



**Border  
Security  
Summit**

**Organised  
Immigration  
Crime**  
London 2025

# Strengthening the UK's International Partnerships on Organised Immigration Crime



# The UK response

**Tackling OIC requires strong international commitments and effective operational collaboration. The UK's new Border Security Command (BSC) has been established within the Home Office to drive forward the required step change in the UK's approach to border security, leading our domestic and international effort to deliver a unified response to border threats.**

The BSC has rapidly mobilised the entire UK Border Security System that consists of a range of UK operational partners, Government Departments, and Agencies to deliver against an agreed set of priorities to counter the threat. The BSC has negotiated new international agreements as part of an ambitious programme of engagement to disrupt organised immigration crime. The UK's operational powers and capabilities will be significantly enhanced through new laws in the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill that has recently been introduced to Parliament. These international agreements, new working arrangements, and new legislation will enable us to deliver greater operational impact more quickly in the UK and overseas.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) is vital in tackling OIC and leads the UK's overall operational response to this and other serious and organised crime threats within the framework set by Government. The Agency has deployed the full range of its assets and capabilities against the threat, both in the UK and overseas, resulting in the disruption of numerous organised crime groups, the seizure of equipment critical to irregular migration, and the arrest of several high-profile, and key members of people smuggling groups. Of course, the NCA can achieve little on its own; any effective response has to be international; the NCA is proud to work with operational counterparts in countries around the world, as well as through Europol and Interpol.

## Successes have included

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- Working with Dutch and Belgian counterparts to arrest an individual suspected of supplying small boats equipment;
- Working with Italy, to arrest in the UK an individual believed to be responsible for thousands of crossings of the central Mediterranean;
- Working with Iraqi Kurdish counterparts in the Kurdish Regional Government to arrest three individuals suspected of being members of a global people smuggling network; and
- Working with Bulgarian counterparts to seize boats and engines.

The NCA is grateful for the extraordinary cooperation it receives from partners across Europe and around the world. But of course, there is more we all need to do.

# Global context

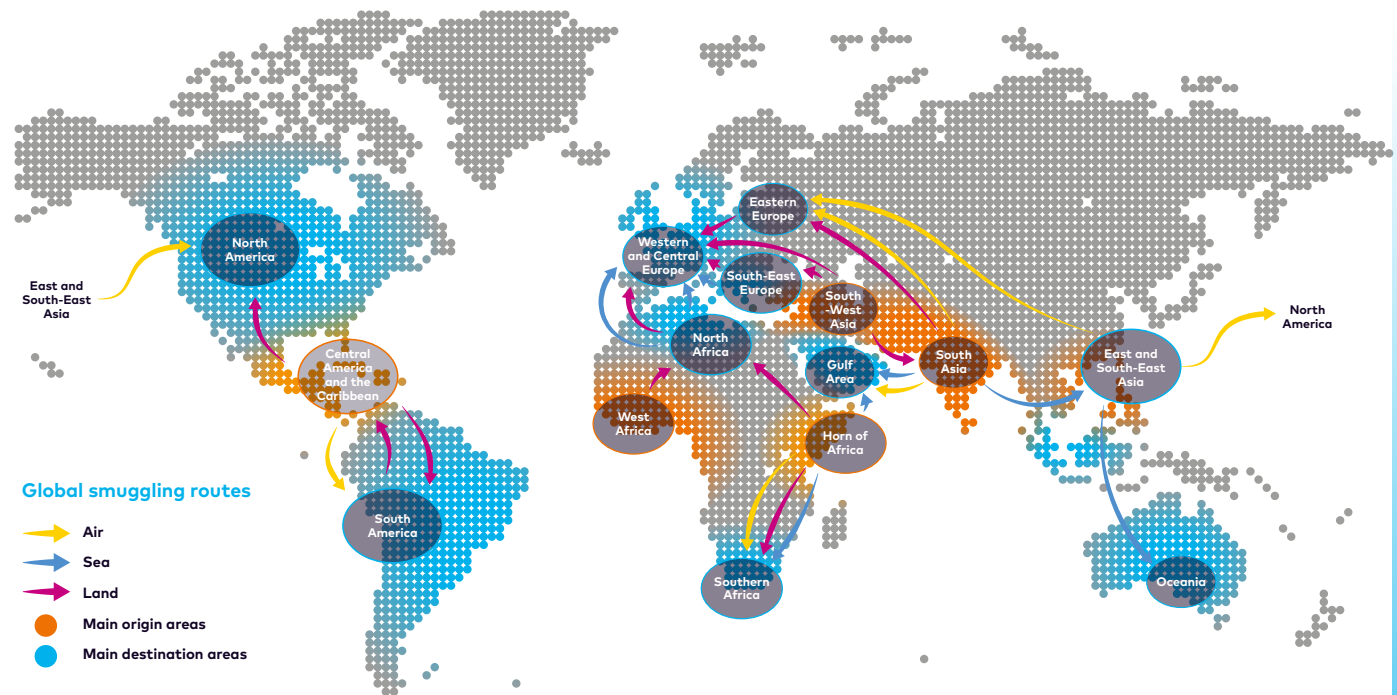
**Irregular migration is a persistent global challenge, with increasing numbers of people forcibly displaced or seeking better economic opportunities.**

Rising global insecurities, ranging from conflict to climate and growing economic disparity, drive this movement of people and means more people are vulnerable to exploitation by smuggler and trafficking gangs.

The mass movement of people across national borders without immigration controls brings threats to public safety, to national security, to economic prosperity, and to social wellbeing.

Almost all irregular migrants entering Europe or the UK have some part of their journey facilitated by OCGs that are profiting from exploitation and putting lives and public safety at risk.

The OCGs behind OIC are resilient and increasingly difficult to disrupt due to their adaptable and agile methodologies spanning multiple countries and nationalities.



## Global migrant smuggling routes

Source: UNODC, Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants, 2018

# Global harm

## Organised Immigration Crime undermines national and economic security and causes substantial wider harm.

**Risk to life:** OCGs are using increasingly dangerous tactics to smuggle migrants across borders, leading to a record number of fatalities while attempting to enter Europe through irregular channels.

**Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking:** OCGs exploit vulnerable people, including children, often with false promises of safety and opportunity, only to extort them through exorbitant fees, forced labour and in some cases sexual exploitation.

**Economic Prosperity:** OIC undermines economic prosperity by straining public services and fuelling grey economies. OCGs also make a substantial profit from OIC, which is often used to fund other forms of criminality, which cause wider societal harm and further drain economic prosperity.

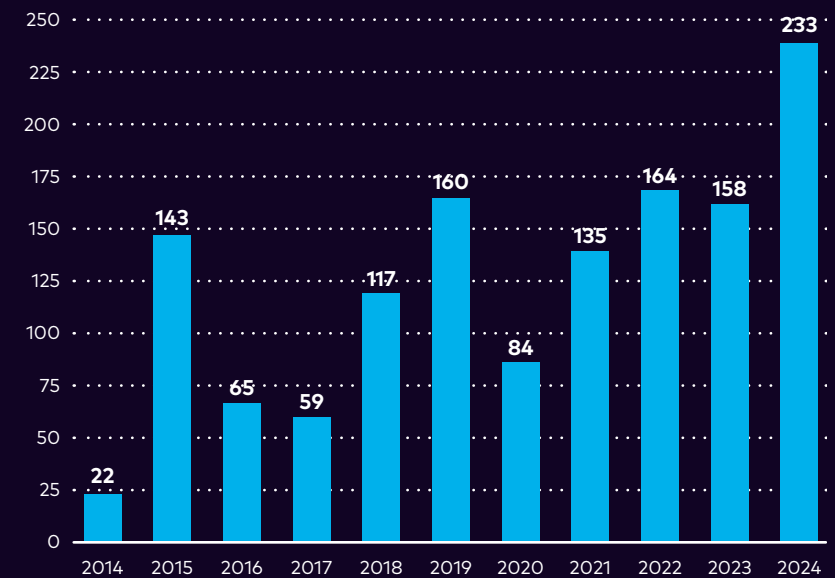
**National Security:** OIC enables individuals to enter countries without appropriate security checks, increasing national security risks.

**Loss of public confidence and social unrest:** OIC undermines the integrity of immigration and border controls, undermining public confidence and cohesion, and causing deep community concern.

Migrant smuggling is estimated to be worth as much as \$10 billion USD per year to OCGs.

Source: Migration Data Portal, 2024

Since 2014, the UN's International Organisation for Migration estimate that at least 1,350 people have died during migration attempts in Europe.



Dead and missing by year

Source: Missing Migrants Project, International Organisation for Migration, 2025

# Threats to National Borders

## Organised criminals use multiple methods to facilitate irregular migrants.

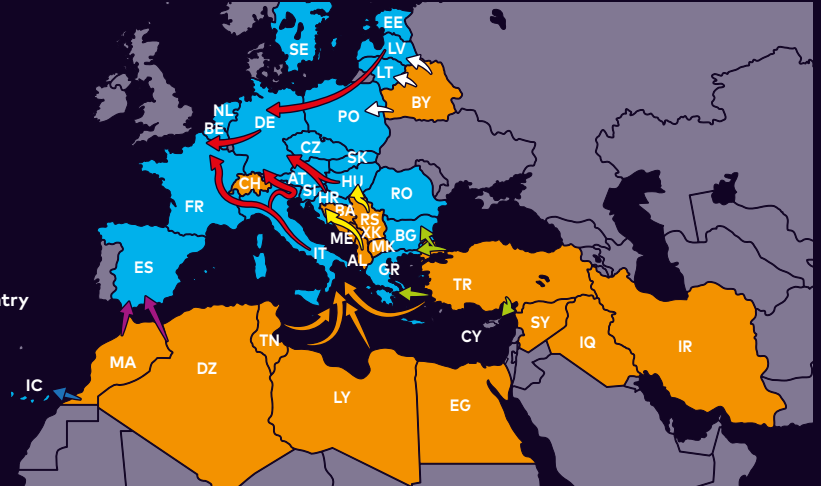
While irregular entry to the UK often takes place through concealments in lorries and the use of false identification on commercial flights, the most prominent and visible challenge since 2020 is the use of small boats to cross the English Channel.

Small boats remain, on average, the least expensive form of facilitated irregular entry into the UK by a considerable margin. The boats, engines and equipment are typically sourced from outside of Europe and imported by OCGs through a number of routes. From storage locations across the continent smaller shipments are driven in vans and cars to the French coast

OCGs have industrialised the supply chains of boats, engines, and other equipment that are neither suitable nor safe for use for this purpose, and this has enabled them to facilitate much higher volumes of irregular migration, with consequent increases in the risk to life.

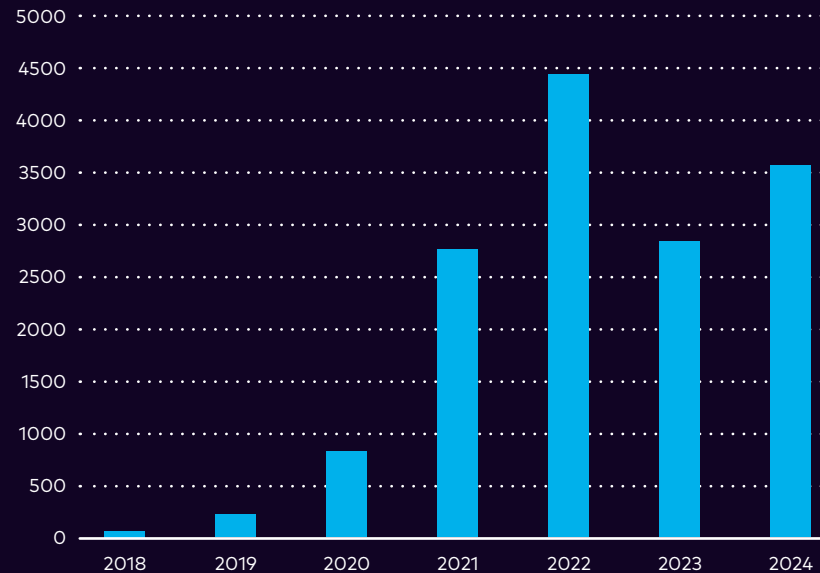
Opportunities offered by the online environment and social media platforms are exploited by OCGs, including advertising facilitation, recruitment of potential migrants and communication between OCG members and with migrants throughout the journey.

- Eastern route
- Western Balkans route
- Eastern Mediterranean route
- Central Mediterranean route
- Routes within Europe
- Western Mediterranean route
- Western African route
- Irregular migration routes
- EU transit or destination country



## Migrant routes into and across Europe

Source: NCA, 2025



Number of irregular arrivals by small boat

Small boats continue to be the most detected method of irregular entry into the UK, with over 36,000 arrivals in 2024.

Source: Immigration system statistics, year ending December 2024 - GOV.UK

# Organised Immigration Crime is highly profitable for OCGs

Financial costs can be relatively low, but migrants are willing to pay a high price to reach their intended destination, irrespective of personal risk.

## Prioritising profit

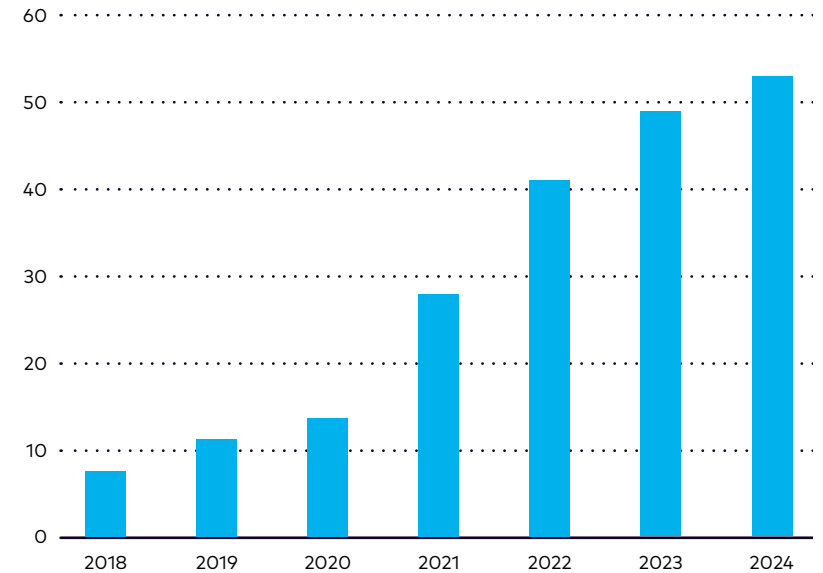
OCGs prioritise profits over migrants' physical and psychological wellbeing by using unsuitable equipment or concealing them in small, confined spaces for prolonged periods. For small boats crossings to the UK, it is highly likely that OCGs have increased the number of migrants on each boat, in part to maximise profit margins.

## Risk of arrest

To date, OIC has been a relatively low risk proposition for criminals, and whilst some key targets have been apprehended with the help of partners across the globe, many more remain who have not yet been brought to justice. This, combined with relatively low barriers to entry and high profitability, makes OIC a highly attractive option for OCGs.

Average number of passengers per small boat crossing into the UK

Source: Immigration system statistics, year ending December 2024 - GOV.UK



OCGs continue to change tactics in response to law enforcement efforts



# A new approach to tackling Organised Immigration Crime domestically and internationally

The UK's Border Security Command is coordinating cross-government efforts, whilst driving new funding, technology, capabilities and legislation to support the delivery of a secure and effective border.

The UK is adopting a new approach to tackling Organised Immigration Crime and reducing irregular migration, which considers the end-to-end process of Organised Immigration Crime, targeting each stage to make facilitation unviable and prevent OCGs from operating, leading to a secure and effective border.

We are learning from our world-leading approach to Counter Terrorism.



## Prevent

Disincentivise migrants and deter OCGs from participating in OIC.



## Pursue

Disrupt OCGs and their criminal activity.



## Protect

Detect and intercept OIC at the border.



## Prepare

Manage, learn from and adapt the UK's response to tackling OIC.

The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill creates new powers for law enforcement to identify criminals, seize materials, disrupt and prevent Organised Immigration Crime; enables greater data sharing; and establishes a new collaborative operating framework under the Border Security Commander.

## Our plan of action includes:

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### Funding

£150m investment into new technology, capabilities, specialist law enforcement officers and international networks, including uplifting the UK presence in Europol and in key source and transit countries.



### Intelligence

Developing an end-to-end intelligence and threat picture for OIC, enabling effective assessment and distribution across the system to maximise disruption opportunities.



### Domestic Levers

Improving the domestic response to OIC through law enforcement and the criminal justice system to reduce the viability of OIC OCGs operating in the UK.



### International

A new approach to partnerships, focused Home Office taskforces coordinated by a new cross-government international unit, and an innovative OIC sanctions regime, combined with more joint operational work, bilaterally and multilaterally through Europol and Interpol.



# A coherent, comprehensive law enforcement response

The UK's law enforcement response is aligned with the overall strategic approach to border security, and is already delivering results.



## Combatting facilitators

Using the full range of law enforcement tactics to disrupt and dismantle OIC networks, with around 70 ongoing NCA investigations into those inflicting the highest harm, and record disruptions last year.



## Disrupting online enablers

Tackling proliferation of OIC online and countering narratives. An estimated 80% of small boat arrivals engaged with OIC online content. We continue to work collaboratively with social media companies, combining to take down over 18,000 OIC related posts.



## Tackling OIC illicit finance

Denying the gangs their ill-gotten gains, bringing together the capabilities, expertise and intelligence of the public and private sectors behind a new approach to "follow the money" and tackle criminal finance, including through informal value transfer systems.



## Tackling the equipment and supply chains

Working to identify and, with international partners, disrupt the flow of dangerous small boats and related equipment into and across Europe, with over 1,300 items seized, detained or intercepted since 2023.



## Collaborative disruption to stop launches and gangs

Working with France, through the Joint Intelligence Cell (JICURO), exchanging intelligence, developing our understanding of the threat, building investigations, enabling interceptions, arrests and prosecutions.

# Success: Targeting the boat smugglers

International cooperation is vital in stopping migrants crossing the Channel in totally unsuitable, highly dangerous boats, supplied by unscrupulous gangs



## Case study 1

A ground-breaking NCA operation, working with the Kurdistan Region Security Council and Kurdistan Region Security Agency, led to the **arrest of three high-ranking members of a global people smuggling network** moving migrants from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) into the UK and Europe. The individuals, all from Sulaymaniyah, are linked to the same network as Amanj Hassan Zada, a UK-based facilitator convicted and jailed for 17 years in November 2024 following an NCA investigation. The NCA were able to follow the trail of the network, from Amanj Hasan Zada in his house in the UK all the way back to Sulaymaniyah where it's believed the gang were operating and recruiting.

## Case study 2

Over two years, intelligence, evidence, and technical support from NCA liaison officers for the Belgian Federal Police (Antwerp) enabled the **arrest of six people in the UK on Belgian warrants** following convictions for involvement in a major people smuggling ring. The men were allegedly part of a dangerous and harmful criminal network which moved migrants across the world, through Europe and eventually into northern Europe and the UK. The OCG had been running since 2022 and allegedly used social media platforms to communicate with migrants. The gang is suspected of transporting significant numbers of migrants who had their asylum claims rejected in Belgium to the UK using small boats. The group also committed serious sexual offences against male migrant minors, including rape which they would video and use footage to blackmail the victims into criminality and further sexual abuse.

# Success through international partnerships

## France

More French personnel being deployed, supported by cutting-edge surveillance technologies and equipment; and more disruptions, enabled by improved intelligence sharing.

## Germany

Joint Action Plan on Irregular Migration to improve investigative and prosecutorial outcomes on OIC, with enhanced intelligence sharing.

## Italy

Joint taskforce on OIC illicit finance.

## Albania

Continued cooperation through the Joint Migration Taskforce (JMTF).

## Europol

50% uplift in NCA deployments, and numerous Operational Task Forces (OTFs) and Joint Action Days (JADs).

## G7 agreement

In July 2024, the Home Secretary and her counterparts from the G7 agreed a major international plan to tackle people smuggling.

## Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government

Set foundations for future relationship, with agreements to target people smuggling gangs and strengthen co-operation on border security, returns, and deterrence communications.

## Vietnam

Close cooperation including a deterrence communications campaign and a returns charter flight have helped reduce arrivals after spikes last year.



## Calais Group: UK, Germany, Belgium, France and The Netherlands

Five-point plan to target migrant smugglers:

- Coordinating communications to deter dangerous irregular journeys.
- Strengthening law enforcement cooperation through Europol.
- Enhancing research and analysis of illicit finance.
- Tackling the use of social media.
- Enhancing reciprocal information sharing on migrant flows and trends.

# Tackling Organised Immigration Crime requires a holistic international response

Governments and international organisations must work together to develop strategic solutions and collaborative operations, across the whole irregular migration route, from source to destination countries.

The UK will develop even closer working relationships with international partners bilaterally and multilaterally to enhance the sharing of capabilities, intelligence, and knowledge. We will:

- Work with the EU and EU member states to strengthen operational and legislative responses to OIC, including through maximising participation in Europol Operational Task Forces, to achieve better criminal justice outcomes;
- Demonstrate leadership and creativity in the international system's response to OIC, including through the Calais Group of Interior Ministers, the United Nations and other fora such as the G7 and G20; and
- Work with international source and transit country partners to disincentivise irregular migration to the UK, providing protection for, and improving the long-term prospects of, people in their home country or region, and enabling the swift and efficient return of those with no right to be in the UK.



Examples of social media assets from UK strategic communications campaigns overseas.



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