

Michael Lockwood  
Director General  
Independent Office for Police Conduct  
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Dear Mr Lockwood

### **Including missing persons investigations in the IOPC thematic focus on race discrimination**

We welcome the IOPC announcement on 10 July regarding a thematic focus on race discrimination, which we believe is both necessary and urgent for public confidence in policing. We are writing to you to request that missing persons investigations are included within this review.

One of the areas you aim to focus on is where members of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities have felt unfairly treated by the police. People from black and minority ethnic communities have contacted Missing People's helpline and disclosed that the police have not responded appropriately to the disappearance of their missing family member. These people believe that racial discrimination may have affected the investigation of their missing loved one, resulting in gaps in the response they would expect to have received from the police. Following these disclosures about experiences of discrimination, staff at Missing People are reviewing processes and records to ensure we can understand and respond to negative experiences of the response from the police for black people and people from other minority communities reporting a loved one missing. This work is linked to our concerns that this issue has been under-recorded and may be affecting a significant number of people across the country.

Importantly, [research](#) has shown that people from BAME communities are over-represented among people who are missing for longer periods of time. This is concerning because *"longer-term missing cases are known to be associated with higher risks (such as increased exposure to harms such as criminal and sexual exploitation) and less positive outcomes (such as suicide or accidental death)."*<sup>ii</sup> The police receive at least 44,000 missing reports for black people and people from minority ethnic communities each year, showing the potential scale of the issue.

The Metropolitan Police's response to the disappearance of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman is an important example of potential racial discrimination, which the IOPC is now investigating. Both women were reported missing by their family. However, frustrated by the police's response, the family decided to search themselves for their missing loved ones, and it was the boyfriend of one of the two women who found the women deceased. The mother of the deceased women has reported that she feels that the police's response was linked to assumptions they made based on the her daughters' race and class.

We believe that potential race discrimination in the police's response to BAME people who are reported missing must be investigated as part of the IOPC thematic focus on race discrimination. This investigation is necessary to both better understand and to respond to discrimination in this area of policing. In light of the discrimination reported by the family of Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman this focus is both vital and urgent.

We look forward to your response to this letter

Yours sincerely

Jo Youle  
CEO  
Missing People

Andy Mccullough  
International Safeguarding  
Director  
Railway Children

Professor Hester  
Parr  
University of  
Glasgow

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<sup>i</sup> Humphrey A and Parr H (2020), Missing Black Lives  
<https://blog.geographydirections.com/2020/07/09/missing-black-lives/>