

## Providing a picture of the threat to the UK from serious and organised crime

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# Welcome from the

# NCA's Director General

I wrote last year that serious and organised crime (SOC) causes more harm, to more people, more often than any other national security threat. Much has changed since then, yet this uncomfortable fact remains true. SOC continues to threaten our security, our economic prosperity, and the safety of the public we serve: no parts of society are immune to the efforts of organised crime gangs, cybercriminals, fraudsters, or those who sexually abuse children.

To tackle these offenders and reduce the threats they pose, we must first understand them, and that is the purpose of this assessment. The National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2024 is a comprehensive baseline of the threat, drawing on intelligence and analysis from across law enforcement and other partner organisations. I am grateful to everyone who has contributed. It looks at how the threat has evolved since the NCA's creation in 2013, focuses specifically on the changes over the last year, and considers the societal trends that will affect SOC over the next five years.

Looking back, it is striking that while overall crime figures have fallen over the last decade, the scale of and harm from SOC has increased, with SOC offending

### What is Serious and Organised Crime?

Serious and organised crime (SOC) is defined as individuals planning, coordinating, and committing serious offences, whether individually, in groups and/or as part of transnational networks.

The NCA leads the operational response to serious and organised crime, working with partners across law enforcement, government, industry, and beyond. Our overall goal of crime reduction requires us collectively to focus on preventing crime, and protecting potential victims, as well as on disrupting and dismantling organised crime groups.

In 2023, the Director General of the NCA directed the agency to focus upstream (for example, against criminal bosses and enablers), overseas, and online where the NCA's unique capabilities can have the most impact.

consequently making up a significantly higher proportion of all offending. This is in part due to drugs becoming cheaper, more potent, and thus more dangerous. Organised crime has also become more international, better networked and technically adept. But the main factor has been the societal shift to living more of our lives online, which criminals have exploited in the form of cybercrime, fraud, and child sexual abuse.

The trends of the last decade have largely repeated themselves over the last year. In 2023, we saw marked increases in the threat and harm from drugs, child sexual abuse, and cybercrime, and smaller increases in money laundering and organised acquisitive crime. We assess that the threat reduced in three areas. In fraud, despite resilient high-harm fraud, total volumes have come down, largely due to industry counter-measures. In firearms, discharges are on a downward trend, and law enforcement and regulatory action has made it harder to source weapons. And in organised immigration crime, the spike of small boat arrivals in 2022 was not repeated in 2023. Progress in each of these areas is, of course, fragile and criminals will seek to reverse our gains as we have already seen with small boats.

The changing threat, rapidly evolving technology, and the global context mean that our mission to protect the public is more challenging than ten years ago. In that time, the system as a whole has increased in maturity and understanding, works better together, and has evolved to tackle new challenges. It takes a network to defeat a network, so the only way we can tackle the threat is collectively, both domestically and with our international partners. I am confident this assessment provides the baseline to enable us to do just that.

**Graeme Biggar CBE**

## The Threats

Serious and organised crime is split into the following threat areas:


- [Child Sexual Abuse](#)
- [Cyber](#)
- [Drugs](#)
- [Firearms](#)
- [Fraud](#)
- [Illicit Finance](#)
- [Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking](#)
- [Organised Acquisitive Crime](#)
- [Organised Immigration Crime](#)

## Cross-Cutting Threat Enablers

The threats cannot be considered in isolation and it is increasingly important to target cross-cutting enablers that enhance offenders' abilities to conduct their criminal activities. Those explored in this assessment are:

- [The Criminal Use of Technology](#)
- [The UK Border](#)
- [Insider Threat, Bribery and Corruption](#)
- [Prisons](#)

*The 2024 National Strategic Assessment is based on data and analysis covering the 2023 reporting period.*



Serious and organised crime continues to threaten our security, our economic prosperity, and the safety of the public we serve.

**Director General**

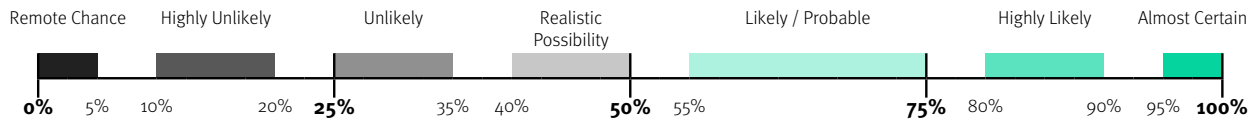
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## Probability and Uncertainty

Throughout the National Strategic Assessment, the 'probability yardstick' (as defined by the Professional Head of Intelligence Assessment) has been used to ensure consistency across the different threats and themes when assessing probability. The following defines the probability ranges considered when such language is used:



## Acknowledgements

The NCA would like to acknowledge the support offered by many partners in the preparation of this assessment. The Agency's partners include, but are not limited to:

- law enforcement and criminal justice bodies, including the police forces of England and Wales, Police Scotland, Police Service of Northern Ireland, National Ballistics Intelligence Service, HM Revenue and Customs, the Serious Fraud Office, Border Force, Immigration Enforcement, HM Prison and Probation Service, and the Crown Prosecution Service;
- UK intelligence community, including the National Cyber Security Centre;
- HM Government, including the Home Office, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Cabinet Office, and HM Treasury;
- Overseas law enforcement agencies and organisations such as Europol and Interpol;
- the academic, private, and third sectors, including research from universities, charities, non-governmental organisations, banks and other financial institutions, communication service providers and technology companies;
- regulatory and professional bodies, such as the Financial Conduct Authority and Ofcom; and
- Opal, the national police unit focused on the collation, coordination and dissemination of intelligence relating to serious organised acquisitive crime, who authored the OAC section of this product.

The threat is almost certainly increasing and causing more harm, driven by people living more online, global insecurities, and increasing interconnectivity



# Overview of SOC

## in the UK

Serious and organised crime has a pervasive and corrosive impact on the UK and our global interests. It is a major threat to the UK's national security, its economic prosperity and the safety of its people.

The effects of serious and organised crime are felt across the whole population, either directly in the form of violence, fear, and other harms (including financial loss and psychological harm), or indirectly in the form of associated criminality, increased living costs, increased strain on public services, and the undermining of legitimate businesses.

In 2023, the NCA marked its tenth anniversary. Since it started, a range of factors, including the UK's exit from the European Union and the COVID-19 pandemic, have introduced significant volatility and uncertainty into how serious and organised crime offenders operate, through the introduction of a changed regulatory landscape and new barriers to offending. In general, offenders have shown considerable resilience and flexibility to maintain their activity and have evolved to meet these challenges.

### Main Themes

This year the main themes running through the National Strategic Assessment are:

#### Technology and Online Spaces

The majority of crime now occurs either online or is enabled by online resources. Technology makes offending significantly easier for organised crime groups, allowing them to quickly diversify, collaborate, and reach a global pool of victims, while providing anonymity and security.

The proliferation and increasing accessibility of artificial intelligence technologies is almost certainly lowering barriers to entry and enabling some criminals to commit crimes at a scale and sophistication previously beyond their capabilities; however, at present artificial intelligence is more likely amplifying existing risks rather than creating new ones.

While overall crime has reduced over the last decade, the scale and threat from serious and organised crime, and the associated level of harm, has almost certainly increased. This means that serious and organised crime now makes up a higher proportion of crime overall.



This follows a long-term global trend in serious and organised crime, and is a result of:

- more people spending more time online and increasing dependence on online services;
- global instabilities as the world becomes more contested and volatile; and
- increasing levels of interconnectivity within serious and organised crime.

These three factors reinforce each other, making the response to serious and organised crime complex and challenging.

A primary driver of the growth in serious and organised crime is offending enabled or inspired by online connectivity, in the form of cybercrime, fraud, and online child sexual abuse. Another key driver is the growth of the drugs threat: drugs have become both cheaper and more potent and therefore more dangerous.

The deployment of end-to-end encryption across popular social media platforms, including messaging apps, without sufficient consideration for public safety, is putting users in danger. Companies cannot protect their customers as they are no longer able to see illegal behaviour on their systems, making it harder for law enforcement to investigate serious crime and protect the public.

## Global Insecurities

As serious and organised crime becomes more international in focus, organised crime groups are more able to exploit the vulnerabilities created by global instability in an increasingly contested and volatile world. They take advantage of more permissive, failing, and corrupt regimes to organise and carry out their criminal activities, produce and distribute illicit commodities, and launder funds. Displacement of families and children caused by global instabilities makes people vulnerable to becoming victims of child sexual abuse or modern slavery and human trafficking.

## The Interconnectivity of SOC

Serious and organised crime is characterised by increasing levels of interconnectivity, which is enabled by readily-available technology. Transnational organised crime groups and UK-based groups use these global connections to extend their reach, making them more harmful and allowing them to spread their offending across the globe, or to connect with other criminals. These groups use professional enablers and other criminally-minded individuals to expand operations, or are supported by organised crime groups that only exist to offer a service to other criminals.

### The Serious and Organised Crime Threat Today

Vulnerable individuals in the UK and overseas are exploited across a range of threats. Victims are trafficked within the UK and across borders by organised crime groups and some are drawn into various forms of modern slavery. Money mules are recruited by organised crime groups to extract and launder funds through a network of bank accounts.

Serious and organised criminals place children at risk of child sexual abuse and exploitation, both in person and online. Children are employed in county lines and exploited by organised crime groups to distribute drugs such as cocaine, crack cocaine, and heroin around the UK.

Violence is a feature of many types of serious and organised crime. While the level of firearms crime in the UK is amongst the lowest in the world, criminal use of firearms does still result in innocent people being hurt or killed. Victims of exploitation within county lines and modern slavery are often subject to physical and sexual violence or abuse from gang members.

Serious and organised crime which impacts on the UK increasingly takes place in more permissive overseas environments. Child sexual abuse, cybercrime, and fraud offenders are able to directly impact on the UK by operating online from overseas; taking advantage of weaker legislation or governance in other countries to hide their activities.

Financial profit remains the primary motivation for most serious and organised crime in the UK. Over £12 billion of criminal cash is estimated to be generated in the UK every year. It is a realistic possibility that over £100 billion is laundered annually through and within the UK or its corporate structures.

A significant portion of money laundering in the UK is linked to corrupt elites from overseas who launder money through UK financial institutions or invest in UK assets. Some kleptocrats are known to use UK institutions to evade financial sanctions imposed on states such as Russia and Iran.

Many serious and organised criminals are resilient and diverse enough to withstand major disruptions to their activity. Organised crime groups often engage in more than one form of criminality to mitigate risks, reduce operational costs, and increase profit margins. Communities remain vulnerable to the high-harm impacts of such linked criminal activity. For example, urban street gangs, who are responsible for the majority of firearms discharges, also dominate local drugs markets. There is collaboration across organised crime group networks, with many groups sharing associates, professional enablers, businesses, and lower level criminals across a variety of crime areas.

Corruption and the use of insiders in both the public and private sector enables criminals to carry out their offending. Corrupt insiders are used to facilitate the movement of illicit commodities, divulge sensitive information, and circumvent security measures.

It is a realistic possibility that rival foreign states are permissive of serious and organised criminal activity which supports their state objectives. State threats enabled by organised crime may include espionage, physical threats to individuals, and cyber operations.

## How Threats Have Changed in 2023

The below table provides a summary of how threats changed over 2023 (threats listed in alphabetical order).

Overall, these trends are likely to largely continue through 2024. The exception to this is organised immigration crime: while there was a reduction in this threat in 2023, this trend has reversed going into 2024.

<b>Increase</b> 	<b>Child Sexual Abuse</b>	The scale, complexity, and severity of the child sexual abuse threat likely increased. Both online and offline child sexual abuse continued to be under-reported and under-detected. Technology continued to develop at pace, driving and enabling more complex child sexual abuse offending and increasing the overall volume of child sexual abuse material.
	<b>Cyber</b>	The cybercrime threat to the UK remained high, and continued to increase. Ransomware remained the most harmful serious and organised cybercrime threat, the largest cybersecurity threat, and a national security threat to the UK.
	<b>Drugs</b>	The drugs threat to the UK has increased, with a rise in the production of cocaine in source countries, an expanding complex and diverse synthetic drugs market, an increase in synthetic opioid availability, and more cannabis seizures at the UK border and inland. Drug-related deaths in the UK were amongst the highest in Europe per capita.
	<b>Illicit Finance</b>	It is a realistic possibility that the amount of money laundered in the UK increased in 2023, likely as a result of increasing overall levels of serious and organised crime. Criminals increasingly used cryptoassets, electronic money institutions, and payment institutions to launder funds.
	<b>Organised Acquisitive Crime</b>	The threat increased with a rise in offending in 2023. This was been driven by the increased cost of living resulting in a greater demand for stolen goods, changes in market prices, and supply chain issues.
<b>No Change</b> 	<b>Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking</b>	It is highly likely that the overall scale of the modern slavery and human trafficking threat remained broadly consistent between 2022 and 2023. The reporting of exploitation in the UK continued to increase; however, this highly likely reflects ongoing improvements in knowledge and reporting around the modern slavery and human trafficking threat and changes in illegal migration trends, rather than an increase in the threat.
<b>Decrease</b> 	<b>Firearms</b>	Although the threat to the UK public from firearms has reduced, the criminal intent to source and use firearms remained unchanged. Law enforcement action and legislative changes have made it more difficult for criminals to obtain firearms, resulting in reduced numbers of discharges across the country since 2022.
	<b>Fraud</b>	It is likely that fraud conducted against individuals and businesses declined overall in 2023 compared with 2022. However, the risk remains high, with organised crime groups still motivated to operate in this perceived low-risk, high-reward crime. Technological countermeasures have had an impact, particularly on volume, lower-harm frauds, but the intent and capability of criminals involved in fraud globally has not diminished; they are adaptive and will continue to innovate.
	<b>Organised Immigration Crime</b>	Detections of irregular migrants entering the UK reduced in 2023, although organised immigration crime groups remain a persistent threat. Small boats departing from northern France remained the most detected method of moving irregular migrants in 2023.

In the last ten years, understanding of the SOC threat to the UK has significantly increased



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

# SOC: Past and Future

In October 2023, the NCA marked its ten-year anniversary, with a mandate to lead the UK's response to serious and organised crime. In this time, understanding of the serious and organised crime threat to the UK has significantly increased, a result of the presence of dedicated analytic functions working closely with partners across the whole serious and organised crime system to build understanding of existing threats and identify new trends and risks.

Since then, the threat from serious and organised crime has almost certainly grown, though notably none of the main organised crime threats faced by the UK are new. Instead, existing threats have escalated and evolved as offenders innovate and adapt, in particular to new opportunities provided by technology. For example:

- In 2014, we assessed that effective 3D-printed firearms were prohibitively expensive and did not pose a threat to the UK in the short-to-medium term. In 2023, a viable complete 3D-printed firearm was seized, although there were no confirmed discharges.
- In 2014, innovations in generative artificial intelligence widened the accessibility of sophisticated tools. In 2024, generative artificial intelligence tools are routinely used for generating images of child sexual abuse, and in cybercrime and fraud offending;

## Looking Forward

A range of social, technological, and societal changes will impact on serious and organised crime over the next five years. It is highly likely that the longer the cost of living remains high, the more people will experience economic pressures that put them at risk of involvement in serious and organised crime, either as customers, victims, or criminal participants.

The rapid pace of technological advancement will create new vulnerabilities and provide opportunities for criminals to exploit. The availability of crime as a service business models means detailed technical knowledge will be increasingly unnecessary. Many criminals will likely adopt new off-the-shelf privacy technologies at least as fast as the wider population, due to their ease of access, low cost,



- The first known ransomware attack took place in 1989, but it was the development of the ransomware as a service business model in the late 2010s which changed cybercrime. This model is now the leading method used by the most harmful ransomware groups impacting the UK and has substantially lowered the barrier of entry for those wanting to become involved in cybercrime.
- Only 37% of frauds reported to Action Fraud in the financial year 2012-2013 were cyber-enabled. By 2023, it was 89%, and the overall number of incidents had increased by over 50%.

Organised criminals have always used the latest technology to enable their offending; however, this has been accelerated by the rapid pace of technological change over the last ten years. Over the last ten years, the increased adoption of online services within the general population has provided the most significant enabler of change in serious and organised crime. As more people spend more time online, and increasingly rely on online services, this has increased public vulnerabilities and presented new and more efficient ways for offenders to target their victims, including across borders.

Technology has also increased opportunities to identify, analyse, assess, and respond to the threat; however, law enforcement is challenged to keep pace with developments. Criminal uptake of new technologies generally happens faster than adoption within government and law enforcement, due to a mix of ethical, legislative, and procurement constraints.

and a perception of concealment provided by their widespread use.

Technologies that enable criminals to obscure their identities and/or commit crimes previously beyond their capabilities both across borders or online, including in virtual and immersive environments, will likely be the most exploited by offenders, presenting challenges to some existing law enforcement capabilities.

The effects of climate change will be felt unevenly across the globe. As commodities become scarcer and more expensive, it is likely that demand will be increasingly met by criminal groups and illicit markets will develop.

## Looking Back: The Resilience of SOC

Over the last ten years, one of the biggest themes in serious and organised crime offending is the resilience and flexibility of serious and organised crime offenders, who have continued to operate, in the face of significant challenges. In the last decade, both the UK's exit from the European Union and the COVID-19 pandemic introduced volatility and uncertainty into the serious and organised crime threat, through the introduction of a changed regulatory landscape. Even though these events caused some short-term disruption to organised crime groups, the overall strength of their offending models, and the resilience of the marketplaces they operate in, means there is unlikely to have been a long-term impact on the overall scale of the threat.

Alongside technology, global insecurities remain a key driver of the serious and organised crime threat. Crime groups take advantage of more permissive, failing, and corrupt regimes to organise and carry out their criminal activities, produce and distribute illicit commodities, and launder funds. Displacement of families and children by global instabilities creates vulnerabilities to becoming a victim of child sexual abuse and modern slavery and human trafficking offending, and produces opportunities for organised immigration crime offenders to scale up their operations.

The Arab Spring of 2011 in parts of North Africa and the Middle East, the long-running civil war in Syria, and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan all resulted in more irregular migration due to conflicts and instability in the countries affected. Organised crime groups met this demand, many of which targeted the UK as a destination. The small boats model, a frequently deadly mode of entry, emerged in 2018 as a response to this demand for travel to the UK and has grown to become a persistent and high-volume threat.

The establishment of a Taliban-led government following the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2020 has almost certainly increased instability resulting in higher levels of migration, and illegal migration towards Europe and the UK. The subsequent ban on poppy cultivation has introduced ongoing uncertainty into global drugs markets.

## Looking Back: The Role of Drugs in SOC

Whilst the decade has been marked by change and uncertainty, the primary motivation behind most serious and organised offending has not changed: money. Drugs remain an enduring threat, generating significant quantities of criminal cash. The total annual cost to society caused by drugs is over £20 billion per year. In the UK, drug misuse deaths per capita are amongst the highest in Europe.

The drugs threat highly likely increased in 2023. As the decade has progressed the overall drugs threat has become more dangerous, as drugs have become cheaper, more potent, and sometimes fortified with synthetic substances.

Drugs both drive and enable a range of other serious and organised offending. Drugs are a key driver of firearms-enabled violence, although criminal access to firearms has been suppressed over the last ten years to the extent that levels of firearms crime in the UK are amongst the lowest in the world. Children and vulnerable adults are often exploited in forced drug production and supply, which over the decade has become the most commonly reported form of exploitation.

Technology trends and behaviour that were strengthened during the global pandemic have continued to develop



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# Cross-Cutting

# Threat Enablers

To effectively tackle serious and organised crime in the UK it is important to target factors that can impact across a range of criminality. These cross-cutting vulnerabilities and enablers enhance organised crime groups' abilities to conduct crime. Those covered in this section include:

- **The Criminal Use of Technology** – Technology and online spaces enable most SOC offending.
- **The UK Border** – By exploiting vulnerabilities at the UK border, organised crime groups seek to move commodities in and out of the UK and evade detection.
- **Insider Threat, Bribery and Corruption** – Insiders, bribery, and corruption enable offending and threaten the UK's national security, economic prosperity, and international reputation.
- **Prisons** – The prisons estate provides opportunities for offenders to network and develop their offending, both inside and on release.

## What You Can Do

### Criminal Use of Technology

There are a number of actions that you can take to protect yourself and your information online. Go to the [Cyber](#) and [Fraud](#) pages to find out how.

### UK Border

If you live near the coast, waterways or an airfield and see anything suspicious please report it to your local police by calling 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm or danger.

You can also contact the independent charity [Crimestoppers](#) anonymously.

### Insider Threat and Law Enforcement Corruption

You can report any information about individuals abusing their positions to your local police by calling 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm or danger.

These sections detail how cross-cutting enablers aid serious and organised criminals to exploit the vulnerable, dominate communities, chase profits, and undermine the UK's economy/infrastructure.

You can also contact the independent charity [Crimestoppers](#) anonymously.

## The Criminal Use of Technology

Technology is a key enabler of serious and organised crime. Criminals continuously adapt to and take advantage of technological developments and changes in user behaviour.

Criminals access a variety of easy to use and often inexpensive technology in an effort to anonymise their communications, hide their identities, and evade law enforcement. They increasingly take advantage of communication tools ranging from virtual private networks and commercially available secure messaging apps with end-to-end encryption as standard, to more sophisticated devices costing thousands of pounds. The growth in international markets for technology such as smartphones and the internet has provided criminals around the globe with increasing access to new tools, techniques, other criminal networks, and potential victims. Developments in technology use by serious and organised criminals present both challenges and opportunities for law enforcement.

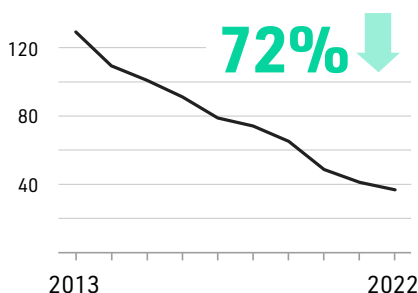
As more people live more of their lives online, society is at greater risk from online criminals. The internet offers criminals a global reach to access personal information to find and exploit victims. Both UK and international offenders are targeting UK society, ranging from individual victims of fraud to cybercrime against UK industry. Children in the UK and overseas are at risk of being exploited by child sexual abuse offenders, who victimise them via online offending and have the ability to seek out potential victims to commit contact abuse. The dark web is also used to commit many types of serious and organised crime, including child sexual abuse, cybercrime, fraud, and illicit commodity sales.

### Changing SMS/MMS and Mobile Data Volumes

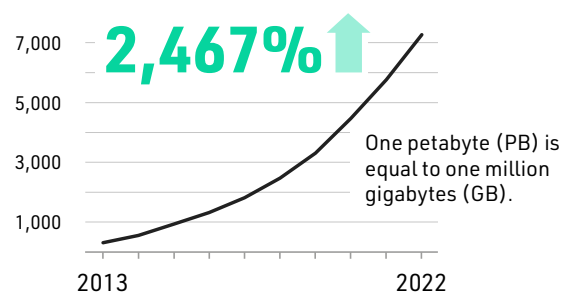


Developments in technologies such as smartphones have driven a change in the UK communications market and consumer behaviour. There has been a decrease in the use of traditional SMS/MMS and an increase in the use of mobile data, used to support the use of social media sites and secure messaging apps.

Mobile SMS/MMS Volumes (Billions)



Mobile Data Volumes (Petabytes)



Source: Ofcom, Telecommunications Market Data Update Q2 2023, published 26 October 2023.

Organised crime groups exploit publicly available technology to enhance their operations, such as the use of Bluetooth and GPS tracking devices to track and monitor illicit shipments.

Cryptocurrency remains an important facilitator of criminal transactions, for laundering funds, paying for goods and services on the dark web, and making ransom demands. Their legitimate use by the public also provides criminals with fraud and theft opportunities.

A developing feature of modern technology is the ease with which it can be used, providing greater opportunities for illegal use. The increasing adoption of automation and smart technology, such as internet or Bluetooth connected devices, whilst reducing the opportunity for human interference, increases the risk of cybercrime through the manipulation of underlying IT systems.

Extended reality technologies, such as augmented and virtual reality, have been identified as evolving technology threats, particularly in child sexual abuse. This technology provides the ability to manipulate or merge virtual and physical worlds. It is highly likely these spaces will be used for serious and organised crime purposes, such as fraud, as the existing technology develops.

It is likely that as artificial intelligence capabilities advance, criminals will seek to exploit the opportunities it offers. Large language models and image generation tools are already being used for illicit purposes in child sexual abuse, cybercrime, and fraud offending. The proliferation and increasing accessibility of artificial intelligence technologies is almost certainly enabling some criminals to commit crimes at a scale and sophistication previously beyond their capabilities.

There is potential for law enforcement agencies and the private sector to use artificial intelligence to detect and prevent crime. For example, machine learning algorithms can help to quickly and accurately analyse large volumes of data to identify suspicious transactions and patterns that may indicate fraudulent investment activity.

## The UK Border

Commodity-based serious and organised crime in the UK, such as the supply of drugs and firearms, relies on international flows of illicit goods and the ability of organised crime groups to circumvent controls at the UK border.

Passenger and freight traffic continue to be exploited by organised crime groups. Smuggling activity across most modes of transport has generally remained consistent; however, in 2023 there were significant increases in detections of illicit goods, in particular cannabis, being smuggled via international parcel operators, the postal service, and by air passengers.

Organised crime groups also seek to exploit the UK border outbound controls, for the exports of stolen vehicles and machinery, illicit cash, and drug supply to lucrative overseas markets.

The nature of the UK coastline and the accessibility of many maritime ports makes the UK vulnerable to the threat of criminals exploiting general maritime for smuggling commodities. There has been an increasing number of instances of Class A drugs being found washed-up on British and Irish shores in 2023 which is likely an indicator that the general maritime method is being used more frequently. Similarly, general aviation is a mode abused by criminals who have access to light aircraft and/or helicopters capable of making flights to numerous airfields and suitable landing areas in the UK. Law enforcement continues to monitor this mode in order to develop understanding of the threat.

### UK Border Operating Environment

In the UK, high volumes of passenger and freight traffic move through a multitude of environments. Criminals can exploit these routes, creating opportunities for serious and organised crime. This makes the UK border an extremely challenging space for law enforcement to control.

#### Airfields

Over **3,270** aerodromes, small airfields, farmers' field strips, and helipads

#### Airports

**38** international airports

#### Vessel Landing Sites

Approximately

**3,500**

general maritime official landing sites



#### International Rail

**1** passenger terminal to/from Europe via the Eurostar

**2** main rail depots receiving freight direct from the Channel Tunnel



#### Sea Ports

**51**

major freight seaports

**27**

roll-on/roll-off ports



Source: Department for Transport, Civil Aviation Authority, Home Office.

Significant challenges facing UK law enforcement include the overseas legalisation of commodities which remain illicit in the UK. Cannabis production in North America, for example, and its online marketing, has likely created a demand in the UK. While users in the UK are paying a premium for North American cannabis, it remains largely indistinguishable in terms of its chemical composition, from cannabis supplied to the UK from other sources. Regardless, this demand has resulted in cannabis seizures from the USA and Canada more than doubling at the UK border in 2023.

Over the last decade, processes at the UK border have become more technologically advanced. Developments such as the automation of container movement and the use of telematics present a range of risks and opportunities, for both organised crime groups and law enforcement. As a result of legislative changes following the UK's exit from the European Union, UK law enforcement will, in future, have access to pre-arrival data which will give details of shipments arriving from the European Union.

The Common Travel Area, and particularly the routes between Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Great Britain, continues to be exploited by criminals for the purposes of immigration crime, as well as smuggling illicit commodities and excise fraud. Routes between the European Union and Ireland are being used by criminals to avoid border checks at UK ports.

Technological advancements in mobile devices have enhanced criminals' capabilities to track goods across the border in recent years, particularly in relation to Bluetooth tracking devices. Such trackers are a cheap and accessible tool for organised crime groups to monitor the movements of their illicit goods, and were discovered much more frequently by law enforcement in 2023.

### Insider Threat, Bribery and Corruption

Corruption and the use of 'insiders' in both the public and private sector enables organised crime groups to carry out their offending.

Employees in job roles that can be used to facilitate the activities of criminals, such as in law enforcement, the Prison Service, logistics, and at the UK border are particularly vulnerable to targeting by organised crime groups. Corrupt insiders are used to facilitate the movement of illicit commodities, divulge sensitive information and circumvent security measures, reducing the likelihood of law enforcement detection.

Individuals working in sectors such as accounting, banking, and legal services are also vulnerable to targeting by organised crime groups, as these roles can provide valuable assistance in complex money laundering and fraudulent activity. These professional enablers are integral to the threat from serious and organised crime.

The UK continues to face the challenge of its financial services and corporate structures being exploited to launder the proceeds of both international and domestic bribery and corruption.

### Prisons

It is highly likely that imprisonment of some high-level members of organised crime groups does not significantly disrupt their ability to run criminal enterprises from prison, particularly when they can still maintain contact with external criminal associates and access funding.

Networking in prison almost certainly leads to the formation of new criminal associations and the transfer of criminal skills and knowledge. The movement of prisoners around the prison estate means that many prisoners encounter a large number of other prisoners throughout their time inside, enabling offenders to establish new links with other parts of the UK or with foreign criminal supply chains.

Many prisoners are able to acquire mobile phones which are used to direct criminality both inside and outside of prison. It is likely that the types of mobile phones accessible to prisoners are becoming more sophisticated, even in highly secure prisons.

It is likely that some corrupt staff in prisons enable serious and organised crime activity by completing favours on behalf of offenders, inappropriately disclosing privileged information, and turning a blind eye to unauthorised activity. They also assist offenders by facilitating the movement of illicit items such as drugs and mobile phones.

The deployment of end-to-end encryption on key platforms is increasing the risks to children by reducing the visibility of offending



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# Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse covers a range of offence types occurring online, offline, or moving between both. It is estimated that there are between 710,000 and 840,000 UK-based adult offenders who pose varying degrees of risk to children, equivalent to 1.3% to 1.6% of the UK adult population ([click here](#) to find out more about the methodology used). The scale, complexity, and severity of the child sexual abuse threat is likely increasing.

The hidden nature of both online and offline child sexual abuse means it is hard to detect and under-reported. Police-recorded crime does not effectively quantify online offending, where often one offence can relate to multiple instances of child sexual abuse material, or where the most serious physical offence is recorded instead of any precursor online offences such as grooming.



experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16-years-old.

Source: Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre), 2023.

In 2022, 73% of child sexual abuse offences recorded by the Police in England and Wales related to physical sexual abuse. Where recorded, about one-third of

## What You Can Do

### Under 18-year-olds

- **Being harmed or threatened in person:** report to local police by calling 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm or danger.
- **Worried about online sexual abuse or exploitation:** report it to [NCA CEOP](#).
- **Worried about a sexual image or video that has been shared online:** use the [Report Remove reporting tool](#) from Childline and the Internet Watch Foundation for help to remove it.
- **Needing to talk about any issue:** contact [Childline](#) at any time.



these offences occurred within the family environment. This is in contrast to other estimates which assess the figure is around two-thirds, suggesting familial abuse is under-reported.

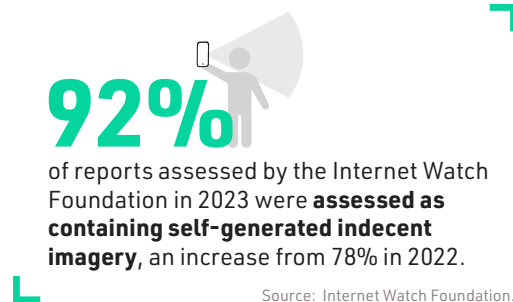
Understanding physical offending, including group-based offending, remains an ongoing priority for law enforcement. Victims and survivors of group-based offending who had previously witnessed or experienced unhealthy relationships are more likely to be vulnerable to controlling, violent, and otherwise abusive behaviours.

Social media and gaming platforms provide increasingly multifunctional features whilst often lacking key safety features, such as robust age verification, moderation, and reporting mechanisms. This provides opportunities for offenders to remain anonymous whilst initiating contact with children to commit both online offences, such as grooming, eliciting indecent images from a child, or further physical abuse offline.

Online spaces also present other potential harms, such as exposure to pornography that may also include violent material, which at a young age can influence some children to display harmful sexual behaviour. 52% of police-reported child sexual abuse reports relate to children aged 10 to 17 years-old offending against other children.

The volume of indecent images of children identified online remains high and is increasing. The Internet Watch Foundation reported that 275,293 webpages on the clear web were confirmed to contain indecent images of children in 2023. The most common age of victims continues to be 13-14, although there has been a continued upward trend in reporting of the under 10s age group.

The volume of self-generated indecent images, either shared consensually, or elicited through manipulation or coercion is also increasing. It is highly likely that this is particularly driven by the popularity of platforms that enable image and live video sharing, such as Snapchat and TikTok. The normalisation of sexualised behaviour within younger age groups can amplify the pressure on children to share self-generated indecent images and it is unlikely that many of these offences are reported to professionals, unless aggravating factors such as blackmail are involved.



The blackmail of children using self-generated indecent

## Professionals Working with Children, Young People and their Families

- Training, resources, and advice on topics relating to online child sexual abuse: [NCA CEOP Education Programme](#)
- Online safety resources, guidance, and training to help people working and volunteering with children: [NSPCC Learning](#)
- Training, consultancy, risk assessments, and interventions: [Lucy Faithfull Foundation](#)
- Training and resources for when working with children who have experienced online child sexual abuse: [Marie Collins Foundation](#)
- Support for professionals working with children and young people with any online safety issue: [Professionals Online Safety Helpline \(POSH\)](#)

## Parents and Carers

- For information, advice and activities to use with children at home visit:
  - [CEOP Education](#)
  - [Marie Collins Foundation](#)
  - [NSPCC Online Safety Hub](#)
  - [Internet Matters](#) for online guides and resources for parents
- For resources to specifically tackle the online sexual abuse of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) visit the [Internet Watch Foundation](#) and [NSPCC](#).

images for [financial gain](#) has increased. It is almost certain that the majority of financially motivated blackmail is carried out by organised crime groups based overseas, with older male children particularly vulnerable to becoming targets. This is in contrast to other types of child sexual abuse where the majority of victims are female. The sums of money involved in sexual extortion may be modest but the impact on victims can be devastating. The NCA has issued a priority alert to the education profession to improve awareness.

The NCA estimates that the deployment of [end-to-end encryption](#) on popular social media platforms will undermine agreed [Safety by Design](#) principles and will impair the industry's ability to identify child sexual abuse content. It is estimated this will reduce the number of [industry reports](#) disseminated by the NCA to police each year by as much as [92%](#) for all of Facebook and [85%](#) for all of Instagram. Consequently, industry and law enforcement's ability to protect children will be reduced.

Developments in technology continue to drive and enable more complex child sexual abuse offending online, as seen with the livestreaming of child sexual abuse and [TCSO](#) offending. Child sexual abuse material generated by artificial intelligence is illegal. [Generative artificial intelligence](#) image creation tools are increasing the volume of child sexual abuse material available across the clear web and [dark web](#). This creates difficulties with identifying and safeguarding victims due to vastly improved photo realism and the ability for offenders to create child sexual abuse material from any available non-indecent images. Additionally, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has published research outlining the risks to children in virtual reality environments, including sexual grooming, children's exposure to pornographic or adult content, and the ability for offenders to engage with children and each other, normalising offending behaviour.

- Worried about a young person's sexual behaviour: visit [Stop It Now!](#) for anonymous support.

### Concerned Adults

- Anyone with a concern about their own or others' sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children can find confidential help and support at [Stop It Now!](#).
- Worried about child sexual abuse material online: report it to the [Internet Watch Foundation](#).
- For help with child protection concerns including online abuse or harm visit the [NSPCC Helpline](#).

## Case Study: Self-Generated Indecent Images

In December 2023, a 24-year-old male from Lambeth was sentenced to 18 years in prison with an additional six years on licence after pleading guilty to 50 offences including causing or inciting a child under 13 to engage in sexual activity, blackmail, and making indecent images of children. He will be subject to an indefinite Sexual Harm Prevention Order and has been placed on the sex offenders register.

The male had used Snapchat accounts to coerce, threaten, and manipulate children into sending self-generated indecent images and videos. To build trust with victims he posed as a model scout for major clothing brands, taking children through a lengthy interview process with fake adverts

and contracts. In one case, he blackmailed a 14-year-old girl with learning difficulties into sending images and offered her \$1,000 to engage in a sexual act with her brother.

The NCA was able to identify the offender, safeguard victims, and gather evidence because his offending on Snapchat was not end-to-end encrypted. 28 female victims, some as young as nine, were identified worldwide. It is believed the individual contacted over 10,000 children so others may also have been harmed.

## Children's Digital Ecosystem

Young people are highly engaged with the digital world, increasing the potential harms to children, including sexual abuse.



### DIGITAL WORLD

**50%**

of 8-11 year-olds use the video sharing site TikTok.



**77%**

of 12-15 year-olds

**One third** of 8-15 year-olds have a user/profile age of at least 16 on a social media platform.

16+



Source: Ofcom.

**27%**

of 11 year-olds have been exposed to pornography online.



Source: Children's Commissioner for England, 2023.

**2,562**

artificial intelligence generated indecent images of children identified in one month within one dark web forum in 2023.



Source: Internet Watch Foundation.

### DIGITAL RISK



Images and video of a sexual nature, shared consensually between under 18s, might later be shared without consent.



Children can gain access to age inappropriate online environments where they can be exploited by their peers or adults.

18+

The viewing of pornography online can negatively impact the sexual behaviours of some children.



The lack of Safety by Design principles incorporated into artificial intelligence and virtual reality platforms increases the risk to children.



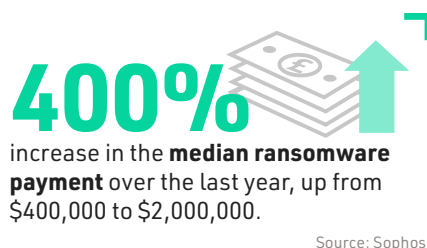
# Cybercriminals operating ransomware as a service from overseas continue to be responsible for most high-profile cybercrime attacks against the UK

## Cyber

The deployment of ransomware remains the greatest serious and organised cybercrime threat, the largest cybersecurity threat, and also poses a risk to the UK's national security. Ransomware attacks can have a significant impact on victims due to financial, data, and service losses, which can lead to business closure, inaccessible public services, and compromised customer data. Threat actors are typically based in overseas jurisdictions where limited cooperation makes it challenging for UK law enforcement to disrupt their activities.

Reporting by Sophos estimated that the median global ransomware payment made by victims increased by 400% to \$2 million over the last year, up from \$400,000. Similarly, the wider recovery costs to victims of a ransomware attack have also increased over the same timeframe from \$1.82 million to \$2.73 million – an increase of around 50%.

In 2023, identified incidents of ransomware impacting UK victims



## What You Can Do

### Protect Yourself by Securing Your Accounts, Data and Devices

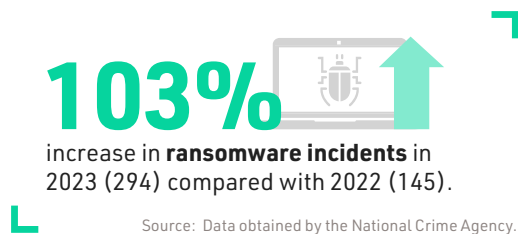
- Protect your accounts by using a strong and different password for your email using three random words and by turning on 2-step verification. Follow Cyber Aware advice.
- Protect your information when using social media.
- Select online providers and retailers which offer good protection for you and your data/information.

### Recognise and Break Suspicious Contacts

- Stop and check official contact routes practices and payment details. If you have

were double those of 2022. Similar trends were also present in global figures, with about 80% more victims identified. Ransomware incidents remain under-reported, and it is unlikely the increased levels of ransomware activity in 2023 can be explained by a change in rates of incident reporting.

The increase in ransomware incidents is likely due to the continued professionalisation of the threat, with multiple business models being operated. The most common model remains ransomware as a service where high-end cybercriminals sell access to the tools needed to launch an attack, making the crime type more accessible to less skilled criminals. The ransomware as a service model also makes it quicker to launch a ransomware attack and facilitates faster extraction of funds from victims as the tools and infrastructure are provided ready for use.



Source: Data obtained by the National Crime Agency.

Other tactics continue to be developed by ransomware criminals that seek to increase the pressure on victims to pay ransom demands or offer multiple opportunities to extort money. For example, stealing data from victims provides another opportunity for extortion and the threat to release or sell this stolen information increases the pressure on victims to pay. This theft of data can have far reaching implications for victims and it can be used or sold by cybercriminals to commit further crimes, typically fraud.

2023 has also experienced further supply chain attacks that focus on critical digital service providers, spreading the impact of these attacks through multiple victims and offering multiple opportunities to profit from the attack.

The deployment of ransomware is supported by cybercriminals who provide access to enabling functions and services. A number of these enabling functions have been identified by the NCA and National Cyber Security Centre and include:

- **Online Marketplaces and Forums:** These platforms enable the exchange of cybercrime-related services, tools, and knowledge alongside the sale of compromised data that are used in the commission of cybercrime offences.
- **Financial Services:** Such services allow cybercriminals to convert illicit funds, typically held as cryptocurrency, into hard currency and include the illicit use of legitimate providers alongside the use of those complicit in crime.

any doubts about a message, don't use the number or address in the message, but use the details from their official website to contact the organisation directly.

## Report the Incident

- If you've received a suspicious email, forward it to [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk)
- Report suspicious text messages to 7726.
- If you have fallen victim to fraud, report it to [Action Fraud](#) in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland. For Scotland report to Police Scotland by calling 101.

## National Cyber Security Centre Guidance

### Ransomware

Law enforcement does not encourage, endorse, nor condone the payment of ransom demands. If you do pay the ransom:

- there is no guarantee that you will get access to your data or computer;
- your computer will still be infected;
- you will be paying criminal groups;
- you are more likely to be targeted in future.

More information is available on the [NCSC website](#).

### Businesses

- For medium and large businesses visit [10 Steps to Cyber Security](#).
- For small businesses please visit the [Small Business Guide](#).

- **Initial Access Brokers:** Gaining access to victim networks is a critical step of a ransomware attack. Initial access brokers specialise in engineering access to the most desirable victims, typically using stolen data or credentials. Having researched the victim and confirmed the access works, these are then resold by initial access brokers to cybercriminals for a much greater value.

Russian and Russian-speaking criminals behind ransomware as a service platforms continue to be responsible for most high-profile cybercrime attacks against the UK. It is highly likely that those groups based in Russia itself benefit from a permissive operating environment and tolerance of their cybercrime activities.

Cybercriminals continue to exploit current events in their criminal campaigns. For example, using cost of living issues as a lure in phishing campaigns or by targeting ransomware at industries or sectors perceived as being under pressure. These issues and pressures can be used by cybercriminals to coerce victims to pay ransoms in the belief it will help to restore operations more quickly.

Beyond ransomware – which despite being the most impactful cybercrime to UK victims is also the least reported – the overall cybercrime threat continues to be high. More than 24,000 cyber dependant crimes were reported to Action Fraud in 2023 and almost a quarter (22%) of businesses in the UK are estimated to have been the victim of a cybercrime in 2023. UK organisations and the public face significant threats from less sophisticated cybercrime, such as distributed denial of service and the implications of data breaches. Malicious emails, aimed at stealing information or encouraging victims to download malware, generally to provide attackers access to a victim’s network, also continue to feature regularly.

The compromise of social media and both business and personal email accounts is also a growing trend, typically undertaken to enable fraud-based offences. As the popularity of cryptocurrency grows, so too does the frequency of cryptocurrency crime. Volumes of cryptocurrency theft and crypto-jacking continued to increase in 2023.

## Case Study: Major Ransomware Group Disruption

In February 2024 the NCA took control of the servers of LockBit, the world’s most harmful cybercrime group, infiltrating their criminal enterprise and disrupting their operations.

LockBit provided ransomware as a service to a global network of affiliates, supplying them with the tools and infrastructure required to carry out ransomware attacks. During its four years of operation, LockBit ransomware attacks targeted thousands of victims around the world, including in the UK, and caused losses of billions of pounds, dollars, and euros, both in ransom payments and in the costs of recovery.

During the operational activity the NCA took control of LockBit’s primary administration environment, which enabled affiliates to build and carry out attacks. We also took control of the

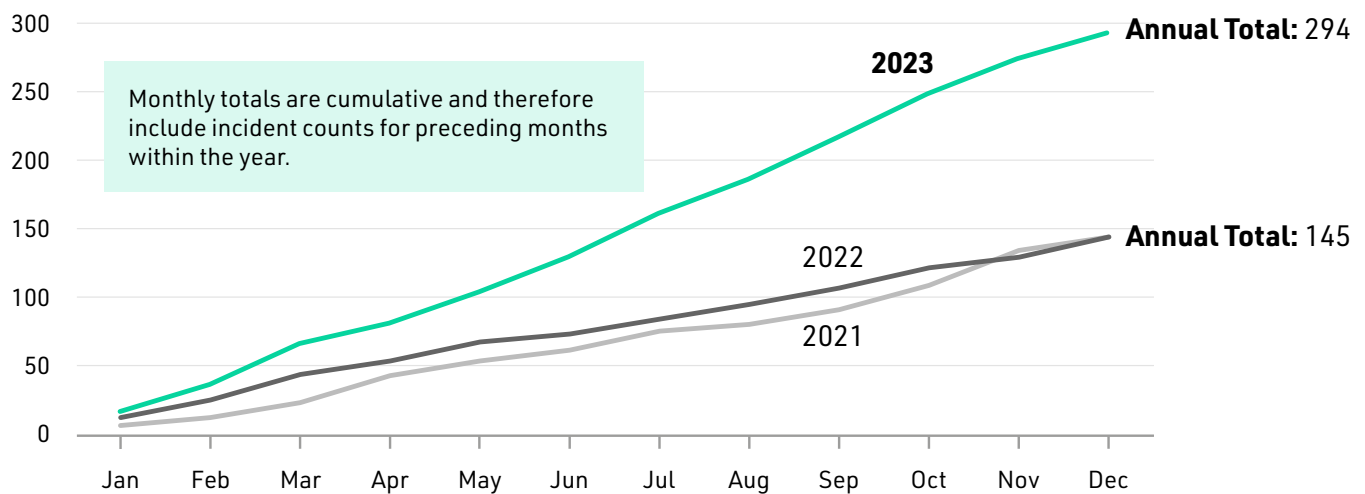


group’s public-facing leak site on the dark web (as shown in image), on which they previously hosted, and threatened to publish, data stolen from victims. Alongside this, infrastructure and servers used by LockBit across the globe were seized by the NCA, FBI, and a taskforce of international partners. Over 200 cryptocurrency accounts linked to the group were frozen, key affiliates and group members indicted, and arrests made in Poland, Ukraine and the US.

A further round of operational activity saw LockBitSupp, the group’s main administrator and developer, being publically named as Russian national Dmitry Khoroshev. He was also issued with financial and travel sanctions by the UK, US, and Australia and charged with cybercrime offences by the US.

Despite quickly relaunching their infrastructure, LockBit has been fundamentally degraded. As a result of the NCA led disruptions, the group’s operational output has considerably reduced and they have resorted to relisting old victims and making misleading claims about new victims to improve their ‘victim count’. LockBit’s reputation has also suffered significant damage within the cybercrime community. Around 64% of affiliates have now left the group and it is unlikely that LockBit will be able to recover to operate at the same level again.

## Significant Increase in Ransomware Incidents



Source: Data obtained by the National Crime Agency.

# There has never been a more dangerous time to consume illicitly purchased drugs



GETTY IMAGES

## Drugs

Drug use and drug misuse deaths continue to impact the UK, with a total annual cost to society of over £20 billion per year. In the UK, drug misuse deaths per capita have increased by 60% over the last ten years and are amongst the highest in Europe. Heroin continues to be associated with the largest number of deaths, followed by cocaine, and then benzodiazepines.

The increasing threat to the UK from the cocaine market is anticipated to continue in 2024. Global cocaine production has increased year-on-year since 2014. Since 2023, the Colombian government has reduced efforts to eradicate the coca crop, the raw ingredient in cocaine, due to a shift in anti-drug trafficking tactics. The latest figures indicate over 2,000 tonnes of cocaine was produced in 2021 which was more than double the volume produced in 2014. Purity and price in the UK remain consistently high, suggesting substantial quantities of cocaine continue to be available to criminal gangs.

The narcotics ban enforced by the Taliban, imposed in April 2022, reduced opium cultivation in Afghanistan to its lowest rate in

**2,304 tonnes**

of cocaine produced in 2021.

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023.

### What You Can Do

If you suspect someone of being involved in drug related crime, including heroin, cocaine, cannabis or synthetic drugs, report to local police by calling 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm or danger. Alternatively, if you wish to remain anonymous, please contact the independent charity Crimestoppers.

**There has never been a more dangerous time to consume illicitly purchased drugs.** High strength nitazenes (synthetic opioids) are being detected with increasing frequency within a variety of illegally obtained drugs. Only consume medicines that have been prescribed for you or purchased on the advice of a registered medical professional.



20 years. There is currently no reduction in supply of heroin to the UK; however, uncertainty relating to the long-term supply caused an increase in the wholesale heroin price in the UK in 2023.

Synthetic opioids are a range of substances that are synthesised in laboratories. They act on the same receptors in the brain as traditional opioids, such as morphine and heroin, to produce analgesic effects. Heroin fortified with synthetic opioids, such as nitazenes, and adulterated with xylazine was an evolving trend in the UK's opioid market in 2023.

Nitazenes, a type of synthetic opioid, were linked to 230 fatalities in the UK between 01 June 2023 and 01 June 2024.

It is a realistic possibility that the potency of nitazenes is broadly similar or equivalent to fentanyl. In the majority of cases, these substances were consumed unintentionally alongside other drugs such as heroin and/or benzodiazepines, with very small quantities capable of leading to overdose and death. While a zero tolerance approach from law enforcement, plus advice to users on the heightened dangers, may contain or slow the current uptake, we must prepare for these substances to become widely available, both unadvertised in fortified mixes, and in response to user demand as a more potent 'high'.

Drug treatment services in the UK can supply naloxone, a medicine that rapidly reverses an opioid overdose, for use in an emergency when an opioid overdose is suspected. Naloxone is only effective in the body for 30 to 90 minutes, so it is possible for a person to again experience the effects of an opioid overdose after the naloxone wears off. Those suffering from the effects of a nitazene overdose may require multiple doses of naloxone.

Nitazenes have also been identified within other drugs such as synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists, benzodiazepines, and also in pill form, increasing the risk to a wide range of drug users. It is highly likely that the user community have little to no awareness of the component parts of the drugs they are using.

Drug misuse deaths linked to other synthetic drugs such as benzodiazepines and gabapentinoid continue. This is particularly through poly drug use, often including alcohol, which remains significant.

Cannabis remains the most widely used illegal drug in the UK. Approximately 2.5 million people aged between 16 and 59 years have reported using the drug. Cannabis cultivation in the UK continues at an industrial scale with the capacity to produce large volumes generating high profits.

The decriminalisation and/or legalisation of cannabis in some foreign jurisdictions, such as parts of the US and Canada, has increased importations into the UK. Seizures of cannabis at the UK border in 2023 were more than double the volume seized in 2022.

Nearly every town and city across England and Wales is affected by county lines supplying a variety of drugs, but most commonly heroin and crack cocaine. Most drugs are sourced from major cities, with about 600 active lines operating. County lines supply is also linked to other offences such as criminal and sexual exploitation, firearms, and violence.

Online drugs markets (on the clear web and dark web) are used to sell illicit drugs, with users increasingly able to purchase drugs online. Social media and encrypted messaging apps provide dealers with a quick, efficient, easy, and anonymous way to advertise and facilitate the supply of drugs to large numbers of end users. The use of postal systems for distributing drugs into and throughout the UK is increasing.



86-95%

reduction in opium production in Afghanistan from 2022 to 2023.

Source: ALCIS (856%) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (95%).

### Case Study: Increasingly Complex Importation Methods

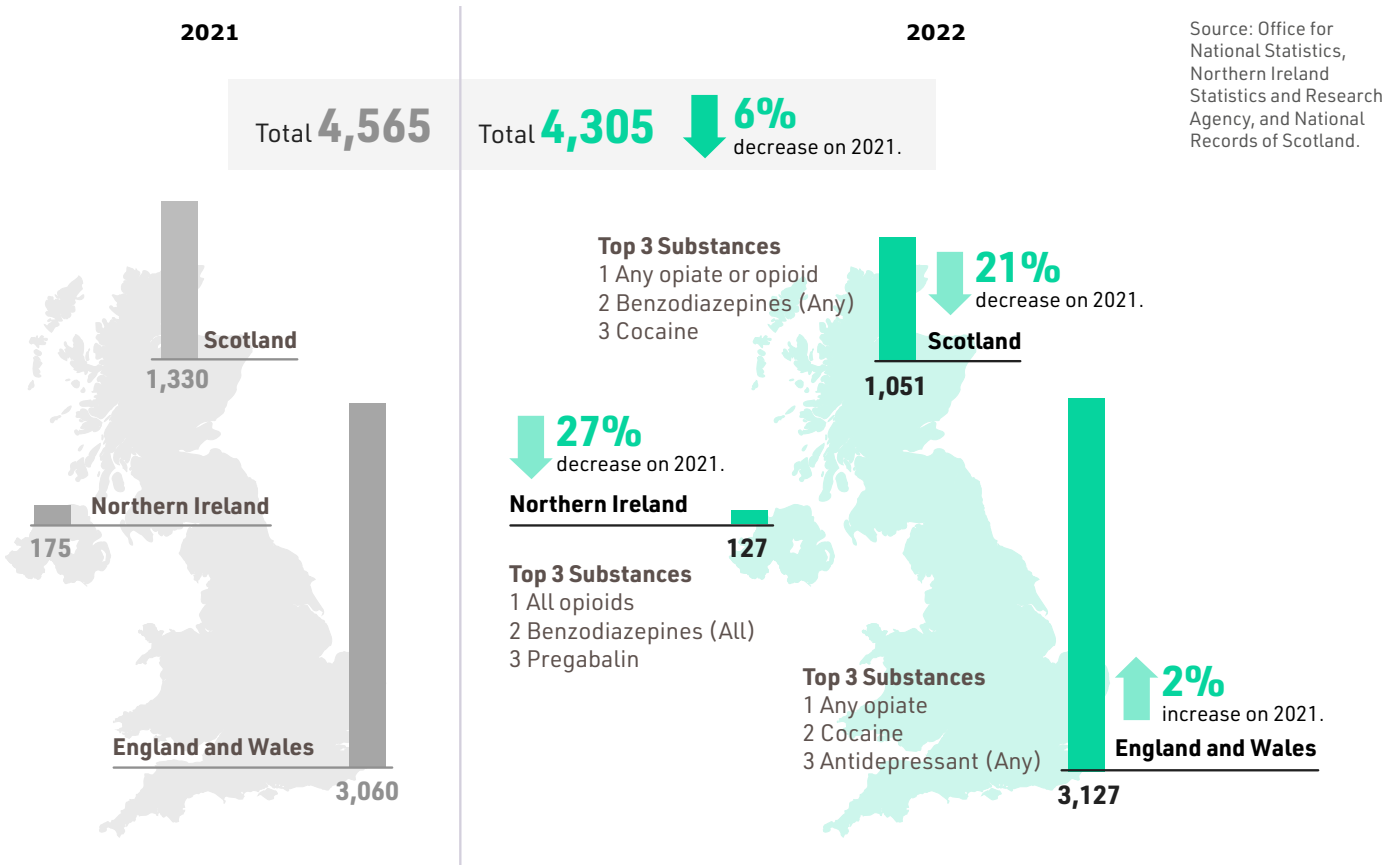
In October 2023, 137kg of cocaine was seized from a container ship docked at Sheerness Port in Kent, following a joint investigation by the NCA, Metropolitan Police, and Border Force. The drugs were found on a Panamanian-registered boat carrying a load of bananas. They had been placed in four large holdalls which were hidden below the water line inside the sea chest, an intake area for sea water to assist stability (as shown in image).



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

The haul was recovered by specialist police divers with assistance from Border Force. The seizure highlights increasingly complex methods used and the lengths organised crime groups will go to for importing drugs into the UK. UK law enforcement seizures of cocaine prevent large quantities of drugs entering the UK, which have the potential to ruin lives and devastate communities.

### Drug Misuse Deaths Remain High



Source: Office for National Statistics, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, and National Records of Scotland.

# Criminals still want to acquire and use original lethal purpose weapons but they are finding them more difficult to obtain



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

## Firearms

Levels of firearms crime in the UK remain amongst the lowest in the world. The criminal intent to source and use firearms remains unchanged; however, law enforcement interventions, regulation, and legislative changes have made it more difficult for criminals to obtain firearms. Criminals continue to mostly use firearms to threaten, intimidate, and maintain criminal status.

Firearms discharges from lethal-barrelled weapons account for about one-tenth of firearm offences. 44% of all reported discharges are against individuals, with most of these resulting in an injury. Serious injury from firearms is low, and fatalities rare, with 25 deaths in 2023; close to an all-time low. Most firearms crime continues to occur in London, West Midlands, and the North West.

**58,584**



firearms offences recorded during the ten years from April 2013 to March 2023.

Source: Office for National Statistics. Excludes air weapons.

Firearms crime is currently lower than the long-term trend. There was a small increase in the number of firearms offences recorded in England and Wales in the year ending September 2023, but this can partly be explained by an increase in the number of offences involving 'gel blasters', which were

### What You Can Do

If you have any concerns relating to illegally held firearms or ammunition, or suspicious attempted purchases of firearms or ammunition, please report to local police by calling 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm or danger. Alternatively, if you wish to remain anonymous, please contact the independent charity Crimestoppers.

The licensed firearms community can take an extra few moments to inspect firearm/shotgun/registered firearms dealer certificates and check for the security features to verify it is a genuine document. More information on what to check for is available here. If you have any concerns a certificate is not genuine, refuse the sale and

incorrectly being recorded as imitation firearm offences. 'Gel Blasters' are non-lethal toys which discharge small gel-filled balls. 6,233 offences involving firearms were recorded in England and Wales in the year ending September 2023, an increase of 209 (3%) from 6,024 on the previous year according to the Office for National Statistics. Within that figure, offences recorded as involving imitation firearms, which includes use of 'gel blasters', increased by 519 (24%) from 2,140 to 2,659 in this period.

Localised spikes in discharges and firearms-enabled serious violence are due to criminal groups involved in the drugs trade, 'turf wars', criminal debt, and personal feuds. These are sometimes directed by upstream criminals, overseas or in prison. Most victims are other criminals, although sometimes innocent people are shot in cross-fire or in cases of mistaken identity.

Criminals are likely to use whatever firearm they can acquire, rather than what they want. Original lethal purpose firearms (mainly handguns) are preferred and are sourced abroad, often online, and smuggled into the UK. Shotguns are typically stolen in residential burglaries in the UK, some of which were not held on licence.

Criminals are converting some types of blank-firing weapons to fire live or modified ammunition. While many blank-firing models are prohibited in the UK, some can be legally bought if they meet correct specifications. When converted, they are a viable and cheaper alternative to genuine firearms.

Criminals also resort to using improvised/homemade firearms (including those with 3D-printed components) and previously obsolete-calibre firearms. There were no confirmed criminal discharges using 3D-printed firearms in 2023, although it is highly likely that criminals have a growing interest in hybrid 3D-printed firearms.

In 2023, there were 25 cases involving the seizure of 3D-printed firearm component parts, or items associated with 3D-printing of firearms (such as printers or blueprints) during targeted police searches. This is an increase on 17 cases in 2022. Five of the cases in 2023 involved the seizure of a complete firearm, with only one of these confirmed through testing as a viable 3D-printed firearm. In the remaining 20 cases, only 3D-printed parts were recovered.

Realistic imitation firearms are used to threaten or intimidate. The criminal use of fully automatic weapons, such as submachine guns and automatic rifles, remains very rare in the UK, although a number of blank-firing submachine guns converted into live-firing firearms were used and recovered in 2023.

It remains highly unlikely that the war in Ukraine is impacting on the UK serious and organised crime firearms threat. After the war, there is a realistic possibility that some firearms will be traded on the European criminal marketplace but this is highly unlikely to change demand or established supply chains for UK criminals.

contact your firearms licensing department or report to local police by calling 101 or 999.

Traders who sell blank-firing firearms and blank ammunition are reminded of the good practice encouraged by the NCA and other trade organisations. This includes requiring the purchaser to produce proof of identity before a sale is agreed, recording the purchaser's details (in line with Data Protection Act 2018), recording the serial numbers of the firearm (if available) and requiring all payments to be made by card, not cash.

# 275



**fatal firearm injuries** during the ten years from April 2013 to March 2023. This includes all firearms fatalities, not just those linked to criminal offences.

Source: Office for National Statistics.

## Case Study: Converted Skorpion Submachine Gun

In October 2023, three people were sentenced to a total of 64 years for drugs and firearms offences following an NCA investigation.

The individuals were part of a Birmingham-based organised crime group which supplied Class A drugs and sourced lethal firearms which they used to intimidate both rivals and customers.

During the arrests of the three individuals, a converted Skorpion submachine gun and magazine of ammunition (as shown in image) were found in a child's bedroom, along with drugs and money.

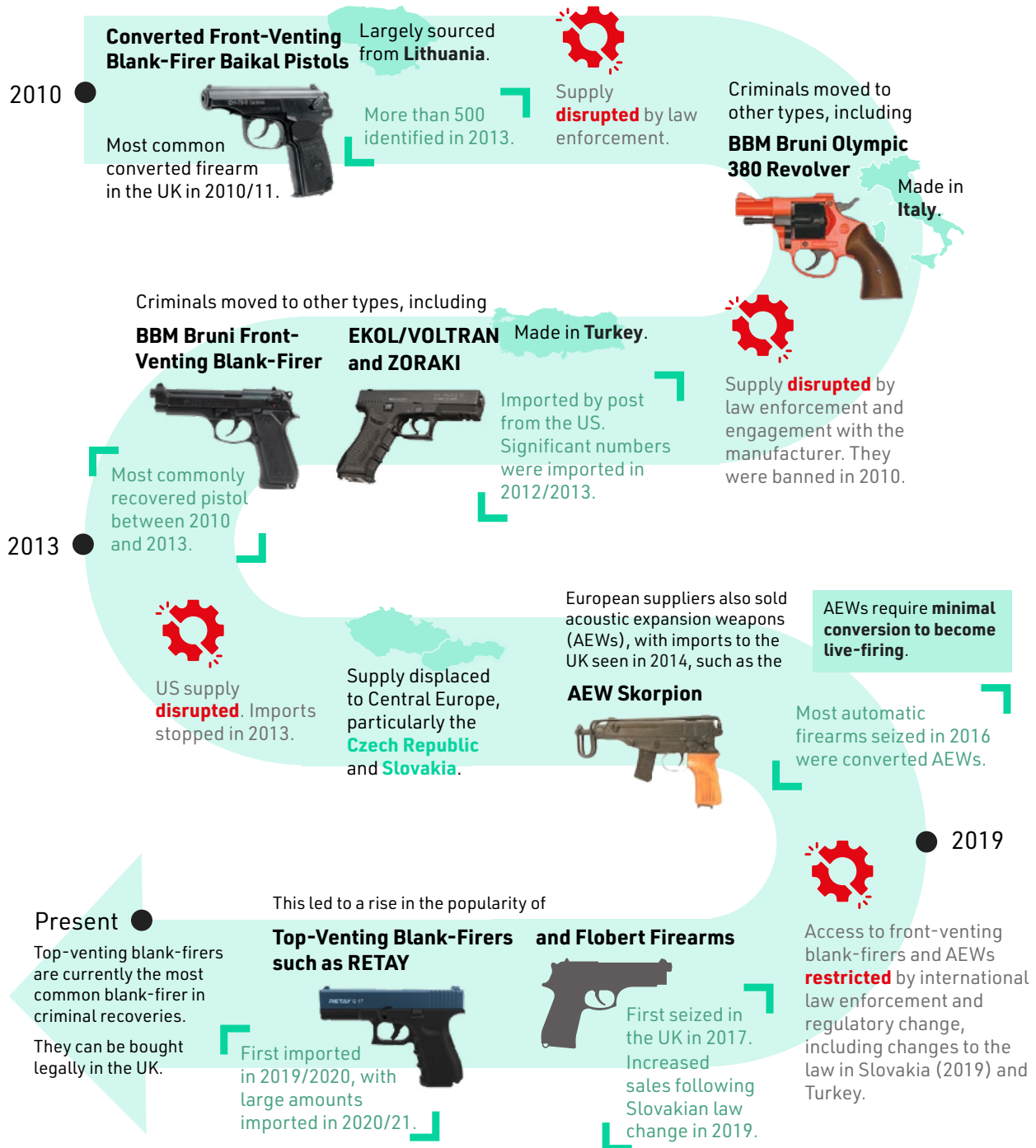


NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

### Diversification of Blank-Firers Since 2010

**Blank-firers** are designed to only make a flash and/or sound. They do not contain a bullet, though often look like genuine firearms. In the UK, forward-venting blank-firers are prohibited, whereas some top/side-venting blank-firers can be purchased lawfully. The venting position is where the gases are expelled from the firearm.

**Diversification** means that many different types and models of firearm are used and criminals are likely to use what they can get rather than what they want.



# Fraud has likely reduced but remains the most common crime type experienced by people in the UK



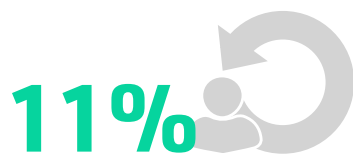
ADOBE STOCK

## Fraud

Fraud is a widespread threat, with all of UK society affected by its economic and social consequences. The [NCA](#) is focused on the threat from two main categories of fraud: fraud against the individual and fraud against businesses.

Fraud remains the most commonly reported crime against individuals in England and Wales according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (an estimated 37% of all crime). There are no similar estimates for fraud against business.

According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales only 13% of frauds against individuals are reported to Action Fraud. Victims are more likely to report frauds with very high losses and emotional harm. Under-reporting by businesses is almost certainly higher, likely in part due to the risk of reputational damage.



of fraud victims in England and Wales were **victimised more than once** in the financial year ending March 2023.

Source: Crime Survey of England and Wales.

The threat to the UK from fraud has almost certainly grown in the last ten years, with many frauds committed entirely or partially from overseas. However, fraud volumes have reduced over the last year although this decline is not uniform. Reporting volumes

### What You Can Do

Fraud remains the most common crime type experienced by people in the country. Stay vigilant and improve your awareness of scams - visit [here](#) for advice on protecting yourself and what to do if you are a victim of fraud.

#### Protect Yourself by Securing Your Accounts, Data and Devices

- Use three random words to create a strong password for your email that's different to all your other passwords, to prevent criminals accessing your personal information.
- Always use a 2-step verification, where available, to protect your email and social media accounts.
- Use your browser's password manager to safely store your passwords.

for some frauds, such as courier fraud and payment diversion fraud have declined (although harm to individual victims of courier fraud has increased). Unauthorised remote purchase fraud has fallen following the implementation of two-factor authentication for e-commerce. Other frauds are almost certainly growing. These include romance, investment and consumer frauds, and also unauthorised payment fraud following account takeover or false applications.

Criminals involved in fraud leverage social, political, and economic events to attract victims and exploit online services, social media, and cryptoassets to conduct a wide range of frauds, as well as to conceal their identities and the destination of the proceeds of these crimes. Cost of living pressures have increased the vulnerability of potential fraud victims, increasing willingness to engage in risky online practices to save or make money.

Most (89%) frauds reported to Action Fraud are now cyber-enabled, compared with 37% in 2012-2013. Technological countermeasures employed by businesses make it increasingly difficult for criminals to commit fraud, although criminals will also use technology in innovative ways to reduce the effectiveness of measures over time. Criminals continue to use social engineering to circumvent enhanced controls, with data breaches remaining a key enabler of fraud. Through harvesting personal and financial information, criminals are able to commit frauds affecting individuals as well as the private and public sectors.

The proceeds of fraud are laundered both within the UK and overseas, with money mules remaining a key enabler. Organised crime groups often use criminal mule networks, with bank accounts owned by witting and unwitting members of the public used to obscure the source and nature of funds. Criminals increasingly use online communication methods to encourage people to become money mules and it is likely that cost of living pressures will continue to attract a wider range of people to such activity.

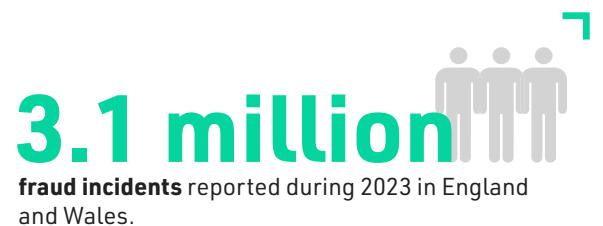
The growth of generative artificial intelligence has widened the accessibility of sophisticated tools, such as ChatGPT, that can be easily obtained by the public and misused by fraud offenders. There are significant uncertainties as to how artificial intelligence will develop and the implications this will have on the wider UK fraud threat. Generative artificial intelligence has the potential to make it easier for lone offenders to carry out fraud offences. It will almost certainly be adopted by more criminals over time to increase the scale and sophistication of frauds. For example, to improve the linguistic complexity of email attacks, and using deepfakes and voice cloning to improve the chances of deceiving a victim into believing they are speaking with a colleague, friend, or family.

## Recognise and Break Suspicious Contacts

- If you have any doubts about a message or phone call, contact the organisation directly to check.
- Use contact details from their official website.

## Report the Incident

- If you have fallen victim to fraud, report it to Action Fraud in England, Wales or Northern Ireland. For Scotland report to Police Scotland by calling 101.
- If you have received a suspicious email, forward it to report@phishing.gov.uk to help stop criminal activity and prevent others from falling victim to scams.
- Always report suspicious text messages and scam call numbers to 7726. Your provider can find out where the text or call came from and block or ban the sender.
- If you see a suspicious advert report it to the Advertising Standards Authority.



Source: Crime Survey of England and Wales.



Public sector fraud is also committed by serious and organised criminals, with the UK's tax system in particular a target for fraud offenders. About £4.1 billion of the estimated total tax gap figure of £35.8 billion for the UK during the 2021-2022 period is attributed solely to criminal attacks, down from £5.2 billion and £4.6 billion in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 respectively.

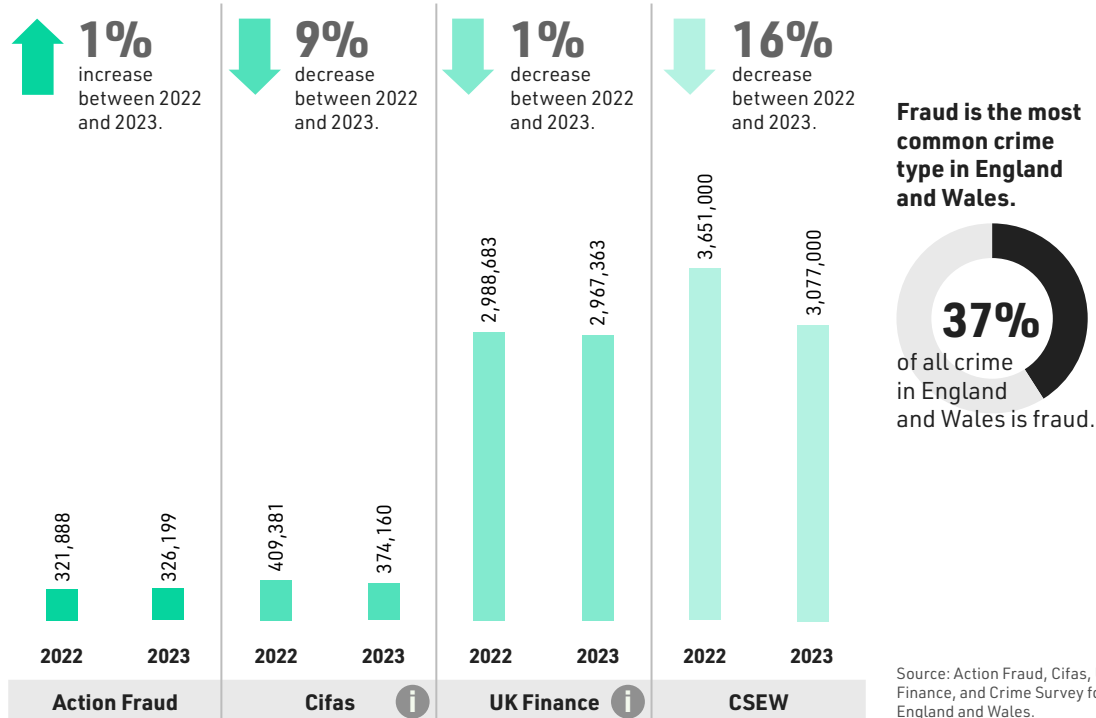
### Case Study: Romance Fraud

In January 2024, two UK based individuals were sentenced for their roles in romance fraud and money laundering following an NCA investigation. One was sentenced to five and a half years in prison and the other was given an 18-month prison sentence, suspended for 18 months. The pair had targeted elderly and vulnerable people on dating sites, gaining their trust before asking them for money. Both defendants had received hundreds of thousands of pounds from a number of victims which they laundered through their bank accounts.

One elderly victim based in Australia believed they were in a relationship with one of the defendants who had gained the trust of the victim before asking for small amounts of money under the pretence it was to buy warm clothes during the winter. The defendant then claimed they were entitled to 78kg of gold in Ghana but needed money for it to be released. They said they would use the gold to fund travel to Australia to be with the victim. The victim subsequently transferred almost £138,000 to the defendant.

Frauds such as romance fraud impact people financially and emotionally, causing severe harm. Criminals use emotional narratives and overwhelm victims with attention to convince them they are in a relationship. In some cases, the fraud lasts for years, increasing the potential impact.

### High Prevalence of Fraud but a Reduction in Overall Reporting Volumes



## The UK's role as a global financial hub exposes it to high levels of proceeds of crime generated overseas



ADOBESTOCK

# Illicit Finance

Most serious and organised crime in the UK is conducted to generate profit. Crimes such as drugs trafficking and fraud generate funds which can be moved and hidden and used to fund further crime.

It is highly likely that over £12 billion of criminal cash is generated each year in the UK, according to research from 2020. It is a realistic possibility that over £100 billion is laundered through and within the UK or UK-registered corporate structures each year.

Money laundering itself causes multiple harms, including:

- through the financial hardship caused by legitimate businesses being undercut by illegitimate ones;
- rises in the property market as a result of the proceeds of crime inflating prices;
- losses to the government due to tax avoidance, reduced trust in the UK's financial sectors; and
- reduced investment in public or private services due to funds being diverted to tackle money laundering.

Alongside traditional methods, money laundering networks continue to innovate. Cryptoassets are increasingly used to

### What You Can Do

Mule recruiters target people via many channels including social media. Be cautious about all requests to move money that does not belong to you, even if the request has come from someone you know or pitched as a risk-free enterprise. What you can do to protect yourself, your family and friends from money mule recruiters:

- If you've been asked to transfer money, ask for advice from someone you trust before you get involved.
- Report money muling to local Police on 101 or anonymously to independent charity Crimestoppers. In an emergency, call 999.
- Report fraud to Action Fraud and your bank if you are a

launder non-digital proceeds of crime such as cash, and are acquired via increasing levels of cybercrime, such as theft, malware, and ransomware.

UK corporate structures enable money laundering due to vulnerabilities in their creation and oversight. Potential indicators of money laundering via corporate structure misuse include multiple companies being registered at the same residential address and the creation of large numbers of dormant companies. Implementation and enforcement of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act will make it harder to abuse UK corporate structures.

**£270 million**  
denied to criminals as a result of defence against money laundering requests from April 2022 to March 2023.

Source: Office for National Statistics.

victim in England, Wales or Northern Ireland. In Scotland, report to Police Scotland by calling 101.

- If you think someone is already involved, visit the NCA website for advice.
- Boost your online security by taking a few simple steps recommended by the National Cyber Security Centre.

Electronic money institutions and payment institutions, including money service businesses, feature prominently in investigations. Some are used to transfer criminal proceeds globally by organised crime groups, likely attracted by simpler and quicker procedures for opening accounts.

Professional enablers continue to be used to conceal and move criminal assets. They can work in various sectors, but have mainly been associated with banking, payment service providers, accountancy services, estate agents, legal services, wealth management, and trust and company service providers.

UK-based criminals continue to use over the counter methods such as everyday banking at the Post Office to introduce cash into the UK banking system. It is a realistic possibility that Chinese underground banking networks exploit this, as well as other financial sector vulnerabilities, to launder billions of pounds annually in the UK.

Money mules continue to be used to introduce the proceeds of crime into the banking system and most proceeds of organised fraud activity use mule accounts to extract and launder funds. Money mules are often identified and recruited by mule recruiters, who also manage the mules and direct their activities.

Some cash intensive businesses within the personal care, leisure, and hospitality industries are used by criminals to conceal the origins of illicit cash. Organised crime groups use them to enter cash into the financial system, mixing licit and illicit funds to hinder subsequent law enforcement investigations.

International controller networks use a variety of methods to provide a professional money laundering service to criminals. They are increasingly able to exchange cash for cryptoassets on behalf of global criminal networks. This links UK generated proceeds of crime to transnational cybercrime impacting victims worldwide.

**\$1.7-5.1 billion**  
in illicit cryptoasset transactions are estimated to be linked to the UK annually.

Source: National Crime Agency.

The energy, extraction, construction, metals, defence, transport, and finance sectors are highly likely to be most at risk from international bribery and corruption. The main method used to launder the proceeds of corruption continues to be the layering and placement of assets through offshore corporate entities and trusts. Professional enablers providing company formation services advertise their services online and facilitate money laundering on behalf of corrupt politically exposed persons.

The scale of sanctions against Russia and complexity of economic links to the UK mean that Putin-linked individuals currently pose the greatest risk for sanctions evasion. Most methods used to evade financial asset freezes are non-complex, such as a simple transfer of assets, or are anticipatory, transferring assets to trusted proxies, such as relatives or employees, before designation.

The counterfeit currency threat has reduced substantially in the last decade. The introduction of polymer banknotes with robust security features and the 12-sided one pound coin are key reasons for this. However, organised crime groups still seek to print counterfeit polymer banknotes, focused mainly on the £20 denomination; some organised crime groups also target Scottish and Northern Ireland issued £50 banknotes. Two-pound coins are also counterfeited. Some organised crime groups and individual criminals source counterfeit polymer banknotes from overseas for distribution in the UK. Criminals are increasingly using social media and online marketplaces to advertise the sale of counterfeit polymer banknotes.

## Case Study: Laundering of Criminal Cash

Two men who were members of an organised crime group which laundered over £12 million of UK criminal cash were sentenced in February 2024 following an NCA investigation.

Both men pleaded guilty to two counts of money laundering, receiving sentences of five years and five years and seven months respectively. Crown Prosecution Service proceedings to recover their criminal proceeds are ongoing.

Mobile devices recovered from their properties showed the leading role they played in managing the movement of funds, including the use of cryptocurrency. The men directed cash couriers to collect criminal cash in the UK and Ireland. The cash was derived from a range of serious and organised crime activity. Some of the cash was distributed in the UK, exchanged for cryptocurrency, or made available to other organised crime groups by smuggling it across UK borders.

## Moving Criminal Funds

Criminals use a variety of different methods to launder money.  
The services of different professional enablers are frequently used.



### Main Methods



Bulk Cash



Cryptoassets



Formal Financial System



Informal Value Transfer Systems (IVTS)



Trade Based Money Laundering (TBML)

### Professional Enablers Can Impact The Following Sectors:



Banks, Payment Service Providers and Cryptoasset Exchanges



Estate and Letting Agents



Lawyers and Accountants



Trust and Company Service Providers (TCSPs)



Wealth Management and Family Offices

Professional enablers are individuals or organisations that provide professional services that enable criminality. Their behaviour is deliberate, reckless, improper, dishonest and/or negligent through a failure to meet their professional and regulatory obligations.

## Public demand for the services provided by victims continues to create opportunities for and drives exploitation in the UK



GETTY IMAGES

# Modern Slavery and

# Human Trafficking

Modern slavery relates to exploitation of children and adults in slavery, servitude, or forced or compulsory labour. Human trafficking is the recruitment, movement, harbouring, or receiving of children and adults through force, coercion, or deception for the purposes of exploitation.

The National Referral Mechanism is a framework to identify potential victims of modern slavery and ensure they receive the appropriate support.

Referrals for modern slavery and human trafficking have increased; in 2023, 8,377 referrals were made for exploitation solely in the UK, an increase of 4.6% on 2022. It is highly likely that changes in illegal migration trends and National Referral Mechanism decision-making processes, alongside improved awareness of the modern slavery and human trafficking threat, are key drivers of the increase.

The highest proportion of referrals were made in the first quarter of 2023. It is highly likely that this reflected the high number of small boats arrivals in 2022 and vulnerability of irregular migrants to exploitation in the UK. Changes to National

**82%**   
of potential victims of county lines exploitation are **under 18**.

Source: National Referral Mechanism.

### What You Can Do

Modern slavery indicators may be visible to the public and employers. Look out for these signs and remember that victims can be of either sex and any gender, age or nationality:

- A victim's appearance may indicate physical or psychological abuse; they may look malnourished, withdrawn or consistently wear the same clothes.
- Victims may be housed in unsanitary accommodation, or may be forced to travel to work in offenders' vehicles.
- Documents or bank cards may be retained by offenders, and victims may have few personal possessions.
- Victims may be unwilling to seek help and may fear law

Referral Mechanism decision-making processes on 30 January 2023 are likely to have contributed to the comparatively low number of referrals in the second quarter of the year, as first responder organisations adjusted to new reporting criteria.

UK nationals are the most commonly identified victims of modern slavery and human trafficking occurring in the UK, followed by Albanian, Vietnamese, Indian, and Romanian nationals. Over three-quarters of UK nationals identified as potential victims of exploitation report being exploited as children, typically in criminal activity such as county lines drug supply. It is highly likely that National Referral Mechanism data does not fully or accurately represent the threat from modern slavery and human trafficking, including to UK nationals, as it is dependent on both identification of potential victims and, for adults, their consent to referral.

Exploitation in criminal activity is the form of exploitation most commonly reported to the National Referral Mechanism. This occurs when victims are forced, coerced or otherwise compelled to commit crime, often in drug offences, such as distribution via county lines or cannabis cultivation.

Organised crime groups engaged in drug distribution often target children for recruitment. Increased rates of persistent absence from education has almost certainly increased opportunities for drug distribution organised crime groups to recruit children, while also creating barriers to identify those already recruited.

Labour exploitation occurs when a person is forced to work for little or no pay, or has access to their wages controlled or limited by another. Labour exploitation typically occurs in sectors with lower paid workforces and where working arrangements are informal or insecure. Ongoing labour shortages in some sectors are likely to have contributed to an increase in labour exploitation in the UK.

Victims of sexual exploitation are typically women and girls, many of whom endure long-term psychological distress as a result of their exploitation, in addition to the physical harms from sexual and sometimes physical abuse. Sexual exploitation takes place both in the commercial sexual services marketplace and within organised crime groups engaged in other criminal activity, particularly county lines drug supply.

enforcement due to threats from perpetrators.

### If you suspect someone to be a victim you can report to:

- Local police by calling 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm or danger.
- The Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline.
- Report anonymously to independent charity Crimestoppers.



Source: National Referral Mechanism.

## Case Study: Trafficking for Organ Removal

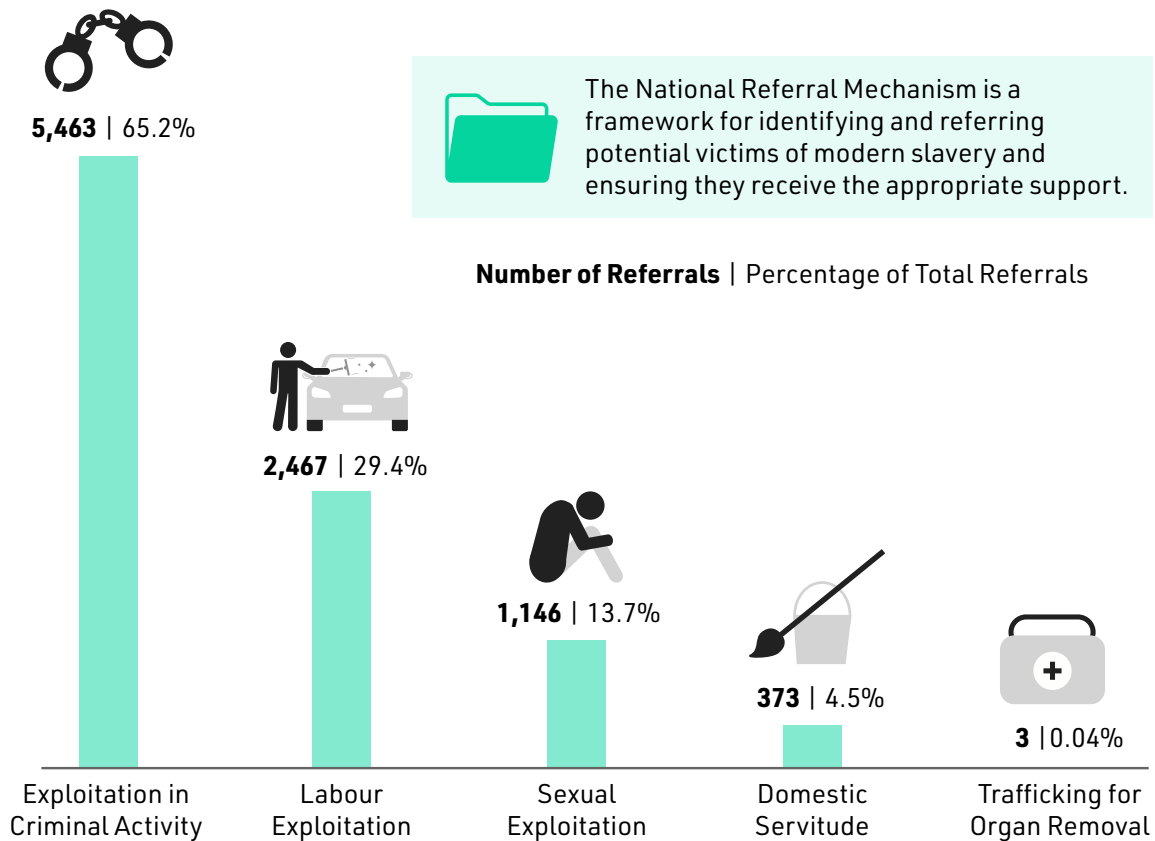
Although trafficking for the purposes of organ removal is rarely reported and presents a limited threat to the UK, 2023 saw the first successful prosecution under the Modern Slavery Act for this type of offending, following an investigation by the Metropolitan Police.

Three offenders were jailed for a total of over 24 years for conspiring to arrange the travel of a vulnerable Nigerian national to the UK with the intention of removing his kidney for transplant.

The victim had been recruited in Lagos, Nigeria, where he was living in poor economic conditions, and promised payment for his kidney and work in the UK. However, on arrival to the UK he was kept under the direction and physical control of the offenders, and coached to provide false answers when attending medical appointments.

The transplant was prevented when a consultant became suspicious of the circumstances, and the victim later came forward to police.

## Types of Exploitation Reported in the UK during 2023



Source: National Referral Mechanism.



Since 2021, there has been a gradual increase in offence levels although they still remain below pre-pandemic levels



# Organised

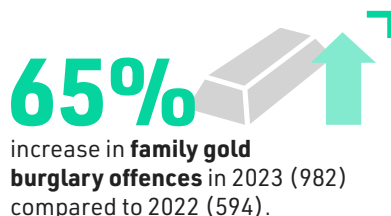
# Acquisitive Crime

All content for this threat is provided by [Opal](#), who are the national intelligence unit for organised acquisitive crime.

Organised acquisitive crime focuses on high-harm and cross-border burglary, vehicle crime, robbery, business crime, heritage and cultural property crime, plant and agricultural thefts, and metal and infrastructure crime, amongst other crime types. Offenders involved in organised acquisitive crime often have links to the wider serious organised crime network.

In 2023, there was an overall increase in organised acquisitive crime reporting, reflecting increased costs of living, fluctuations in market prices, and supply chain pressures caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The global microchip shortage between 2020 and 2023 is also likely to have generated demand for stolen vehicles and equipment.

The persistent nature of these drivers mean it is highly likely that organised acquisitive crime will continue to increase through 2024 as there will continue to be high demand, domestically and internationally, for stolen items and cheaper products.



Source: Police National Database.

## What You Can Do

You can report acquisitive crime offences to local Police or by calling 101 or 999 if in immediate risk of harm or danger. Alternatively, if you wish to remain anonymous, please contact the independent charity [Crimestoppers](#).

When reporting such offences ensure that accurate details of the offence are provided including descriptions of property, values of the property where known, method of offending and descriptions of offenders/offending vehicles.

Ensure that your property/business is secure and has up-to-date security measures to prevent thefts from occurring. In the event of a theft ensure that any

It is highly likely that greater numbers of people working from home, and more widespread use of smart security systems, have resulted in a sustained reduction in residential burglary offending. During the COVID-19 pandemic, residential burglary offences reduced, and have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. There was a further 11% decrease in residential burglary offences from 164,536 in 2022 to 146,744 in 2023.

In 2023, the number of family gold burglary offences increased by 65% from 594 in 2022 to 982 in 2023. There are a number of reasons for the increase including ease of disposal, and market price, which has been rising since 2005.

Cost of living pressures have almost certainly led to an increase in offences targeting businesses. Levels of both shop theft and commercial robbery of business increased by 37% in 2023. The British Retail Consortium's Crime Survey 2024 reported losses due to customer theft of £1.8 billion, almost double the £953 million reported in the 2023 survey.

Offenders of organised robbery of business property and linked shop thefts often commit offences on a national scale; targeting the same retailers and selecting high value products such as tobacco, vaping products, alcohol, and beauty products.

Levels of ATM theft offences remained fairly stable in 2023 but there was an increase in the variation of tactics used, with more offences involving hydraulic cutting equipment.

The theft of motor vehicle offences increased by 14% from 108,894 in 2022 to 124,545 in 2023. Organised crime groups continue to exploit new technologies to enable keyless vehicle theft.

Highly organised UK teams committing heavy goods vehicle and cargo crime pose a national threat, committing curtain slashing and bolt cropping offences on heavy goods vehicle trailers to remove cargo. Freight crime offences increased by 5% from 5,086 in 2022 to 5,359 in 2023.

In 2023, there was a 22% increase in GPS thefts from tractors. Offences increased from 176 in 2022 to 214 in 2023. Organised criminal networks involved in acquisitive crime are highly likely to be geographically widespread, highly organised, and capable of crossing international borders with stolen equipment. Recoveries of stolen plant and agricultural equipment have occurred in multiple locations in the UK and internationally, including Romania, Lithuania, northern Cyprus, and more recently in Poland.

The majority of heritage and cultural property crime threat areas decreased or remained stable in 2023, but highly organised offenders operate at various levels across the UK and continue to target specific cultural items stolen to order, for example, priceless silver military antiques were stolen from a museum in an offence targeting culturally significant silverware. Professional handlers sell the stolen commodities in the UK, laundering the money through the business sector or abroad. Online marketplaces continue to enable and facilitate the sale of stolen cultural items.

There is a realistic possibility that the threat posed by the theft of cable has remained the same despite a decrease of 26% in theft volumes from 2022 to 2023. It is likely that organised crime groups are stealing

closed-circuit television imagery is shared with police to assist in apprehending offenders.

If you suspect that a crime is taking place do not put yourself at risk, instead call the police and report what you have seen.

For crime prevention advice visit your local police website, where resources will provide advice on safety tools, property marking systems, and other methods of keeping property and public safe.



Source: Police National Database.

higher quantities of cable across fewer incidents.

There was a 71% decrease in theft of catalytic converters in 2023 compared with the same period the previous year. It is likely this is related to the stabilisation in the price of platinum-group metals, which had increased after tariffs were imposed on exports from Russia in 2022. In addition, some vehicle manufacturers have adapted the design of their vehicles to make stealing catalytic converters more difficult and newer vehicles contain less of the metals desired by criminals. There has also been a multi-partnership focus on catalytic converter thefts by the National Infrastructure Crime Reduction Partnership.

There continues to be a threat to the expanding renewable energy sector, including thefts from solar farms. Farmers have experienced significant thefts of both photovoltaic panels and string cable with many falling victim to repeat offences.

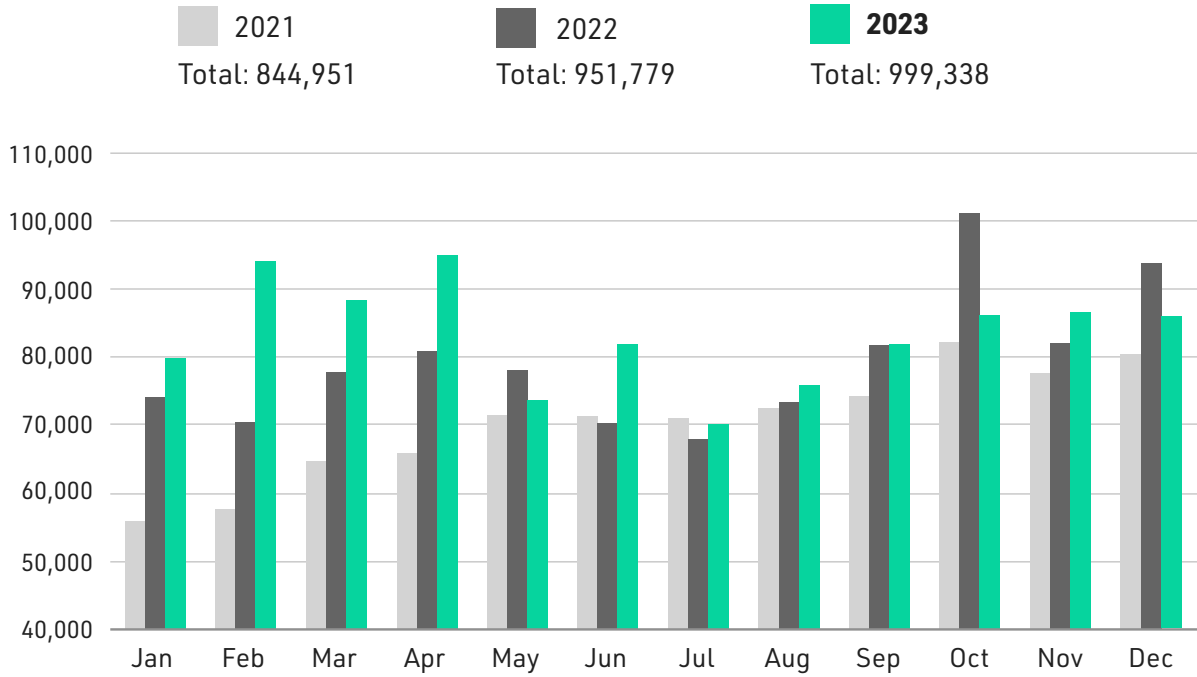
## Case Study: Joint Working at the Border

The UK ports network is often exploited by criminals as a means to import/export stolen goods into/out of the UK. The below two examples of collaborative enforcement action highlight the value of partnership working to tackle both local and national criminal networks that exploit ports to enable criminality.

In March 2024, joint working between police forces, Border Force, the National Construction and Agricultural Theft Team (NCATT), the National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service, and Opal resulted in two arrests and the recovery of £100,000 worth of stolen plant equipment at Harwich Port. Collaborative work between NCATT and Opal led to a stop on a suspect vehicle involved in the theft of GPS devices, disrupting the activities of this organised crime group.

In October 2023, North Wales Police along with partner agencies sought to challenge intelligence gaps around the driver and haulier network that uses Holyhead Port, specifically in relation to the movement of criminal commodities. This action supported the development of a more informed intelligence picture and identified opportunities for further collaborative work.

## Total Offences Continue to Increase



Source: Police National Database.

# OCGs continue to put migrant lives at risk by overloading small boats, facilitating their concealment within vehicles and making them vulnerable to modern slavery



GETTY IMAGES

## Organised

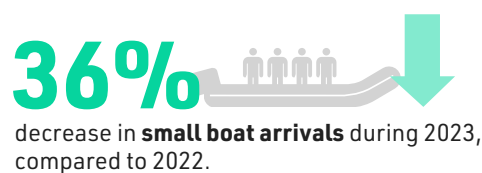
# Immigration Crime

Organised immigration crime involves an organised crime group assisting a person to cross borders without legal permission or documentation. Irregular migrants leave their home countries for a number of reasons, including economic opportunities, civil unrest, presence of diaspora/family in Europe, and fear of persecution. Irregular border crossings at the European Union's external border in 2023 were the highest since 2016.

Law enforcement disruptions have had a short-term impact on organised crime group business models. These disruptions have caused diversification

of supply routes and sourcing of small boat equipment, increased costs for organised crime groups and migrants, increased concealment of material and displacement of small boats equipment for use elsewhere.

Detections of irregular migrants entering the UK reduced in 2023: there were 36,704 irregular arrivals, one third fewer than



Source: Gov.uk

## What You Can Do

Organised immigration crime offenders routinely use practices that endanger the safety of the people using their services. The public may hold information that is valuable to law enforcement. Significant investigations into organised immigration crime offences have benefited from the receipt of information from members of the public.

A range of signs may be visible, including:

- Activity at isolated coastal locations or at unusual times of day, including attempts to guide vessels offshore to unusual landfall, or crew showing signs of nervousness.

in 2022, and 80% of those arrived on small boats. However, evidence suggests that organised immigration crime groups remain a persistent threat and it is highly likely the threat from organised immigration crime has increased going into 2024. Small boat arrivals increased between 01 January and 11 July 2024, with 14,120 recorded arrivals compared to the same period in 2023 (13,133).

Small boats departing from northern France remained the most detected method of moving irregular migrants in 2023, although numbers of arrivals dropped to 29,437 in 2023 compared to 45,755 in 2022. This was mostly due to a 93% reduction in Albanian nationals using small boats which is due to a number of different factors, including law enforcement activity, changes in UK government policy, deportations, diminished demand for travel to the UK, and potential displacement to other methods. Small boat arrivals of other nationalities decreased by 14%. The continued use of refrigerated vehicles and overcrowded and poorly equipped small boats by organised crime groups to facilitate arrivals almost certainly increases the risk of harm posed to migrants.

Afghans were the most commonly detected nationality arriving by small boat in 2023. This is likely due to the continued impact of the Taliban takeover in 2021 which is driving migration out of Afghanistan. Irregular migrants from Iran, Iraq, and Syria were also detected entering the UK in large numbers although these numbers reduced in 2023. Many migrants attempt to settle in other European countries before attempting entry to the UK.

Organised criminals overload small boats to maximise profits. Consequently, the average number of persons per boat increased from 41 in 2022 to 49 in 2023. This, together with operating models that include migrants wading out to boats or transferring from taxi boats, has increased the likelihood of fatalities. 12 migrants were reported as dead or missing in the English Channel in 2023, highlighting the dangers associated with this route. The International Organization for Migration's Missing Migrant Project reported that in January 2024, 226 migrants (including 35 children) are estimated to be dead or missing after attempting to cross the Channel to the UK by boat or other clandestine means since 2014.

Irregular migrants continue to enter the UK clandestinely within vehicles using roll-on/roll-off ferries. Detections of this high-risk method declined through most of 2023. The risks were highlighted in an incident in February 2024 when six people were taken to hospital and two others arrested after they were found in the back of a lorry at Newhaven in East Sussex.

- People coming out of the back of heavy goods vehicles at service stations or on the roadside.
- For businesses, strange patterns of payment being made such as receipt of frequent cash payments from multiple sources through bank accounts.
- Small aircraft making short landings at remote or unmanned airfields.

You can report to local police by calling 101 or 999 if there is an immediate risk of harm or danger.

To report organised immigration crime anonymously, visit [here](#), call the Immigration Enforcement hotline on 0300 123 7000 or contact the independent charity [Crimestoppers](#), quoting Kraken (if near a waterway) or Pegasus (if at an airfield).

If you spot someone in an emergency situation off the coastline you should call 999 or 112 and ask for the Coastguard.

If you are concerned that online activity is linked to organised immigration crime, please notify the respective social media company using their reporting process.

**3,822**   

**inadequately documented arrivals** during 2023. This is a 25% decrease compared to the 5,130 arrivals in 2022.

Source: Gov.uk

Detections of irregular migrants travelling outbound from the UK to France increased in 2023, including two incidents where 39 migrants were detected in a refrigerated lorry and 22 migrants detected in a trailer. On both occasions, the migrants were of North African origin. It is likely the migrants involved were attempting to avoid French border immigration and visa controls.

Organised crime groups facilitate irregular migrants onto commercial passenger flights for those that can afford the comparatively higher costs. This is quicker and safer than using small boats or concealment in vehicles.

Organised crime groups help migrants to fraudulently obtain entry clearance through 'leave to enter' or 'leave to remain' in the UK under various visa or settlement schemes. By definition, successful deceptions remain undetected, but it is likely they amount to thousands of people per year.

Opportunities offered by the online environment and social media platforms are exploited at all stages of organised immigration crime, including: advertising of illicit services (primarily smuggling and the supply of false documents), recruitment of potential migrants, and communication with the migrants on their journey or amongst other crime group members. Social media and messaging are also used to share travel guidance and give advice on how to frustrate law enforcement activity.

## Case Study: Small Boats Smuggling Network

In October 2023, a man who led a small boats people smuggling network was jailed for 11 years after a joint investigation between the NCA and Belgian authorities.

The individual had directed a network of offenders from his home in Ilford, east London. He sourced boats in Turkey and had them delivered to locations in Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. He directed members of the network to take them on to the northern French coast, from where migrants would be transported. It is believed he had been involved in smuggling around 10,000 people to the UK.

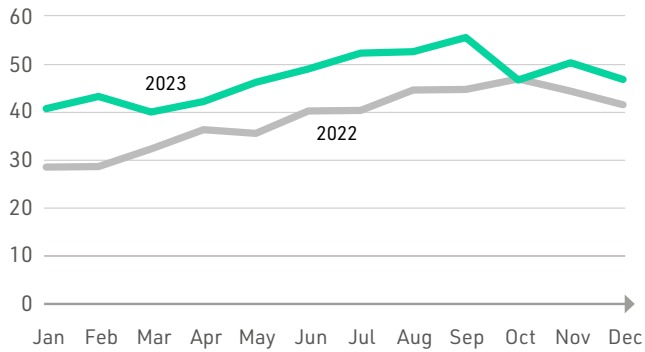
His arrest triggered a Europe-wide operation to disrupt the other members of the network, which led to arrests in the UK, Germany, France, and the Netherlands. Following his arrest by the NCA a UK court ordered the offender to be extradited to Belgium to face trial. He was found guilty and sentenced to 11 years in prison. Another 19 people connected to the organised crime group were convicted and handed jail terms of between 30 months and eight years.



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

## Changes in Small Boats Activity

### Monthly Average Number of People per Boat in Small Boat Arrivals



### Increased Numbers Per Boat

Despite a decrease in arrivals, there has been an increase in the number of people per boat. This shows an increase in boat size, reflecting the ability of organised crime groups to move more people via fewer launches and the increasing professionalisation of the small boat methodology.



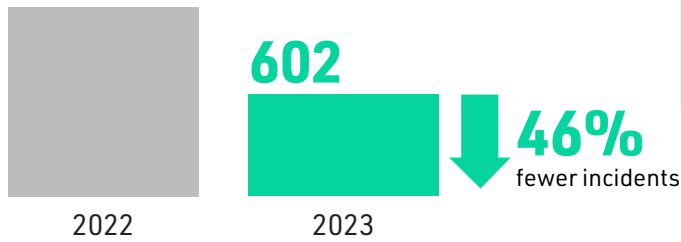
Average number of people per boat from January to December 2022.



Average number of people per boat from January to December 2023.

1,110

### Number of Small Boats Incidents



### Decreased Incidents

The number of boats detected arriving to, or heading for, the UK decreased in 2023. One boat will typically contain multiple people, as shown on the graph above.

Source: Home Office.



# The NCA leads the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime, protecting the public by targeting and pursuing those criminals who pose the greatest risk to the UK

## THE SITE IS NOW UNDER CONTROL OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

This site is now under the control of The National Crime Agency of the UK, working in close cooperation with the FBI and the international law enforcement task force, 'Operation Cronos'.



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

# Tackling the Threat

Each year, law enforcement agencies across the UK undertake a range of activity, targeting and disrupting high-harm, high-impact criminals across a wide spectrum of serious and organised crime offending. This includes the pursuit and disruption of offenders, preventing people from engaging in serious and organised crime, protecting individuals, organisations and systems, and preparing for when crime occurs.

The below section contains a small sample of this activity, highlighting the variety and complexity of the serious and organised crime threat to the UK. The examples demonstrate that the threat to the UK is a global challenge, requiring collaboration across the UK and international partners, and is not always visible or easy to identify.

The NCA and its partners work tirelessly to bring criminals to justice, disrupt their offending and degrade their capabilities:

## Operational Response

The mission of the NCA is to protect the public from serious and organised crime. The NCA leads the UK's operational response to serious and organised crime, working closely with partners to degrade the most harmful organised crime groups.

This includes police forces, Regional Organised Crime Units, HMRC, Border Force, the UK intelligence community, government departments and international organisations, as well as organisations in the private, charity and regulatory sectors.

In 2023, the agency shifted its operational focus towards the highest harm organised crime groups, targeting its activities:

- upstream, to disrupt those at the top of the criminal chain, those who enable their activities and those who launder the money they make;
- overseas, to tackle the threat at source and en route to the UK, alongside our international partners; and

**You are on: Tackling the Threat**



**Next >**

in some of the examples, the activity took many years, showing how we will relentlessly pursue the most serious and dangerous criminals in the UK and globally.

- online, to increasingly focus on combatting a critical element of the modern organised criminal business model.

## Tackling the Threat

### In the UK | Part 1



#### Coordinated Activity Against Large-Scale Cannabis Cultivation

Operation Mille, a coordinated effort by law enforcement partners to disrupt Albanian criminality in the UK, targeted large cannabis grows across England, Wales, and Scotland from March to June 2023.

In total, nearly 200,000 cannabis plants were seized, with a street value of between £115 and £130 million, along with £636,000 in cash, 26kg of cocaine and 20 firearms. More than 450 individuals were charged with a number of offences. The activity was led by the National Police Chiefs' Council, supported by police forces, Regional Organised Crime Units, the NCA, and Immigration Enforcement.

#### Disrupting a Plot to Manufacture and Supply 3D-Printed Firearms

In May 2023, two men were jailed for their involvement in a plot to manufacture and supply firearms using a 3D printer. During raids at addresses in Bradford and Hull, homemade guns were found, alongside bullets and gun-making equipment. The offenders were producing firearms in their kitchen and garage using instructions from an online manual with the intention of supplying the firearms to other criminals.

The men were arrested after a homemade automatic submachine gun was discovered in an associate's vehicle. One of the offenders was sentenced to 18 years and the other to 13 years and eight months. In June 2023 a third male was sentenced to five years and four months for his involvement in the plot after being found guilty of possession of ammunition and conspiracy to transfer a prohibited item.

This successful investigation, the first of its kind, was led by Yorkshire and Humber Regional Organised Crime Unit, with support from the NCA's National Firearms Targeting Centre.

#### Operation Henhouse – Collaborative Working to Target Fraud

In February and March 2024, over 400 people were arrested and £19m seized as part of Operation Henhouse, a coordinated, multi-agency initiative to target fraud across the UK. The activity was coordinated by the NCA's National Economic Crime Centre and City of London Police.

This was the third iteration of Operation Henhouse but for the first time, the action involved all UK police forces and Regional Organised Crime Units, alongside national agencies including the Financial Conduct Authority, NCA, Serious Fraud Office, and National Trading Standards.

Substantial law enforcement activity was carried out by individual forces and agencies across the UK.

Several NCA investigations, many of which involve its Complex Financial Crime Teams, are ongoing.

High value seizures included an £80,000 Porsche by Lancashire Police, a £70,000 BMW by the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit, and a £15,000 Rolex watch, alongside \$33,200, £15,750, and a large quantity of high value designer clothing by the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit.

The results demonstrate that through coordinated action, multiple agencies can tackle what is a complex and quickly evolving threat.

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## In the UK | Part 2



### Countering the Threat of Violence Within an Organised Crime Group

In 2020, a joint investigation by the London Organised Crime Partnership, a joint NCA and Metropolitan Police team, identified an organised crime group conspiring to supply cocaine. Enquiries revealed there were escalating tensions within the group relating to a group member who had stolen drugs from another member. Messages sent using the encrypted communications platform EncroChat indicated that some group members were seeking revenge and intending to torture or kill the perpetrator and their family members. There was intelligence to indicate they were trying to locate the intended victim and were attempting to obtain firearms.

A decision was made to arrest the organised crime group members to prevent the execution of a potentially serious or fatal attack. During the arrests, over £24,000 in cash was recovered, together with a number of mobile phones including one capable of being used within the EncroChat network, alongside evidence of a luxury lifestyle.

Two offenders were convicted of conspiracy to cause grievous bodily harm in May 2023. They had previously pleaded guilty to drugs and money laundering offences along with two additional defendants. One male was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment and the other was sentenced to 17 years and seven months.

The Organised Crime Partnership is focused on countering the threat posed by drug trafficking and related money laundering. In 2024 it celebrated 20 years since its creation and marks many years of effective partnership working between Metropolitan Police and the NCA.

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### Tackling Corruption

In January 2024, a border officer who shared sensitive intelligence documents with incarcerated criminals was given a 20-month suspended jail sentence following an investigation by the NCA's Anti-Corruption Unit. Working alongside the Border Force Joint Anti-Corruption Intelligence Team and the Prison Service, it was identified that the female offender had been communicating with at least four men who were using illegally held phones from inside prison. Investigations revealed she had shared details of individuals who had been arrested for drug smuggling and criminal investigations she was assisting.

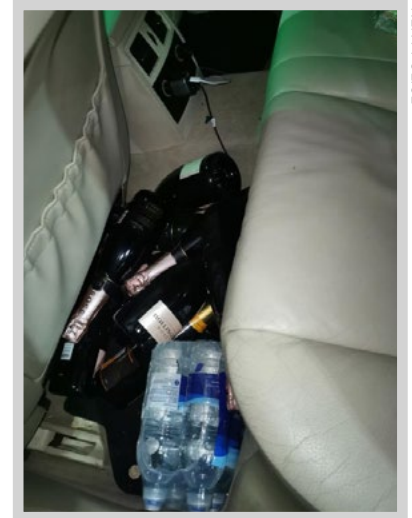
In November 2023, a police employee from Warrington was sentenced to three years and nine months in prison. She had shared information relating to Operation Venetic – the infiltration of the encrypted communications platform EncroChat by international law enforcement partners – with criminals who were subject of that operation and warning them that the EncroChat platform had been compromised.

## Tackling Organised Shop Theft

In January and July 2023, several members of a highly organised shop theft group were convicted of conspiracy offences for their part in high value thefts of alcohol from supermarkets (image shows alcohol found in vehicle). The group committed offences on a national scale affecting at least 28 police forces. They would communicate during offences via earpieces and successfully escape in vehicles waiting nearby.

Opal and the [National Business Crime Solution](#) acted as a central point of co-ordination to ensure collaboration and intelligence sharing between retailers and police to maximise the chances of catching the offenders. Extensive investigations were carried out by multiple police forces.

Opal has recently expanded to include an Organised Retail Crime team which will work closely with policing partners including the [National Business Crime Centre](#), retailers, and wider organisations supporting the retailers to combat this criminality.



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## In the UK | Part 3: Protecting the Vulnerable



### Historic Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

2024 will mark the tenth anniversary of Operation Stovewood, a criminal investigation led by the NCA into non-familial child sexual exploitation and abuse in Rotherham between 1997 and 2013. It is the single, largest law enforcement investigation of its kind in the UK; as of April 2024, there were over 1,100 identified victims and 26 successful convictions. In January 2024, South Yorkshire Police took responsibility for any new investigations; however, the NCA remains committed to seeing more than 50 active investigations, with over 300 suspects, through to the end.

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### Courier Fraud Targeting Elderly and Vulnerable Victims

In November 2023, four members of an organised crime group were sentenced to custodial sentences with a combined total of more than 15 years for their involvement in fraud activity across the UK. The North East Regional Organised Crime Unit led the investigation into the group, which targeted elderly and often vulnerable victims.

The group would telephone their victims purporting to be a police officer, who had arrested a relative of the victim. Victims were persuaded to withdraw large sums of cash from their bank accounts to aid the investigation, which would then be picked up by a courier, actually a member of the crime group, at their home address. 29 victims were identified across the UK with a total loss of over £100,000.

## Multi-Agency Project to Tackle Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

Project AIDANT was established in 2017 as a focused and innovative programme of multi-agency activity aimed at surging UK law enforcement's response to modern slavery and human trafficking. A range of tactics are used to identify and safeguard potential victims, and prosecute offenders.

In 2023, Project AIDANT activity resulted in 50 arrests and the identification of 98 potential victims. A range of partners contributed to this success, including the NCA, police forces, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, Border Force, and Tackling Organised Exploitation.

Activity in 2023 included a campaign to tackle labour exploitation in the construction sector, with a focused NCA-led social media communications campaign aimed at engaging and upskilling both the public and the industry on the threat from modern slavery and human trafficking. The campaign was effective in reaching a large audience: organic posts reached over 300,000 people and video assets were watched over 112,000 times.

Another initiative involved intensive research and analysis of methods and online platforms being used to recruit victims of sexual exploitation. This provided useful insights into the online recruitment of potential victims, especially those from Romania and Brazil, and identified additional opportunities for law enforcement interventions. It also contributed to planning for the EMPACT Hackathon where the Netherlands, supported by Europol, coordinated a three-day-long law enforcement operation to identify human trafficking activities across multiple online platforms.

## At the Border | Part 1



### Supply of Fraudulently Obtained Genuine Passports to High End Criminals

In May 2023, three individuals were sentenced to eight, six, and three years imprisonment for the supply of fraudulently obtained genuine passports, following a five-year NCA investigation. The sentences were reviewed by the Court of Appeal in August 2023 and considered unduly lenient for two of the offenders; subsequently increasing from eight years to 12 years, and from six years to ten years and two months.

The fraudulently obtained genuine passports (one of them shown in image) allowed individuals to cross borders and leave the UK undetected. One of the convicted offenders would persuade vulnerable 'donors', often with drug and alcohol problems, to give him their expired passports so he could renew them for use by his customers.

One offender admitted 73 other offences which were taken into consideration for his sentencing. Over 20 years, he had supplied hundreds of documents for as much as £17,000 per passport to multiple offenders, including fugitives and international drug and firearm traffickers. This included Jamie Acourt, a suspect in the Stephen Lawrence murder; Irish crime boss Christy Kinahan, and at least five suspected members of the



Glasgow-based Gillespie gang, including Jordan Owens, who fled to Portugal after committing a murder for which he was later convicted in Scotland in 2022.

## Money Laundering of Funds from Small Boats Crossings

In January 2024, a male offender was jailed for eight years after being convicted of laundering the money made by people smuggling networks involved in small boats crossings. He ran an unregistered money service business in Wood Green, London, as part of a network of bankers transferring money using the hawala system. He acted as a trusted middleman, accepting payments from migrants or their families, and then releasing money to the criminal gangs on completion of their journeys to the UK. NCA officers seized around £50,000 in cash (as shown in image) from his premises and uncovered evidence of around £1.6 million in payments in his bank accounts.



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

## Use of Light Aircraft for People Smuggling

In May 2023, three men were jailed for their involvement in smuggling Albanian migrants into the UK in a light aircraft (as shown in image). One of the men was arrested at the airport by a waiting NCA surveillance team. Another offender was responsible for renting the plane and for its storage, whilst the other man picked up the migrants from the airfield in his taxi. All three defendants had previous convictions for smuggling drugs and migrants into the UK. Two of the offenders are believed to have met in prison, where they began to collaborate.



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

## At the Border | Part 2



### Smuggling Cash to Dubai

In September 2023, 16 people were given jail sentences totalling over 70 years for their involvement in international money laundering and people smuggling. The individuals were part of a west London-based organised crime group. The group are likely to have smuggled around £70 million in cash out of the UK in suitcases on flights to Dubai, United Arab Emirates (image shows some of the cash seized). It is believed that the money was generated by the sale of Class A drugs and people smuggling. As part of the investigation, the NCA also uncovered a plot to smuggle 17 migrants into the UK in the back of a van. The van was intercepted by Dutch police, who were working with the NCA, before it could reach a ferry.



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

Achieving a successful outcome required joint working across the NCA, Border Force, Eurojust, and international partners in the Netherlands and United Arab Emirates.

### The Largest Cocaine Seizure in the UK

In February 2024, the NCA and Border Force made what is believed to be the largest ever seizure of Class A drugs in the UK. 5.7 tonnes of cocaine were found in a container at Southampton Port, hidden within a cargo of bananas (as shown in image) which had been transported from South America.

It is believed that the drugs were heading to the Port of Hamburg, Germany, for onward distribution. Based on UK street-level prices, the cocaine would likely have an estimated value in excess of £450 million.



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

## Overseas | Part 1



### Collaborating with European Partners to Target the Firearms Threat

In July 2023, the NCA announced that over 700 firearms (one of them show in image) had been recovered in the UK as part of a five-year long Project Vizardlike, working with the Guardia Civil in Spain, UK policing, Border Force, international law enforcement, and international gun retailers. The activity targeted forward-venting blank firearms, which are illegal to possess or import to the UK, but can be traded lawfully in some parts of Europe.

The activity took three strands: working with international partners to stop the weapons being shipped to the UK; seizing weapons at the border, predominantly by identifying those sent by post or using a parcel carrier; and, collaborating with public and private sector partners to identify those who had already bought firearms. This work contributes to the ongoing reduction in the firearms threat, by suppressing criminals' access to firearms at source.



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

### Bribery Conviction for Madagascar Chief of Staff

In February 2024, the former Chief of Staff to the President of Madagascar was found guilty of bribery following a covert NCA investigation led by the agency's International Corruption Unit. The defendant and an associate had been charged in August 2023 after soliciting a bribe from Gemfields, a UK-based mining company, in exchange for their help securing an exclusive mining joint venture with the Government of Madagascar. Gemfields had reported thier concerns about corruption to the NCA and supported the subsequent investigation.

### Targeting the Threat of Kidnap and Extortion in the UK and Overseas

The NCA's specialist Anti Kidnap and Extortion Unit is at the forefront of confronting the threat from kidnap and extortion both in the UK and overseas. It delivers strategic and tactical support to the UK and other international law enforcement partners, working to secure the safe return of hostages within the UK and on a global basis.

The unit provides kidnap and extortion support to preventative strategies developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. In 2023 the unit delivered a number of international training workshops to law enforcement colleagues in Canada, Libya, Mozambique, Pakistan, the Philippines, and South Africa to improve capability and understanding of kidnap response structures, in line with the United Nations' manual on 'Kidnap for Ransom'.



## Overseas | Part 2



### Conviction of UK-Based Head of Global Drug Enterprise

In January 2024, the head of a multi-million-dollar drug enterprise pleaded guilty in the US to supplying hundreds of kilograms of drugs on a global scale. The man had sold the drugs on dark web marketplaces, before personally shipping or arranging shipments from Europe to destinations around the world. The investigation was led by the US Drug Enforcement Administration, supported by the NCA, Crown Prosecution Service, and UK Central Authority.

The subject was arrested by NCA officers at his home address in Coventry. Vital evidence was gathered to support the prosecution, including information about his cryptocurrency accounts. As part of his plea agreement, the offender forfeited the proceeds of his illegal activity, estimated to be worth \$150 million in cryptocurrency. This was the biggest cryptocurrency seizure in Drug Enforcement Administration history.

### Outbound Drug Trafficking to Australia

In January 2024, a husband and wife living in the UK were convicted, each being sentenced to 33 years in prison for exporting 514kg of cocaine from the UK to Australia. The two individuals were identified by NCA officers after Australian Border Force intercepted the cocaine in Sydney in May 2021. The drugs were shipped within six metal toolboxes via a commercial flight from the UK. The cocaine was estimated to have been worth up to £57 million when sold in Australia, where prices are higher than in the UK.



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

On arrest, officers seized £5,000 worth of gold-plated silver bars and approximately £73,000 in cash (as shown in image). Further investigations identified almost £3 million in cash hidden in boxes and suitcases at a storage unit. Investigations showed that both defendants held cash in bank accounts which far exceeded their declared income. They had deposited almost £740,000 in cash into 22 different bank accounts since 2019. They were further charged with money laundering and the judge concluded that the couple had exported between six and seven tonnes of cocaine to Australia.

### Travelling Child Abuse Network

In December 2023, an offender from London was sentenced to over seven years in prison for sexually abusing young boys in Morocco. The investigation, which involved the NCA, Europol, and Dutch authorities, identified that the man was part of an international abuse network whose members travelled together to target children across the globe. His computer and phone were encrypted, but NCA investigators were able to recover over 200,000 child abuse images, some of which were taken by the offender and showed boys aged as young as one-year-old.

Another member of the network is currently serving a 17 year prison sentence for sexually abusing boys in south east Asian countries on over 20 trips between 2008-2018. The NCA has identified and arrested a further four suspects based in the UK who are believed to have links to the network.

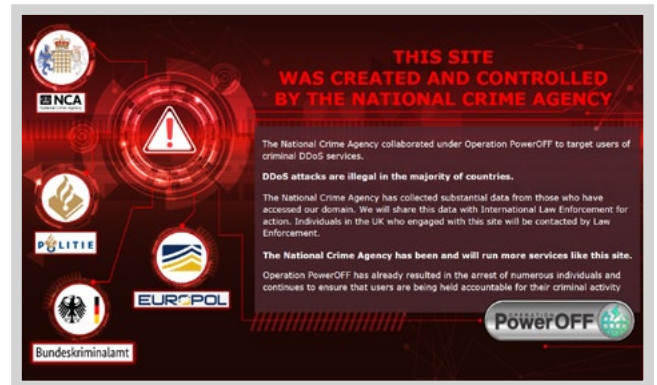
## Online | Part 1



### Infiltrating Cybercrime Market with Disguised DDoS-For-Hire Sites

In March 2023, the NCA revealed that it had infiltrated the online criminal marketplace by setting up a number of sites purporting to offer DDoS-for-hire services. All of the NCA-run sites, which have so far been accessed by several thousand people, have been created to look like they offer the tools and services to enable cybercriminals to execute DDoS attacks.

However, after users register, rather than being given access to cybercrime tools, their data is collated by investigators. One of the site's domains was replaced with a splash page (as shown in image) warning users that their data had been collected by NCA and would be shared with law enforcement partners.



Users based in the UK have been contacted by the NCA or police and warned about engaging in cybercrime. Information relating to those based overseas has been passed to international law enforcement.

This activity forms part of Operation Power Off, the coordinated international law enforcement response targeting criminal DDoS-for-hire (booter) infrastructures worldwide. In December 2022, 48 of the world's most popular booter sites were taken offline by the FBI, following close collaboration with the NCA, Dutch Police, and Europol.

### Taking Down the Ransomware Service, HIVE

In January 2023, the NCA was involved in an international operation which took down the servers of HIVE, a ransomware service used by cybercriminals to attack and extort businesses across the globe. Anyone attempting to access HIVE infrastructure was subsequently met with a law enforcement splash page (as shown in image) explaining the network had been seized.

The activity was led by the FBI and German law enforcement and supported by NCA cybercrime investigators and a range of other international partners including the US Secret Service, Canada, Germany, France, Romania, Lithuania, Sweden, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Ireland.



HIVE ransomware group targeted more than 1,300 victims and received more than \$100 million in ransom payments. The group impacted about 50 corporate victims in the UK, including in the housing, haulage, commercial, and education sectors.

## Online | Part 2



### Takedown of Online Marketplace Selling Criminal Identities

An international criminal marketplace selling victim identities was taken down by a global law enforcement operation in April 2023. Anyone trying to access the site was directed to a splash page (as shown in image) informing them it had been seized. The activity involved 17 countries and was led by the FBI and Dutch Police.

Genesis Market was a go-to-service for criminals seeking to defraud victims, having hosted approximately 80 million credentials and digital fingerprints stolen from over two million people.

Genesis Market traded in digital identities, selling 'bots' that contained information harvested from victim devices, which had been infected using malicious attacks. These indiscriminate attacks were conducted against both members of the public and companies operating in a variety of sectors.

As part of the investigation, the NCA worked with City of London Police and other UK policing partners to identify UK-based victims of the system. This resulted in over 24 arrests in the UK. In total, there were around 120 arrests, over 200 searches and close to 100 pieces of preventative activity carried out across the globe.



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

### Sanctions Against Russian Cyber Espionage

In December 2023, the UK and allies exposed the Russian Intelligence Services as being behind a number of attempts to interfere in UK politics and democratic processes. Centre 18, a unit with Russia's FSB, was identified as accountable for a range of cyber espionage operations targeting the UK, including high-profile parliamentarians and entities.

Following an NCA investigation, the UK sanctioned two members of Star Blizzard - a group assessed by the UK National Cyber Security Centre as almost certainly subordinate to Centre 18 - for its involvement in the preparation of spear-phishing campaigns and associated activity that resulted in unauthorised access and exfiltration of sensitive data. The sanctions were jointly delivered with the US.

## Online | Part 3: Protecting the Vulnerable



### Dark Web Child Abuse Moderators Jailed

Three UK men who helped run a dark web paedophile website where some of the most extreme types of child abuse was shared have been jailed following an NCA investigation. One of the men, from Cheshire, was head moderator of The Annex, a website with over 90,000 global members. The site was used to share, discuss and encourage some of the worst instances of child sexual abuse material, including 'hurtcore' and the sexual abuse of babies and toddlers.

The offender was sentenced to 16 years in jail in February 2024 for offences of facilitating the sexual exploitation of children, participating in an organised crime group, possession of a paedophile manual, and making and distributing indecent images of children. Another site moderator was also convicted and sentenced to five years and four months imprisonment. A further male, an NHS psychiatrist from London, had previously been sentenced to six years imprisonment for his role in the site in June 2023.

The NCA worked with international partners to target this group of moderators. A further 14 men have been charged in the US for their involvement in the site. The website, which has been shut down, was run by an American man who received a sentence of life in prison in the US in January 2024.

### Child Sexual Abuse Offender Identified Through Online Communications

In June 2023 a male alleged in his online communications to be a child sexual exploitation facilitator, with access to children under the ages of 10-years-old. The male graphically described his intentions to abuse the children of an online contact. Urgent enquiries established that the male, not previously known to police, was living in the Devon and Cornwall police area.

The male arranged to meet his online contact for the purpose of abusing her children and stated that he had booked a train to facilitate his travel. He was arrested by the local police force at his home address and a subsequent search located train tickets that he had purchased for the relevant date.

Examination of the male's devices identified hundreds of indecent images of children and conversations with other persons making further arrangements to abuse children. A paedophile manual was located which graphically explained how to groom and abuse young children.

In February 2024, the offender was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for arranging and facilitating the commission of a child sex offence, given a 20 year Sexual Harm Prevention Order and placed on the sex offenders register indefinitely. The successful outcome was due to collaborative working between the Tarian Regional Organised Crime Unit, which covers the three southern Wales police forces, and the Devon and Cornwall Police team.