Hey – have you heard? European Digital Rights (EDRi) is calling on the EU to ban biometric mass surveillance!

Followers! So what is biometric mass surveillance?

You know how the UK use facial recognition to watch people going shopping? Or how French authorities have been scanning teens’ faces to manage entry into their schools? Or even how Poland’s Coronavirus app analyses people’s faces to check if they are staying indoor? These are all types of biometric mass surveillance...

Ah, you’re talking about facial recognition?

Not just facial recognition. It could be your voice, or how you walk! It is basically all data about us and our bodies, which makes it really sensitive.

EDRi what?

EDRi is the umbrella made up of 44 civil society organisations across Europe. They’re all about online privacy, freedom online, and all that stuff. Follow them on Twitter – they’re lit!

What is biometric mass surveillance?

The EDRi folks say that whenever a system uses the biometric data of anyone that happens to be in a public space, that’s mass surveillance.

So like, surveilling me when I walk randomly in a square as well as anyone else who happens to be around?

Exactly! Imagine, if someone is spying on innocent people like you as you go to work, attend a religious ceremony, or join a peaceful protest, are you going to be happy about that? That’s what EDRi means! Not only is it bad for society, it’s actually against EU law!

What’s the point of biometric mass surveillance?

Well, several European countries are doing it, and unless someone stops them now, they’re going to keep doing it. That’s why EDRi is asking EU institutions (European Commission and Parliament) to make sure that biometric mass surveillance cannot and does not happen anymore.

But now? With all this Coronavirus crisis?

Especially now. Imagine, if someone is watching you from a distance as you walk, they are training their cameras on you. And for people that already face disproportionate police violence, for example, imagine being a latent terrorist, or someone constant police presence instead of where you go, what we do and who we meet can all be used against us, and this is really dangerous for our freedoms and democracy.

This stuff can totally continue after the state of emergency ends, huh?

Totally! We gotta act now, hold powerful states and companies to account, and make sure we don’t descend into a digital dystopia...

What can we do to ban biometric mass surveillance?

EDRi has prepared a list of recommendations on how this ban can happen. Dig into their paper, “Ban Biometric Mass Surveillance” – all about the what, how and why of a ban.

More action now! The EU are asking you right now what you think in this public consultation on artificial intelligence. You can respond there (in Section 2) and tell them to stop our public spaces from becoming perpetual police line-ups. Furthermore, you can tweet about this using #BanThisBS and #Biometrics.

Gotcha. Let’s ban biometric mass surveillance!

Power!