-of-concept pilot is also referenced in the [Borders, Immigration and Citizenship: privacy information notice](#) that is published on GOV.UK, which explains how personal information that is legally obtained and held by the Home Office may be lawfully processed in support of the Home Office's statutory functions. In exceptional cases, when the primary purpose (law enforcement) appears not to be appropriate due to individual circumstances, the matched and verified biometric data may then be used for a general immigration purpose, where the data processing is covered by Part 2 of the DPA 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation, specifically Article 9(2)(g), which allows for processing of special category personal data (biometric data) where processing is necessary for reasons of substantial public interest. For the reasons stated above, in respect of the Schedule 8 condition, it is considered this threshold would also be satisfied.