

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

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NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

# Welcome from the

# NCA's Director General

The threat to the UK from serious and organised crime continues to grow, and has a devastating impact on the public. It undermines communities, scars neighbourhoods, exploits the most vulnerable people and has a corrosive effect on our economy. It causes more harm, to more people, more often than any other national security threat.

The **National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2023** covers the period January to December 2022, drawing on intelligence and analysis from across law enforcement and other partner organisations, and I am grateful to everyone that has contributed. This assessment ensures our collective response is based on the latest evidence and understanding. It also sets out what the public can do, to reduce the risk of being a victim or to spot and report suspicious activity.

Over the past year, we have felt the reverberations of international conflict, instability and poverty. Organised crime groups capitalised on the war in Ukraine and the cost of living pressures, shifting their campaigns to prey on the well-meaning and the vulnerable, whilst human traffickers and drug smugglers have adapted

### What is Serious and Organised Crime?

Serious and organised crime (SOC) is defined in the [2018 Serious and Organised Crime Strategy](#) as individuals planning, coordinating and committing serious offences, whether individually, in groups and/or as part of transnational networks.

The main categories of serious offences covered by the term are: child sexual abuse; modern slavery and human trafficking; organised immigration crime; illegal drugs; illegal firearms; organised acquisitive crime; cyber crime; fraud; money laundering; and bribery, corruption and sanctions evasion.

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their routes and methods to maximise profits. The consequences play out on our shores and streets on a daily basis: last year a record 45,755 people used small boats to arrive on UK shores, while drug prices fell and drug production and deaths rose.

The harm to the public is not always so visible. More crime is online, taking place behind closed doors, on the dark net and through encrypted apps. We now estimate that there are between 680,000 and 830,000 people in the UK (1.3% to 1.6% of the adult population) who pose varying degrees of sexual risk to children, and assess that viewing indecent images of children increases the risk of offenders escalating to contact abuse. We have seen cyber criminals offering ransomware as a service online and enabling fraud, and drug cartels using encrypted apps to communicate and cryptocurrency to launder their proceeds. And we have seen major tech companies rolling out end-to-end encryption in a way that they know will make it harder for law enforcement to detect and investigate crime and protect children. Online is the new frontline.

As the threat grows in scale, complexity and reach, so must our response. I have directed the NCA to focus **upstream, overseas, and online**, where we can best use the NCA's unique capabilities to reduce harm on our streets and in our communities. That approach is underpinned by a new strategy that will see the Agency degrade the most harmful organised crime groups and lead the UK's operational response. We will continue to work closely with our operational partners, with Government and with the private and third sectors. By ensuring priorities are agreed, roles and responsibilities are clear, and activity, performance and impact are assessed, we can be confident the whole system will more effectively tackle this chronic and corrosive threat.

**Graeme Biggar CBE**

**“As the threat grows in scale, complexity and reach, so must our response. I have directed the NCA to focus upstream, overseas and online”**

**Director General**

## The Threats

Exploitation of the Vulnerable:

- [Child Sexual Abuse](#)
- [Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking](#)
- [Organised Immigration Crime](#)

Impact of SOC on Communities:

- [Drugs](#)
- [Firearms](#)
- [Organised Acquisitive Crime](#)

Harm to the UK's Economy and Institutions:

- [Cyber Crime](#)
- [Fraud](#)
- [Money Laundering](#)

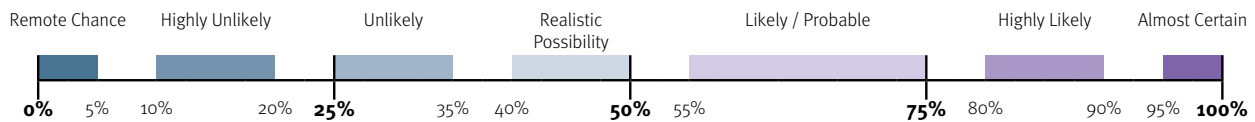
## Cross-Cutting Threat Enablers

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

## 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, NABIS expand, 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, the Cabinet Office, and HM Treasury;
- Overseas law enforcement agencies and organisations such as Europol and Interpol;
- The academic, private and third sectors, including academic 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;
- 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 war in Ukraine and cost of living pressures have created new opportunities for organised crime groups to exploit



# Overview of SOC

## in the UK

Serious and organised crime is a pervasive and enduring threat, impacting UK citizens, public services, businesses and infrastructure. The National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime captures the key and emerging issues throughout 2022 across the threat areas.

Vulnerable individuals continue to be exploited across a range of threats. Organised crime groups involved in organised immigration crime facilitate the movement of people into the UK in hazardous conditions with no regard for their safety. The exploitation of victims occurs at home and abroad, with offenders trafficking people within the UK and across borders, forcing people into various forms of modern slavery. Globally, serious and organised crime places children at risk of child sexual abuse and exploitation, both in person and online.

Offenders who engage in serious and organised crime are a risk to the public. The wider impact of the trade in drugs and firearms is felt throughout communities, demonstrating the significant harm caused by this threat and putting greater strain on public services.

### Main Themes

This year the main trends highlighted in the National Strategic Assessment are:

#### **Geopolitical Instability and International Conflict:**

Organised crime groups exploit vulnerabilities created by international conflict, instability and poverty. The vast majority of serious and organised crime has an international dimension, demonstrated through the increased numbers of irregular migrants entering the UK on small boats, drugs smuggling and firearms supply.

**The Cost of Living:** Criminals exploit cost of living increases, taking advantage of people's vulnerability. Challenging economic conditions created

The UK economy and its institutions are undermined by criminals laundering their illicit finances to hide their illegal activity, frustrating the efforts of law abiding citizens operating legitimate businesses. The risk to the public and UK institutions from fraud and cyber attacks is evolving, with criminals adopting increasingly complex methods to target and exploit victims.

The war in Ukraine and cost of living pressures have created new opportunities for organised crime groups to exploit economic hardship. Established supply chains and transport routes have been disrupted, increasing the cost of food, metal, oil and gas. It is likely that this will increase the number of potential vulnerable victims and exploitation opportunities across many of the threat areas.

Organised crime groups regularly rely on criminal supply chains, networks, and specialists to pursue their criminality. This includes the use of concealment specialists to hide illicit commodities such as drugs and firearms in vehicles, [money mule networks](#) to launder the proceeds of crime, or financial and legal professionals to hide assets in seemingly legitimate businesses.

Many organised crime groups are involved in multiple crime types. Communities remain vulnerable to the high-harm impacts of such linked criminal activity; for example, urban street gangs that carry out the majority of firearms discharges also dominate the retail level drugs trade.

The cross-border nature of serious and organised crime means that crime groups are highly reliant on international supply chains and connectivity, operating enterprises on a global level. This means that there is also significant foreign national involvement in serious and organised crime, bringing challenges to the law enforcement response. This is compounded where such criminal activity emanates from jurisdictions where law enforcement cooperation is limited.

pressures on individuals, households and businesses: with organised crime groups using the cost of living as a lure for cyber crime and fraud and exploiting the vulnerable through modern slavery and human trafficking.

**The Exploitation of Technology:** Technology remains a key enabler for serious and organised crime, and is increasingly accessible to offenders. Ransomware remains the greatest cyber crime threat. Criminals use technologies to target the public online, increasingly using social media in particular to identify and communicate with victims. They also use technology to facilitate criminality, including encryption to hide their activities, cryptocurrency for ransoms, and tracking to monitor illicit shipments.

**Criminal Resilience and Adaptability:** Organised crime groups are highly adaptable to the changing environment, with a disregard for legal boundaries. They demonstrated their ability to adapt operating models in response to the EU exit and COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. As restrictions lifted, organised crime groups continued to evolve criminal methods, exploiting international crises and technology, adapting their activity to frustrate law enforcement detection.

## Scale

As serious and organised crime offending in the UK continues to grow, methods are being developed to refine and improve the estimation of the overall scale of the threat.

In 2021 and 2022, an estimate was given for the number of known individuals engaged in serious and organised crime offending impacting on the UK. This year, the methodology has been repeated and indicates a minimum of 59,000 individuals are involved in serious and organised crime in the UK, excluding child sexual abuse offending.

Whilst this number is below previous estimations (minimum 70,000), this does not indicate a decline in serious and organised crime activity in the UK. Instead, this is a result of historic changes in data recording, both within and external to the NCA, which have involved a clearer and higher threshold, and thus produced a more accurate figure.

**>59,000**   
known SOC nominals.  
Source: National Crime Agency.

**680,000**  
**- 830,000**   
Estimated number of UK based individuals posing varying degrees of risk to children.  
Source: National Crime Agency.



Methods have been developed to estimate the 'hidden' or unrecorded scale of child sexual abuse and modern slavery and human trafficking ([click here](#) to find out more about the methodology used). It is estimated that there are between 680,000 and 830,000 UK based adult offenders who pose varying degrees of risk to children, equivalent to 1.3% to 1.6% of the UK adult population. There is a broad spectrum of child sexual offences, from downloading and sharing indecent images of children to direct contact abuse. Every offender will have varying behaviours and life factors which will intermittently increase or decrease the risk they pose.

It is estimated that at least 6,000 offenders are involved in the trafficking and exploitation of people in the UK.

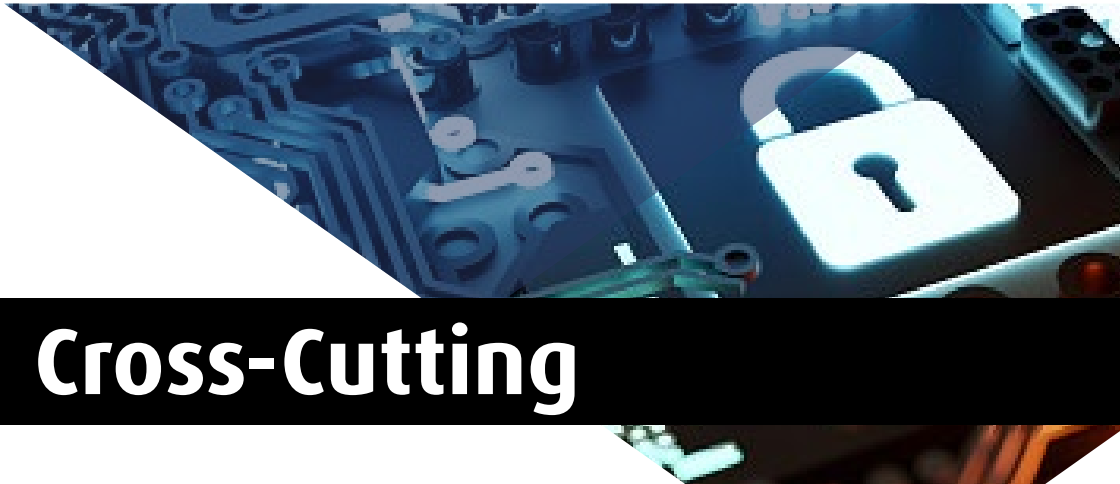
## Summary of Threat Changes

As serious and organised crime offending in the UK continues to grow, methods are being developed to refine and improve the estimation of the overall scale of the threat.

Threat Changes in 2022 (threats listed in alphabetical order).

Increase 	<b>Drugs</b>	The drugs threat to the UK has increased, with a rise in both production of cocaine and heroin in source countries and drug related deaths in the UK. There is also an increased threat from a growth in the variety and availability of synthetic drugs.
	<b>Fraud</b>	Estimating the scale of fraud against the UK is complex due to underreporting and the various indicators available. Weighting certain indicators, it is likely that the fraud threat to the UK in 2022 increased slightly.
	<b>Modern Slavery &amp; Human Trafficking</b>	The scale of modern slavery and human trafficking highly likely increased, exceeding pre-pandemic levels. The rising cost of living and ongoing labour shortages affecting sectors where modern slavery and human trafficking is commonly experienced increases the threat to victims.
	<b>Money Laundering</b>	It is likely there has been an increase in the threat. Money laundering is driven by both predicate crime levels in the UK and by the desire of organised crime and kleptocrats to launder overseas generated illicit funds through the UK.
	<b>Organised Acquisitive Crime</b>	The threat has increased with a rise in offending in 2022. This has been driven by the cost of living increase, fluctuations in market prices and supply chain issues resulting from the war in Ukraine.
	<b>Organised Immigration Crime</b>	2022 saw the arrival of record numbers of irregular migrants by small boat. There were 45,755 arrivals in 2022, up 60% from 2021. Inadequately documented arrivals also increased.
No Change 	<b>Child Sexual Abuse</b>	Greater knowledge of the threat continues to improve understanding, but it is highly likely all areas of child sexual abuse are underreported. The overall threat remains high and is consistent with trends seen in 2021. There are sustained risks from the widespread availability of online sexual content normalising harmful sexual behaviours. Analysis of child sexual abuse offences reported to the police shows that over 40% of identified offenders are under 18.
	<b>Cyber Crime</b>	The cyber crime threat to the UK remains high and continues to evolve. The deployment of ransomware remains the greatest cyber crime threat and it also poses a threat to national security.
	<b>Firearms</b>	The firearms threat remains unchanged. The majority of firearms metrics are stable and within expected ranges. There is no evidence that month-to-month changes are anything other than normal random variation. The Office for National Statistics reports that firearms crime in the year ending March 2022 was 0.6% more than the year ending March 2021, with 35 more offences.

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



# Cross-Cutting

# Threat Enablers

To effectively tackle serious and organised crime in the UK it is important to target cross-cutting enablers that enhance organised crime groups' abilities to conduct crime. Those covered in this section include:

- 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.
- The Criminal Use of Technology – The integration of technology, such as the use of encryption and the internet, including the dark net to enable criminal activity.
- Insider Threat, Bribery and Corruption – These pose a risk to the UK's national security, economic prosperity and international reputation.

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.

## What You Can Do

### The 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 [Crimestoppers](#) quoting Kraken (if near a waterway) or Pegasus (if at an airfield).

### 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 Crime](#) and [Fraud](#) pages to find out how.

### 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.

You can also contact [Crimestoppers](#).

## The UK Border

Commodity-based serious and organised crime in the UK, such as the sale 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.

As COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions lifted, opportunities for criminals to move illicit commodities and irregular migrants via traditional routes returned to pre-pandemic levels. Despite border staffing pressures, particularly at UK airports during peak travel periods in 2022, there has been no significant changes in smuggling methods.

During the pandemic, organised crime groups showed flexibility in their ability to adapt their smuggling methods and shift between different forms of transport to exploit the UK border. In some instances, organised crime groups have continued using the routes which were effective during periods of government enforced travel restrictions.

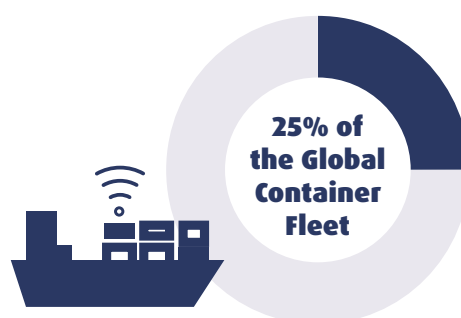
One such example is the increased use of small boats to facilitate organised immigration crime, rather than a return to pre-pandemic levels using road and ferry transport. Subsequently, some organised crime groups diversified to using general maritime vessels to facilitate organised immigration crime to the UK.

The nature of the UK coastline and the accessibility of many maritime ports means that the threat of organised crime groups exploiting general maritime for smuggling commodities is high; the capability and intent to use this mode is already demonstrated in other international jurisdictions. The impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on global supply chains in 2020/21 meant that more organised crime groups switched to general maritime to keep their commodity flows open.

In 2022, the demand for additional staff at travel hubs, particularly airports, was widely reported. It is likely that organised crime groups saw this as an opportunity to have complicit associates apply for roles in the industry. The risk may be compounded by the cost of living increase, making financially impacted staff more susceptible to approaches from organised crime groups.

After leaving the EU, the UK ceased to recognise European Economic Area and Swiss national identity cards as documents for entry to the UK. These were some of the most regularly exploited documents seen at the border and often used by organised crime groups. In their absence, there have been more counterfeit passports detected at the UK border. These are professionally made and include many different nationalities.

The use of 'hub to hub' freight routes and multi-load consignments



Source: Drewry.co.uk

## 8.7 million

Smart Containers by 2026

This will give shipping companies and law enforcement agencies greater visibility of global container movements. This is likely to impact organised crime groups' considerations when planning smuggling operations.

A container becomes 'smart' when fitted with a telematics device that provides real-time tracking and monitoring. This enables operators to improve the efficiency and availability of their containers and supply chains.

continues to enable organised crime groups to move illicit commodities to the UK. This involves smuggling illicit goods within a shipment and hiding them amongst multiple legitimate consignments. Such shipments are moved to the UK from a legitimate freight hub on the continent, for onward distribution within the UK. This distribution is primarily facilitated via the UK's road networks using HGVs, where commodities are often taken to locations away from the ports, and distributed in smaller amounts around the UK via cars and vans.

Technological advancements in container shipping will likely result in organised crime groups reacting to avoid law enforcement targeting measures. The global fleet of smart containers is forecast to grow over the next five years to 8.7 million, accounting for 25% of all containers by 2026. This should give shipping companies and law enforcement agencies greater visibility of global container movements. Organised crime groups are likely to consider this when planning smuggling operations, and will actively aim to avoid placing illicit commodities into containers which can be monitored by law enforcement agencies.

## Criminal Use of Technology

Technology is a key enabler in serious and organised crime. Criminals continuously adapt to and take advantage of technological developments and changes in user behaviour. Working with intelligence and commercial partners, law enforcement needs to be agile in its approach to identifying and adapting to technological threats and opportunities in an increasingly complex operating environment.

Criminals access a variety of easy to use and often inexpensive methods 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 applications with end-to-end encryption as standard, to more sophisticated devices costing thousands of pounds. Developments in technology use by serious and organised criminals can present opportunities for law enforcement activity, leading to successes such as Operation VENETIC.

As online and offline activity increasingly overlaps, many in society are at greater risk from online crime. The internet offers criminals a global reach to steal personal information to identify and exploit victims. Both UK and international offenders are targeting UK society, ranging from individual victims of fraud to cyber crime 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 seek out potential victims to commit contact abuse. The dark net continues to enable child sexual abuse, cyber crime, fraud and illicit commodity sales.

Technology trends and behaviour that evolved during the global pandemic have continued to develop. Cryptocurrency remains an important facilitator for criminal transactions, through laundering funds, paying for goods and services on the dark net and making ransom demands. Their legitimate use also provides criminals with fraud and theft opportunities.

Extended reality technologies, such as augmented and virtual reality, have been identified as evolving threats,

**\$59 billion** 

Projected global spend on augmented and virtual reality in 2022.

Source: Statista

particularly in child sexual abuse. This technology provides the ability to manipulate or merge virtual and physical worlds. These spaces are highly likely to become integral as the existing technology develops and becomes more immersive.

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, whilst reducing the opportunity for human interference, increases the risk of cyber crime through the manipulation of underlying IT systems.

Publicly available technology, such as GPS tracking devices, are increasingly exploited by organised crime groups due to their availability and low cost.

## 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.

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.

Extended reality technologies, such as augmented and virtual reality, have been identified as evolving threats



# 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 680,000 and 830,000 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). Estimates indicate that one in ten children experienced child sexual abuse before the age of 16 and the 2022 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse estimates that this occurs to one in six girls and one in twenty boys. However, all forms of child sexual abuse remain consistently underreported.

It is estimated that about two thirds of physical sexual abuse takes place within the family environment, which remains challenging to detect due to the hidden nature of the crime. Understanding physical offending, including [group based offending](#), remains an ongoing priority for law enforcement. It is likely that a significant proportion of victims and survivors do not recognise themselves



## 1 in 6 girls

are estimated to have experienced child sexual abuse before the age of 16.

Source: The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

## 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 of themselves that has been shared online: use the [Report Remove reporting tool](#) from Childline for help to remove it.
- Needing to talk about any issue: contact [Childline](#) at any time.

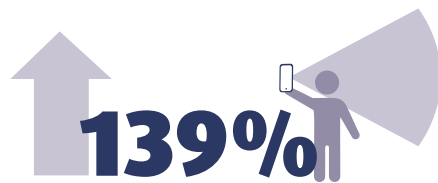
as such. Victims and survivors of group based offending who had previously witnessed or experienced unhealthy relationships are more likely to be vulnerable to controlling, violent and otherwise abusive behaviours. This emphasises the need to continue to support and encourage victim disclosure.

Adults remain the primary perpetrators of child sexual abuse, but offences against children committed by other children continue to be reported, with most relating to contact abuse. The NSPCC's Childline figures for 2021/22 show that, where known, 31% of counselling sessions about child sexual abuse and exploitation recorded a child as responsible for the abuse. Where it can be calculated in police recorded data relating to contact and online incidents involving under 18s, the most commonly identified age to carry out or be the victim of abuse is 14.

Self-generated indecent imagery, including material shared consensually between peers, or elicited by offenders through manipulation or coercion, is

increasing. The Internet Watch Foundation classified 72% of reports they assessed as containing self-generated indecent imagery. Testimonies of young people indicate that sharing images is increasingly commonplace, with peer norms amplifying the pressure to generate imagery. It is unlikely these online interactions are reported to professionals, unless aggravating factors such as blackmail are involved.

Online spaces continue to provide strangers with the opportunity to initiate contact with children, enabling both online and contact offending. Industry decisions which undermine the agreed Safety by Design principles will reduce companies' ability to protect children on their platforms, and will result in less identification and reporting of offending. For example, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children estimate that with the implementation of end-to-end encryption by default, the number of CyberTipline reports will reduce by 80%. Therefore, without equivalent moderation and safeguarding mitigations in place on platforms used by significant numbers of children, like Facebook



increase in material confirmed to include self-generated indecent imagery. January-June 2022 compared to January-June 2020.  
Source: Internet Watch Foundation

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

- For training, resources and advice on topics relating to online child sexual abuse: [NCA CEOP Education Programme](#).
- For training and resources to protect children from harm: [NSPCC Learning](#).

## Parents and Carers

- For information, advice and activities to use with children at home visit:
  - [CEOP Education](#)
  - [Parents Protect](#)
  - [Internet Watch Foundation](#)
- For resources to specifically tackle the online sexual abuse of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) visit the [Internet Watch Foundation](#).

## 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](#).

Messenger and Instagram, industry and law enforcement's ability to protect children will be reduced.

Social media and gaming platforms allowing children to interact with strangers increase the risk of technology assisted grooming. Ofcom reports that 31% of children aged three to fifteen play games online with or against strangers. The interactive nature of gaming provides offenders with additional opportunities to groom children, as they are able to build rapport through shared gaming interests, the sharing of equipment, co-operative gameplay or via offers of in-game currency.

Livestreaming is used by offenders to direct and watch the sexual abuse of children. The integration of livestreaming functionalities into social media and gaming platforms allow offenders to interact with direct content being broadcast by children. The instantaneous nature of contact can expose children to inappropriate material without warning, and can permit offenders to elicit self-generated indecent imagery or other sexual abuse following live interactions where children are placed under pressure to respond.

Extended reality technologies, such as augmented and virtual reality, have been identified as evolving threats. This technology provides the ability to manipulate or merge virtual and physical worlds, and is an increasingly standard addition to technology already in use. It is a realistic possibility that extreme or indecent acts conducted within the virtual world could act as an early pathway to further child sexual abuse offending.

## Case Study

Ian Wynter who admitted being 'sexually attracted to babies and toddlers' targeted financially vulnerable individuals in countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. He would give them explicit directions and pay them to livestream themselves carrying out abuse against young children.

Chat logs and financial records showed that Wynter had paid a man in the Philippines to abuse a two-year-old boy for him via video call. Video recordings of these calls show him directing the abuse, as well as requesting specific sexual acts in the chat box.

Officers recovered thousands of online chat logs which showed Wynter speaking with offenders based all over the world, discussing 'fantasies' and advising others on how to carry out abuse without getting caught.

17,000 indecent images of children (6,000 in category A) were stored across Wynter's devices, many of which he had also shared online. Within these was a naked image of a child that he had taken himself.

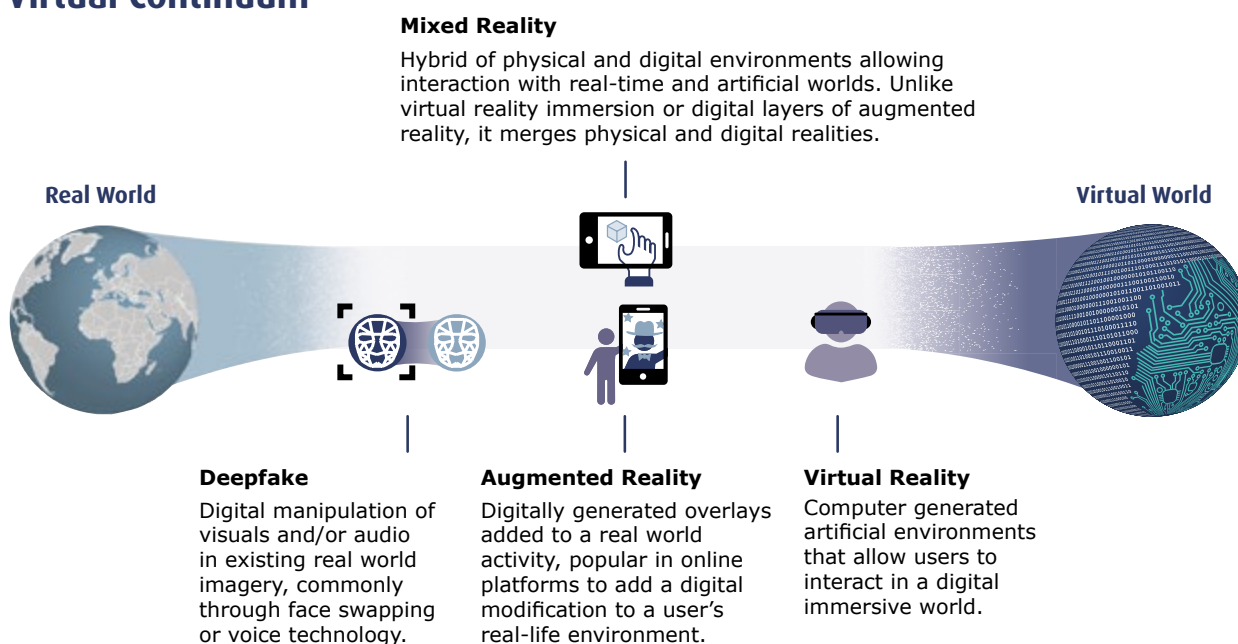
He was sentenced on 09 November 2022 to 19 years in prison with an additional six years on license. He will also be subject to an indefinite Sexual Harm Prevention Order and has been placed on the sex offenders register.

## Extended Realities and Child Sexual Abuse

Extended reality technologies have the potential to impact both online and technology assisted offline CSA offending.

They use a computer or wearable technology to alter reality, creating an experience that combines physical and virtual worlds. They provide a sense of immersion, allowing the user to feel more involved in a given activity. Each technology ranges in how real or virtual the experience created is, shown below.

### The Virtual Continuum



## Russian-language criminals operating ransomware as a service continue to be responsible for most high profile cyber crime attacks against the UK

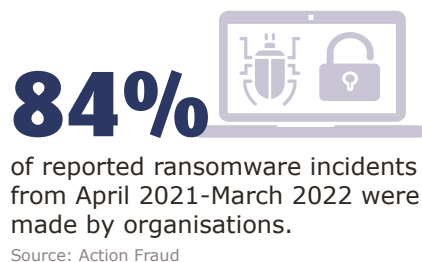


# Cyber Crime

The cyber crime threat to the UK continues to evolve. The deployment of ransomware remains the greatest cyber serious and organised crime threat to the UK and its use threatens Critical National Infrastructure and poses a risk to 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.

Russian-language criminals operating ransomware as a service continue to be responsible for most high profile cyber crime attacks against the UK. Some of these high profile Russian-language groups are known to have links with the Russian state. However, it is highly likely that in most instances these links extend only to tolerance of their activities.

These organised crime groups are becoming more capable and, in some instances, have claimed to



### 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.

introduce stricter controls over the activities of affiliates to improve the effectiveness of their operations. For example, some groups have taken steps to limit their exposure to law enforcement by trying to avoid targeting Critical National Infrastructure and healthcare institutions providing lifesaving medical treatment. There is no guarantee these groups will prove willing or able to enforce their own rules. The attacks against European energy companies in 2022 demonstrate that cyber criminals are still willing and capable of attacking high profile targets.

High-end cyber crime groups continue to improve their business models, almost certainly to make it easier and quicker to extract funds from victims. Extorting victims by threatening to sell or publish stolen data is an established part of the ransomware criminal business model. Newer developments to further pressurise a victim into paying a ransom include making stolen data searchable online or threatening a distributed denial of service attack to publicly disrupt a victim's services.

Ransomware groups highly likely adapted their methods immediately after the Russian invasion of Ukraine to overcome operational disruptions, such as loss of access to Ukrainian affiliates and their skills, and difficulties in laundering criminal profits. Ransom payments were disrupted as victims were discouraged from paying criminal groups linked to the Russian state. As a result, groups used different ransomware strains, rebranded, and added new methods to pressurise victims into paying.

The wider cyber crime landscape is supported by online marketplaces selling compromised data and tools that enable cyber crime. Cyber tools, including ransomware, are increasingly available to a wide range of cyber criminals, alongside service providers who can provide access to online systems. This marketplace also enables criminals from other threat areas, and enables cyber criminals with only basic capabilities to cause serious harm to UK businesses and individuals.

Cyber criminals will almost certainly continue to exploit current events



of the 29,845 computer misuse reports to Action Fraud between April 2021-March 2022 involved hacking of social media and email accounts.

Source: Action Fraud

## Recognise and break suspicious contacts:

- Stop and check official contact routes practices and payment details. If you have 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 on 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](#).

in their criminal campaigns. For example, using the cost of living issues as a lure in phishing campaigns or by targeting ransomware at sectors perceived as being under pressure. This perceived pressure can be used to compel victims to pay ransoms to restore operations quickly.

Beyond ransomware, the cyber crime threat continues to be high. UK organisations and the public face significant threats from less sophisticated cyber crime, such as distributed denial of service. Malicious emails, aimed at stealing information or encouraging victims to download malware, continue to feature regularly. The compromise of social media and personal email accounts is also a growing trend.

## Case Study

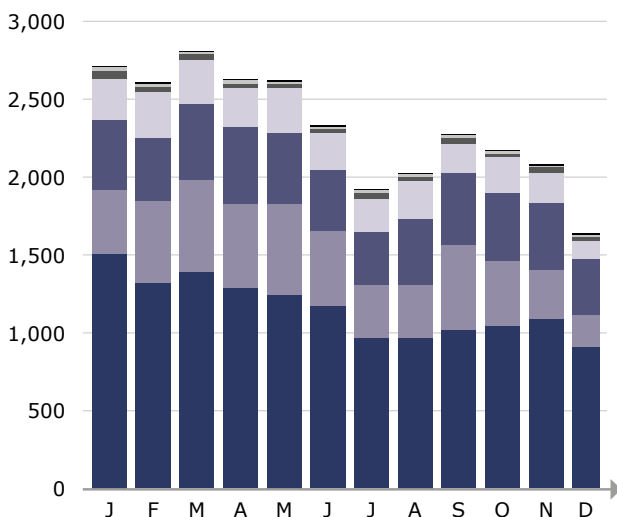
A cyber attack on Advanced, a company providing services to health care, including some linked to the NHS 111 service, caused disruption to the NHS throughout August 2022.

Affected services included patient referrals, ambulance dispatch, out-of-hours appointment bookings, mental health services and emergency prescriptions.

This example also demonstrates how a cyber attack on a third party provider can have serious consequences beyond the immediate victim and impact customers that rely on its services.

## Cyber Incident Reports

Cyber Crime Incidents Reported to Action Fraud in 2022.



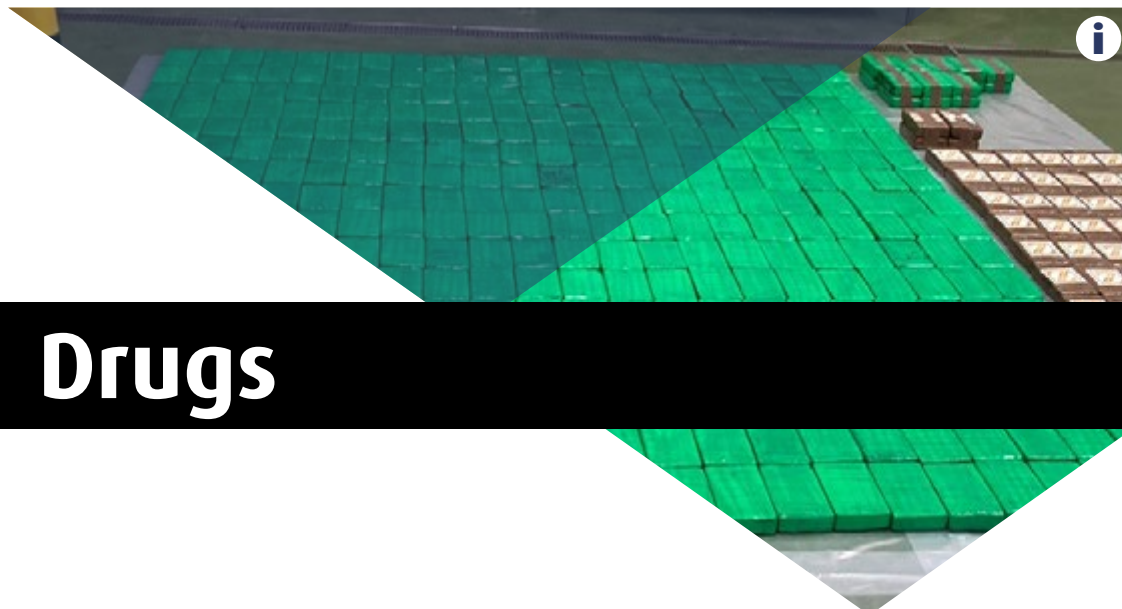
Cyber Crime Type	2022 Total	% of Total
Denial of Service Attack	73	0.26%
Hacking Server	207	0.75%
Ransomware	373	1.31%
Hacking Extortion	2,829	10.07%
Hacking Personal	5,157	18.80%
Computer Virus Malware Spyware	5,324	19.08%
Hacking Social Media & Email	13,986	49.73%



Hacking of social media and email accounts for over 49% of reported cyber crime incidents, according to Action Fraud.

Source: Action Fraud, Online Dashboard.

## The overall demand and trends for drugs offences continue to increase within the UK



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

# Drugs

Drug use, drug seizures and drug offences continue to increase within the UK with a total annual cost to society of over £21 billion. In 2021, there were 223,106 drug seizures in England and Wales; this is a 21% increase compared with the previous year resulting in the third consecutive annual increase. Scotland saw a 3% rise from 33,281 to 34,308 seizures and Northern Ireland rose by 3% from 8,186 to 8,428.

The common wholesale prices of cocaine and heroin decreased in 2022, across the UK and the rest of Europe. From January 2022 to December 2022, cocaine prices have dropped by about 30% and heroin prices have fallen by about 33%. The prices are consistent with substantial quantities of the drugs being widely available and easily accessible. Wholesale drug prices are likely to return to pre-pandemic levels in 2023.



increase in drug seizures in England and Wales during 2022 compared to 2021.

Source: Office for National Statistics.

Drug related deaths through misuse reported in the UK rose from 4,517 in 2020 to 4,564 in 2021. Scotland

### What You Can Do

Cannabis farms are often linked to other forms of serious and organised crime and provide profits for further crime. Sometimes those working in the farms are victims of modern slavery. Signs to spot cannabis farms include:

- A powerful distinctive smell.
- Frequent visitors throughout the day and night.
- Blacked out windows.
- Snow melting on rooftops unusually quickly in winter.
- High levels of condensation on windows.
- Noise from fans.

continues to have the highest numbers of drug related deaths through misuse, 245 deaths per million. In England and Wales, the North East continues to have the highest rates of deaths at 104.1 deaths per million people.



increase in the global cocaine production estimate in 2021 compared to 2020.

Source: Office for National Statistics.

The most recent estimate for the annual consumption of cocaine in England, Scotland and Wales is 117 tonnes. Global cocaine production estimates have increased from 1,886 tonnes in 2020 to 2,132 tonnes in 2021, which is an increase of 246 tonnes. This 13% increase is driven by historical high levels of production in Colombia. Border Force at Southampton Docks recorded the largest seizure of cocaine (3.7 tonnes) since 2015, arriving from Colombia concealed within pallets of bananas.

- Tampered electricity boxes or unusual cabling.

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 [Crimestoppers](#).

Drugs continue to transit from South America and Central America to Europe. Ports such as Antwerp and Rotterdam remain key transit hubs for drugs before they enter the UK.

Geopolitical events in 2022 have affected the world heroin market. Opium cultivation and heroin production continued in parts of Afghanistan despite Taliban announcements that they would outlaw the drugs trade in the country. International heroin trafficking has been affected by the war in Ukraine with routes being displaced from the port of Odesa in Ukraine to Romania and Azerbaijan.

Nearly every town and city across England and Wales is affected by county lines supplying heroin and crack cocaine. Most drugs are sourced from major cities including, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Nottingham and Sheffield. There are about 600 active lines operating with county lines supply also linked to other offences such as labour exploitation, firearms and violence. Law enforcement activity saw the disruption of 276 active lines in October 2022.

Cannabis is still the most widely used illegal drug in the UK particularly amongst young adults, with 16.2% of 16 to 24-year-olds, 950,000, in England and Wales reporting the use of cannabis this year. Cannabis cultivation in the UK continues at an industrial scale and is often linked to other offences including benefit fraud, energy theft, modern slavery, robbery and violence.

The threat of harm linked to the misuse of synthetic drugs such as benzodiazepines and gabapentinoid drugs has increased. This is particularly through poly drug use which remains significant and indicates an overall upward trend. The abuse of benzodiazepines was involved in 69%, 918 out of 1,330, of all drug misuse deaths in Scotland in 2021. There was also a 13% rise in the numbers of deaths involving any benzodiazepine in England and Wales in 2021, from 476 in 2020 to 538; the number of deaths involving gabapentinoids increased 17.3% from 462 in 2020 to 542 in 2021.

The threat from ketamine in the UK has risen and it is probable the market for this drug is larger in the UK than previously understood. In November, a suspected functioning ketamine lab was discovered in Essex capable of producing notable amounts of this drug.

Afghanistan continues to produce methamphetamine from the naturally growing ephedra plant, with production growing significantly to now reach parity with heroin. Production in the Netherlands has also increased rapidly. Whilst UK consumption remains very low, there has been an increase in exports from the UK to Australia and New Zealand.

## Case Study

In May 2022 a man suspected of supplying equipment to illicitly produce benzodiazepines was arrested alongside three other people, as part of an NCA investigation.

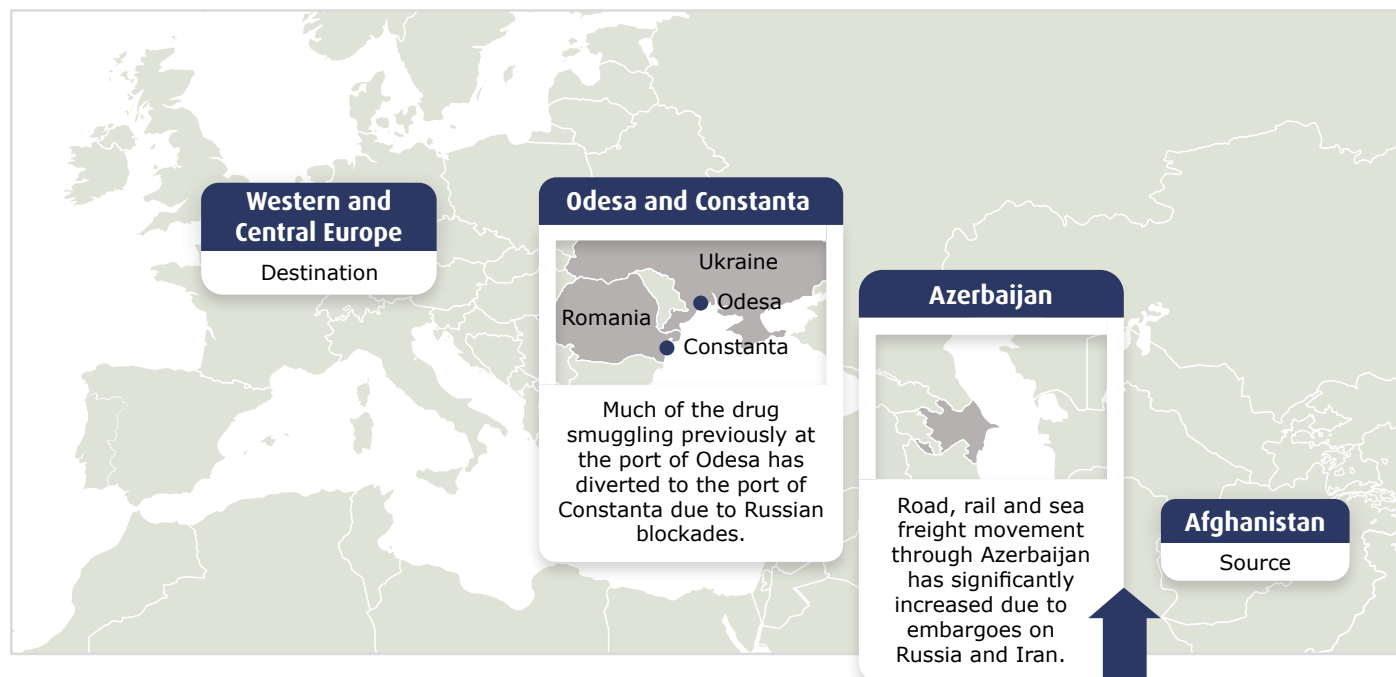
The Wiltshire based company, linked to the arrested individuals, was alleged to have been supplying pill presses, stamps and mixing agents to organised crime groups.

These groups were making and distributing Benzodiazepines pills (which are also referred to as 'street Valium' and 'street benzos') pills in Scotland. These pills are sold cheaply and they are linked to a growing number of drug related deaths across Britain, particularly in Scotland.

Items such as machinery and mixing agents consistent with pill making were seized as a result of this investigation.

## Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War

This map highlights the key changes to drug routes.



## Firearms crime is currently lower than the long term trend and remains suppressed



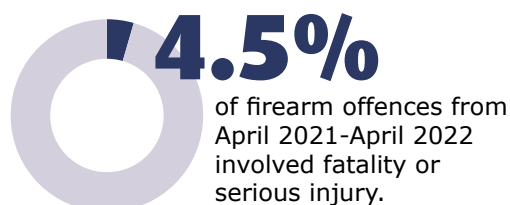
# Firearms

Levels of firearms crime in the UK remain amongst the lowest in the world; however, criminals continue to engage in firearms enabled crime.

Firearms crime is currently lower than the long term trend. There were 5,750 firearms offences recorded in England and Wales in the year ending March 2022.

This was 35 more (0.6% increase) than the year ending March 2021, which was at the lowest level since the year ending March 2016, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Firearm discharges from lethal-barrelled weapons account for about 9% of firearm offences. About 40% of all reported discharges are against the person, with most of these resulting in an injury. Serious injury from firearms is low, and fatalities rare, with 26 deaths in 2022 - close to an all time low. Most firearms enabled serious violence continues to occur in London, West Midlands and the North West.



Source: Office for National Statistics.

### What You Can Do

The NCA has launched a firearms safety campaign urging the public to 'know the gun, know the law and know the consequences' of the illegal possession of firearms in the UK.

- This campaign aims to address the risks to individuals and communities by the import of prohibited weapons and the possession and supply of unlawful firearms in the UK. It also addresses the risks of lawfully-held weapons being stolen from firearm and shotgun certificate holders.

Urban street gang activity accounts for most firearm discharges, including those that result in injury. The key drivers for firearms enabled serious violence is the drugs trade, 'turf wars', criminal debt and feuds. Some of these criminal feuds are long-standing and result in periodic escalations of violence. Violence can be directed by criminals elsewhere, for example, abroad or in prison. Most victims are other criminals although sometimes innocent people are shot in cross-fire or in cases of mistaken identity.

There is diversification of firearms availability in the UK, where criminals are likely to use what 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 convert some types of blank-firing weapons to fire live or modified ammunition and also resort to improvised/home-made weapons (including with 3D-printed components) and previously obsolete-calibre firearms. The number of recovered homemade firearms with 3D-printed components (such as hybrid firearms) has increased this year and the reliability, functionality and quality is improving. It is highly likely that criminals have a growing interest in hybrid 3D-printed firearms. The criminal use of fully automatic weapons, such as submachine guns and automatic rifles, remains very rare in the UK.

Most firearms recovered by law enforcement have not been previously fired in crime and when they have been, most have been used only once, before being disposed of or never used again. The few firearms that are used in more than one incident are, however, responsible for a disproportionate level of serious violence.

It remains highly unlikely that the war in Ukraine is impacting on the UK serious and organised crime firearms threat. After the war, it is a realistic possibility that some firearms will be traded on the European criminal marketplace. This threat of firearms diversion is likely mid to long term, where countries neighbouring Ukraine are likely to become transit hubs for firearms trafficked to mainland Europe. Despite the number of firearms available in conflict zones, very few types available pre-conflict or donated by Western governments are used by criminals in the UK.

- Target audiences include young people expressing an interest in firearms; those with access to guns through farming; hunting communities or shooting clubs; offenders involved in serious and organised crime; vulnerable groups who might be used to store weapons for criminals; and visitors to the UK who do not understand UK firearms legislation.

Anyone who has information about illegally held firearms or ammunition should 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 [Crimestoppers](#).



9% of firearm offences from April 2021-April 2022 involved a discharge from a lethal barrelled weapon.

Source: Office for National Statistics.

## Case Study

Against the backdrop of surging gun crime in the West Midlands over the last decade, a man was arrested in Birmingham having ordered various firearms parts online from the US.

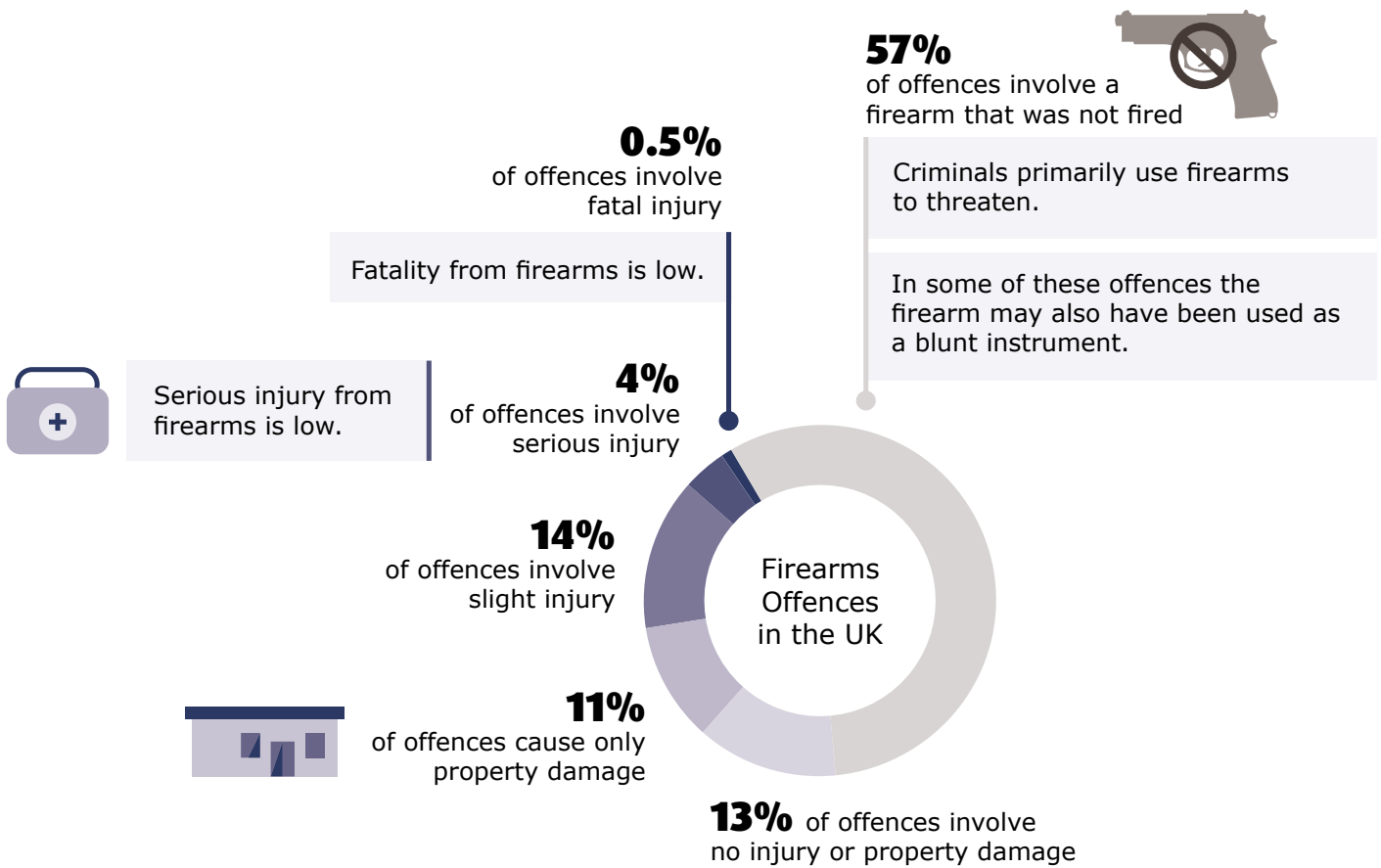
The man gave the US seller detailed instructions on how to hide the parts in packages to avoid detection. Following an investigation by US Homeland Security, the NCA identified the man and arrested him.

Firearm parts (as shown in image) and an ammunition press were seized, along with a 3D-printer that was believed to have been used to make some component parts. After pleading guilty to attempting to possess a firearm, he was jailed for three years and nine months.

The firearm parts, although not illegal on their own, and 3D-printer which could have been used to create deadly weapons for use by organised crime groups, were taken out of circulation.



## Variety of Firearm Use by Criminals



Source: Office for National Statistics. Figures reflect crimes reported to the police. Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number, excluding those below 1, which are shown to one decimal place, so figures do not total 100.

## Fraud remains the most common crime type experienced by victims in England and Wales



# Fraud

Fraud is a prevalent and consistent threat, with all of UK society affected by its economic and social consequences. The UK's fraud threat is divided into three categories: fraud against the individual, fraud against businesses, and fraud against the public sector.

It is a realistic possibility that three quarters of fraud perpetrated against the UK is partially or fully committed from overseas using both criminal and legitimate services, and exploiting technology enablers.

**3.7 million**

The number of frauds experienced by individuals in England and Wales in the year ending December 2022.

Source: Office for National Statistics



Volumes of fraud against UK individuals and businesses fell from the unprecedented levels seen during the pandemic but the financial losses to victims grew in 2022. The gap between all fraud experienced by the public and fraud reported to police remains, with underreporting from individuals and businesses still a barrier to understanding the true scale of fraud.

### What You Can Do

#### 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.

In 2022, UK individuals continued to be the targets of [payment diversion fraud](#), [investment fraud](#), [romance fraud](#), [courier fraud](#) and [cheque, plastic card and online bank account fraud](#).

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. It is highly likely that inflation increased the vulnerability of potential fraud victims as more people looked to save and make money. For vulnerable victims, financial losses to frauds are likely to lead to more serious financial difficulties and psychological harm.

As criminals committing fraud find it increasingly difficult to circumvent enhanced controls implemented by businesses, they often seek to target consumers through [social engineering](#). Data breaches remain a key enabler of fraud and can be used alongside social engineering. 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, to obscure the source and nature of funds. Criminals are increasingly using online methods to encourage people to become money mules, and it is likely that cost of living pressures will attract a wider range of people to money mule activity. Whilst criminals have

developed fraudulent cryptoasset investment schemes to lure victims, they also increasingly use cryptoassets to move and launder the profits of a range of other frauds. Criminals also continue to exploit the near real-time transfers that the [Faster Payments System \(FPS\)](#) provides, to swiftly obtain payments from their victims and launder the proceeds of fraud.

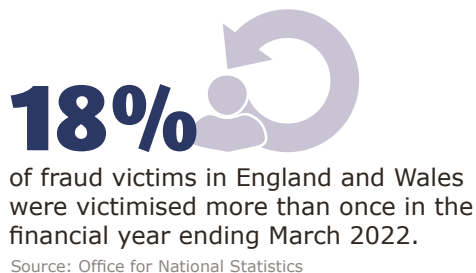
The UK's tax system is a target for organised criminals. Attempts to defraud the Exchequer or profit from illicit trade are seen across a range of tax regimes including through smuggling, non-payment of taxes and false claims for tax repayments. About £5.2 billion of the tax gap (the difference between the theoretical tax total and the amount actually paid) is attributed to criminal attacks. In March 2022, the creation of the Public Sector Fraud Authority (PSFA)

## 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:

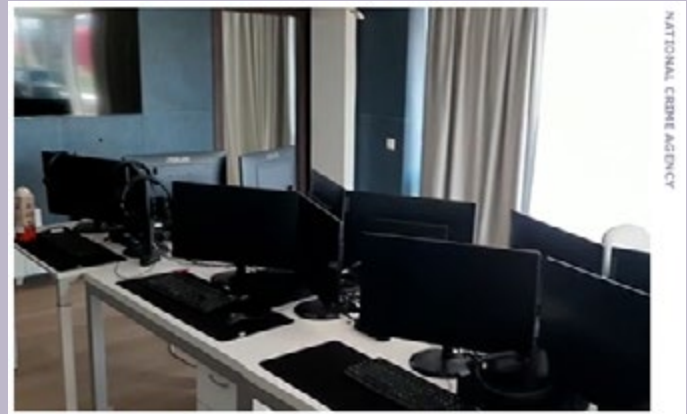
- If you have fallen victim to fraud, report it to [Action Fraud](#) in England, Wales or Northern Ireland. For Scotland report to Police Scotland by calling 101.
- If you have received a suspicious email, forward it to [report@phishing.gov.uk](mailto:report@phishing.gov.uk) to help stop criminal activity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



was announced. Its purpose is to work with departments and public bodies to understand and reduce the impact of fraud against the public sector.

## Case Study

In September 2022, prioritising the protection of victims, the NCA acted swiftly with Romanian Police to disrupt an overseas organised crime group. The group was operating a call centre style set-up out of rented accommodation (as shown in image) in Bucharest, systematically targeting thousands of individuals from around the world in a bid to convince them to pay an advanced fee for a false service.

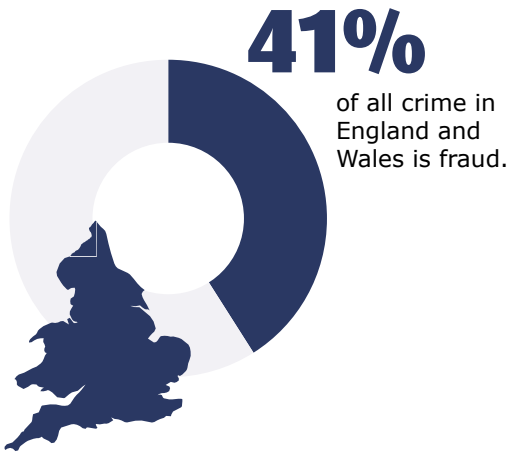


They typically targeted previous investment fraud victims, aware that the victims would be vulnerable and desperate for solutions to get their money back. The criminals falsely claimed to victims that they would help them get their money back, before defrauding them for a second time. Law enforcement officers seized material that indicated that the criminals followed a script when making contact with victims. The criminals would impersonate a domestic regulatory body, claiming the victims would be able to recover their losses for an upfront fee. False cryptoasset wallets were used to demonstrate that funds were available to repay victims.

Over 700 potential UK victims have been identified by law enforcement, with an additional 4,000 potential victims identified worldwide. The financial loss has already been identified as in excess of £1 million; however, as the identification of victims continues the loss is expected to be much higher. The impact of repeated targeting of fraud victims, both psychologically and financially is often devastating. The NCA continues to collaborate with domestic and international partners to support those affected. This case highlights how working with partners the NCA disrupts serious and organised criminals involved in frauds, even when they base themselves in countries far away from their victims.

## The High Prevalence of Fraud

Fraud is the most common crime type in England and Wales.



Source: Office for National Statistics, Crime Survey England and Wales 2022.

### Targeted

**40 million**

approximate number of individuals targeted by fraud in 2022.

### Increased Cost of Living

Inflationary costs have increased the vulnerability of potential fraud victims, as more people look to save and make money.



### Cost

**£ 2.46 billion**  
lost by businesses and individuals alone to fraud in the financial year 2021/22.

**17%**  
increase on the Year 2020/2021.



### Under-Reporting



**86%**

of fraud instances are estimated to go unreported.

The rising cost of living has almost certainly exacerbated and increased the risks of modern slavery and human trafficking



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY


# 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 the year ending December 2022 7,936 referrals were made for potential victims of exploitation that has taken place solely in the UK, an increase of 10.3% on the previous year. It is likely this represents an improved awareness of the modern slavery and human trafficking threat, alongside increased movement across the UK border since COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were lifted. All forms of exploitation are underreported.

**7,936**   
potential victims of UK based exploitation identified through the National Referral Mechanism in 2022.  
Source: UK Data Service - NRM Statistics.

## 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 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.

UK nationals are the most commonly identified victims of modern slavery and human trafficking occurring in the UK, followed by Albanian, Vietnamese, Romanian and Indian nationals. An increase in the number of Albanians referred during 2022 has coincided with increases seen in both small boat arrivals and asylum claims for [Albanian nationals](#).

Criminal exploitation occurs when victims are forced or coerced to commit crime. This is the most commonly reported form of exploitation seen in National Referral Mechanism referrals, and victims are often UK nationals. The most common examples, including for UK nationals, involve drugs offences, such as distributing drugs or cultivating cannabis.

Labour exploitation is where a person is forced to work by way of threats, violence, deception, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, or abuse of position. It is typically seen in labour sectors with lower skilled and lower paid workforces. Ongoing labour shortages in some of these sectors have likely contributed to a rise in labour exploitation in the UK.

Organised crime groups engaged in coerced drug distribution often prioritise children during recruitment, targeting vulnerabilities such as social isolation, poor economic opportunities and being in social care. It is highly likely that increased rates of absence and children missing in education provide opportunities for drug distribution organised crime groups to recruit victims, while also creating barriers to identify those already recruited. Almost two-thirds of British victims of modern slavery and human trafficking are children being exploited for criminality (2,534), many through county lines drug distribution in which organised crime groups transport and sell drugs in other areas, usually moving from cities into smaller towns and rural areas.

The war in Ukraine has reduced the number of seasonal workers coming to the UK from Ukraine. This has resulted in workers being recruited from countries further afield where there are typically fewer labour protections than in Europe. These seasonal workers from outside of Europe are at an increased risk of being exploited in their home countries during the recruitment process, such as in the payment of fees to local brokers leading to potential debt bondage.

Sexual exploitation typically occurs in brothels and escort agencies. Victims, particularly women and girls, are subject to sexual and often physical abuse, with many victims suffering long term psychological distress as a result of their exploitation.

The rising cost of living has almost certainly exacerbated and increased the risks of modern slavery and human trafficking. It is likely that organised crime groups will consider alternative ways to maintain profitability and offset rising costs onto victims, such as spending less on

- Victims may be unwilling to seek help and may fear law 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](#).
- [Crimestoppers](#).

To find out more about how you can recognise the signs of modern slavery in the businesses that you use, visit the [NCA's Ethical Consumer Choice Campaign](#).



of potential victims in the UK during 2022 were children. 78% of these reported criminal exploitation.

Source: UK Data Service - NRM Statistics.

victim welfare. For victims of sexual exploitation, other likely adaptations include coercing victims into providing more risky sexual services, such as unprotected sex, to attract and retain a steady customer base.

## Case Study

In June 2022, a Bristol couple were jailed for a total of 25 years for trafficking at least 29 adults into the UK over seven years and forcing them to work in a hand car wash and other businesses.

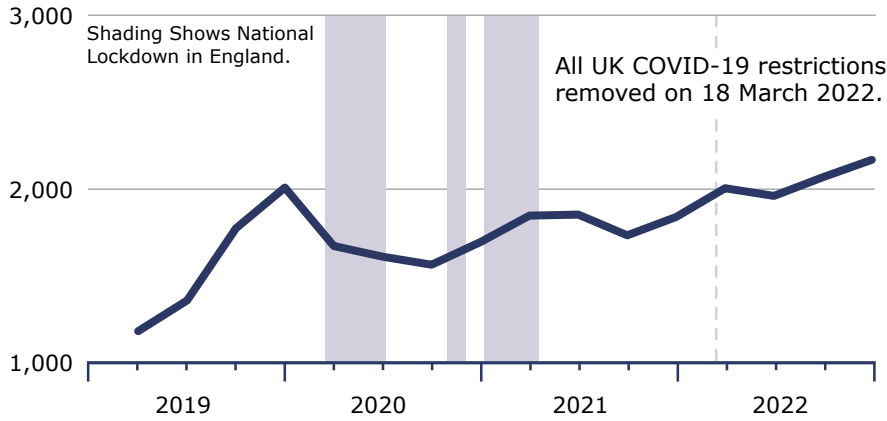
The offenders (image shows one of them being arrested by the NCA) controlled all aspects of their victims' lives. The victims were kept in squalid conditions in a house, were regularly beaten and threatened, and were forced to hand over their ID documents, phones and bank cards.

Almost £300,000 was transferred from the victims' bank accounts to the offenders, and the offenders failed to pay their victims nearly £1 million in wages from the car wash.

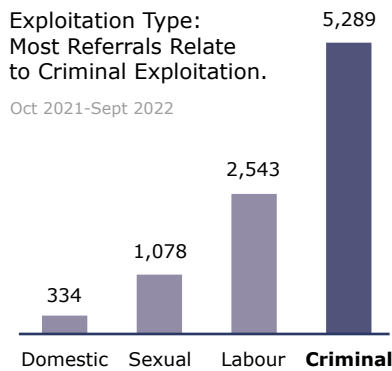


## Increase in National Referral Mechanism Referrals

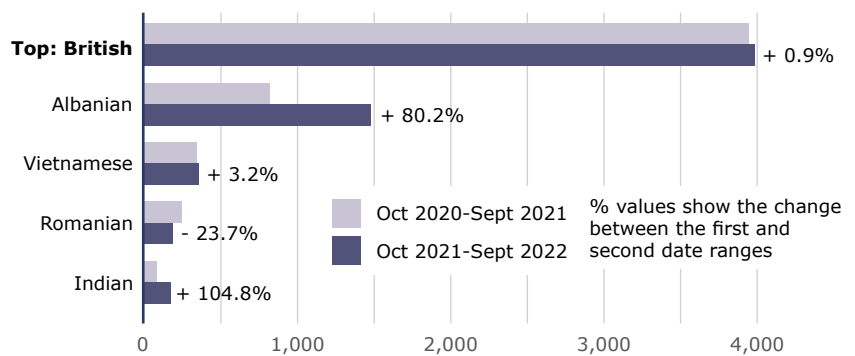
Increased NRM Referrals of Potential Victims since Periods of Lockdown and the Lifting of COVID-19 Restrictions.



The National Referral Mechanism is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive appropriate support.



Top 5 Nationalities of Potential Victims: Most Referrals are British Nationals.



Source: UK Data Service - NRM Statistics. Data collected at the end of each quarter.

There is a realistic possibility that more people and/or businesses will be drawn into acting as money mules due to cost of living pressures



# Money Laundering

Alongside traditional methods, money laundering networks continue to innovate. Cryptoassets are increasingly used to launder non-digital proceeds of crime such as cash, as well as acquired via increasing levels of cyber crime, such as theft, malware and ransomware.

Organised crime groups continue to use money mules to introduce illicit cash into the banking system. There is a realistic possibility that

more people and/or businesses will be drawn into acting as money mules due to cost of living pressures.

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

**>£10 billion**

in both non-cash and cash-based money mule activity is estimated to be laundered via money mule activity in the UK annually.

Source: National Crime Agency

## What You Can Do

The money mule prevention strategic communications campaign #DontBeUsed was launched in October 2022. The campaign aims to raise awareness of and help protect the public from money mule recruiters.

The campaign uses social media ads and influencers to reach the three key audiences of young people, parents and carers and education professionals.

The campaign encourages you to do five things to tackle mule recruiters:

networks exploit this, as well as other financial sector vulnerabilities, to launder billions of pounds annually in the UK.

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

UK corporate structures enable money laundering due to vulnerabilities in their creation and oversight. Tens of billions of pounds of both UK and overseas generated proceeds of crime are likely laundered through UK registered corporate structures every year. 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.

Electronic money institutions and payment institutions, including money service businesses, feature prominently in investigations. They 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. 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.

The war in Ukraine, resulting sanctions and cost of living pressures increase the risk for bribery and corruption to occur in increasingly competitive markets, or in attempts to maintain trade covertly. For example, the extractive industry is a high risk sector for international bribery and corruption and increasing pressure for alternative sources to Russian oil and gas are likely to provide opportunities for this threat.

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 threat from market abuse remains, risking the integrity of the financial system, eroding confidence and lowering participation. The Financial Conduct Authority, which investigates market abuse, assesses that the greatest threat in terms of financial value comes from persistent insider dealing by international organised crime networks. The groups recruit insider

1. Ask a friend or someone in a trusted position for advice.
2. Report mule recruiters to local police by calling 101 or to Crimestoppers.
3. 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.
4. If you think someone is already involved, visit here for advice.
5. Boost your online security.

> **£300 million** 

denied to criminals as a result of defence against money laundering requests, April 2021-March 2022.

Source: National Crime Agency

sources to illegally disclose price-sensitive information about global markets.

## Case Study

The head of an international controller network which smuggled millions of pounds of criminal cash out of the UK was jailed in July 2022 for nine years and seven months. The individual arranged travel for a cash courier network, who between them, smuggled £104 million from the UK to UAE between November 2019 and October 2020.

The group collected cash from organised crime groups and took it to counting houses, where it was vacuum packed in suitcases (as shown in image) containing about £500,000 each and odorous/fragrant articles were used in an effort to avoid detection by Border Force dogs.

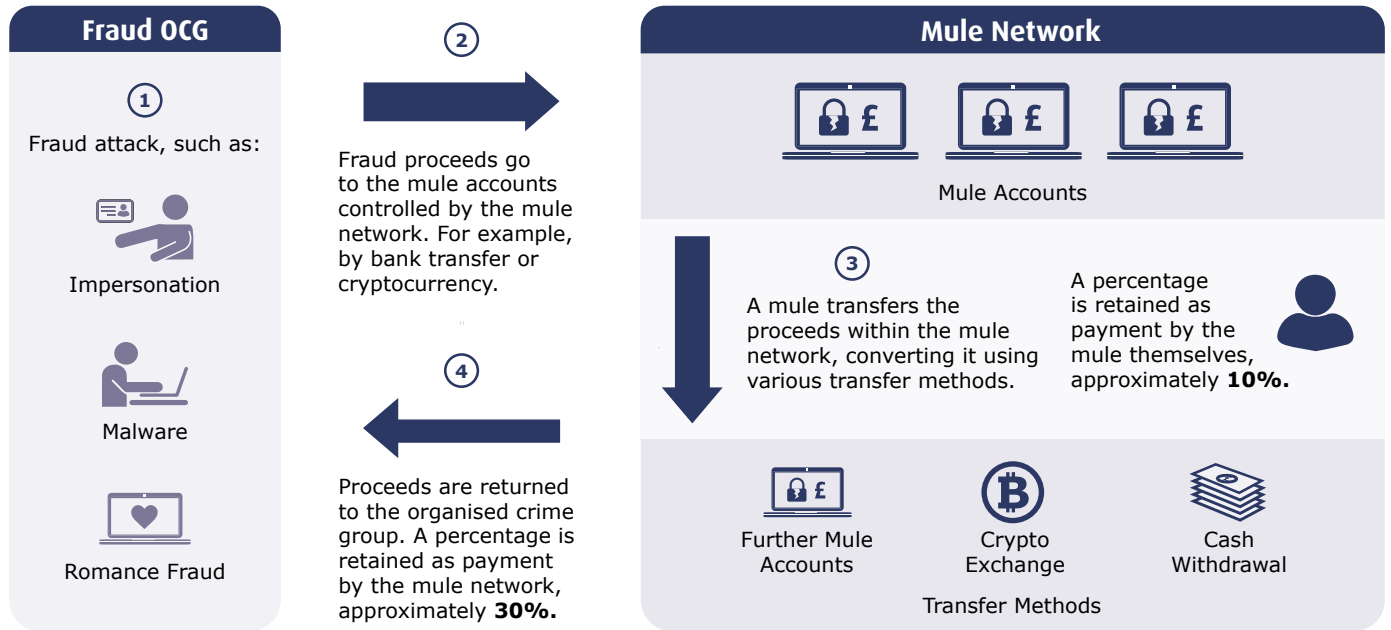



The couriers flew business class for the extra luggage allowance and declared the cash on arrival in Dubai, using a front company in customs declarations.

The investigation team gathered enough evidence relating to the head of the controller network that he pleaded guilty. International Liaison Officers and the National Economic Crime Centre supported the investigation team in facilitating a working relationship with UAE law enforcement to gather evidence against the wider money laundering group.

## Disguising the Origin and Destination of Funds

Organised crime groups use money mule networks to move proceeds of crime through personal and/or business bank accounts. This disguises both the origin and ultimate destination of criminally derived funds.



Key:  The width difference of the arrows indicates a decrease in the amount of profit. At transfer steps 3 and 4, a percentage is removed as payment.

It is highly likely that all areas of organised acquisitive crime will increase in the coming years due to increases in the cost of living



# Organised

# Acquisitive Crime

*Please note that all content for this threat is provided by the 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, heritage and cultural property crime, plant and agricultural thefts and metal and infrastructure crime, amongst other crime types. 2022 saw an overall increase in organised acquisitive crime reporting when compared with 2021. This is reflective of international COVID-19 pandemic travel and EU exit trade restrictions leading to increased difficulty in offenders' movement and disposal of property.

It is highly likely that all areas of organised acquisitive crime will increase in the coming years due to increases in the cost of living. It is anticipated that there will be a correlation between the volume of offending and increased value of property.

There were 110,739 vehicle thefts recorded in 2022 compared with 93,006 during 2021, a 19% increase. The most frequently stolen vehicles remain the Ford

## What You Can Do

To improve our understanding of organised acquisitive crime it is important that all such offences are reported to police.

You can 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 [Crimestoppers](#).

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

Transit and Ford Fiesta, often used to commit further organised acquisitive crimes.

Methods of theft have continued to evolve, with offenders turning to new technology to facilitate thefts such as electronic compromise thefts often committed by organised crime groups. Offenders continue to employ traditional methods of theft such as car key burglaries. High levels of organisation have been demonstrated through the use of new technologies and subsequent disposal via 'chop shops' and exports. The high levels of organisation make it difficult for law enforcement to recover vehicles with criminals using further methods such as tampering with vehicle information to avoid detection. Additionally, the breaking down of vehicles into component parts again reduces the chances of a vehicle being recovered, making identification more difficult.

Catalytic converter thefts have fallen significantly throughout 2022 with 22,902 offences recorded compared with 36,739 for 2021, a decrease of 37.7%.

The decrease is likely due to lower market values for platinum-group metals and increased value of second hand vehicles. Older hybrid vehicles remain the most often targeted vehicle, with offences most likely to occur in large public car parks with low security, during the hours of daylight. Car parks are targeted due to the higher volumes of vehicles and therefore increased profits available. Whilst the number of offences has fallen, the relative ease to carry out the offences and availability of tools makes catalytic converter thefts attractive for smaller organised crime groups.

In 2022 residential burglaries increased by less than 1%, with 164,537 offences in 2022 compared to 162,958 offences in 2021, with an 11.8% increase in commercial burglary offences with 63,843 offences in 2022 compared to 57,109 in 2021. Jewellery and cash remain the most frequently targeted items with residential burglaries, and cigarettes, alcohol and cash the most targeted items in commercial burglaries.

Family gold burglaries reduced by 52.6% to 576 offences in 2022 compared with 1,214 offences in 2021. Offences appear to correlate to the market value for gold, 2022 has seen relatively stable gold prices and therefore lower levels of thefts.

Copper is the most frequently targeted metal with cable thefts reporting a 24.6% increase for 2022 with 1,563 offences, compared to 1,254 in 2021. Offences reduced in the latter half of 2022 but the quantity and value taken during each offence increased substantially. Offences show a strong correlation to the market value of materials and therefore offences are expected to increase into 2023.



increase in car theft in 2022 compared to 2021.

Source: Opal

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 CCTV 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.



increase in cable theft in 2022 compared to 2021.

Source: Opal

Lead thefts from church roofs increased in 2022 by 6.8% from 162 offences recorded in 2021 to 173 offences recorded in 2022. The harm caused by these offences is substantial and leads to significant loss of heritage along with expensive repair costs to listed buildings.

Reporting of agricultural and construction equipment thefts has increased by 14% with 3,446 offences in 2022 compared with 3,022 offences in 2021. There are seasonal offending trends with many thefts reporting foreign national offender organised crime group involvement and international disposal of property.

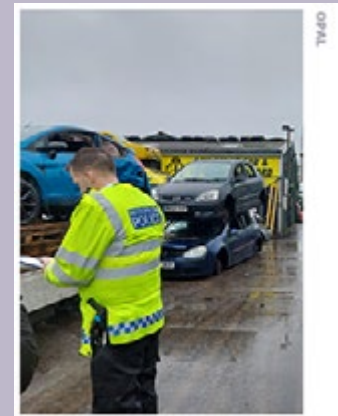
2022 saw a 22.6% increase in fuel theft reporting, likely due to changing legislation regarding red diesel sales. As cost of living pressures increase it is likely that these offences will continue to increase into 2023.

## Case Study

Catalytic converters, which clean harmful gases before they exit a vehicle's exhaust pipe, are often targeted by thieves because of the precious metal they contain.

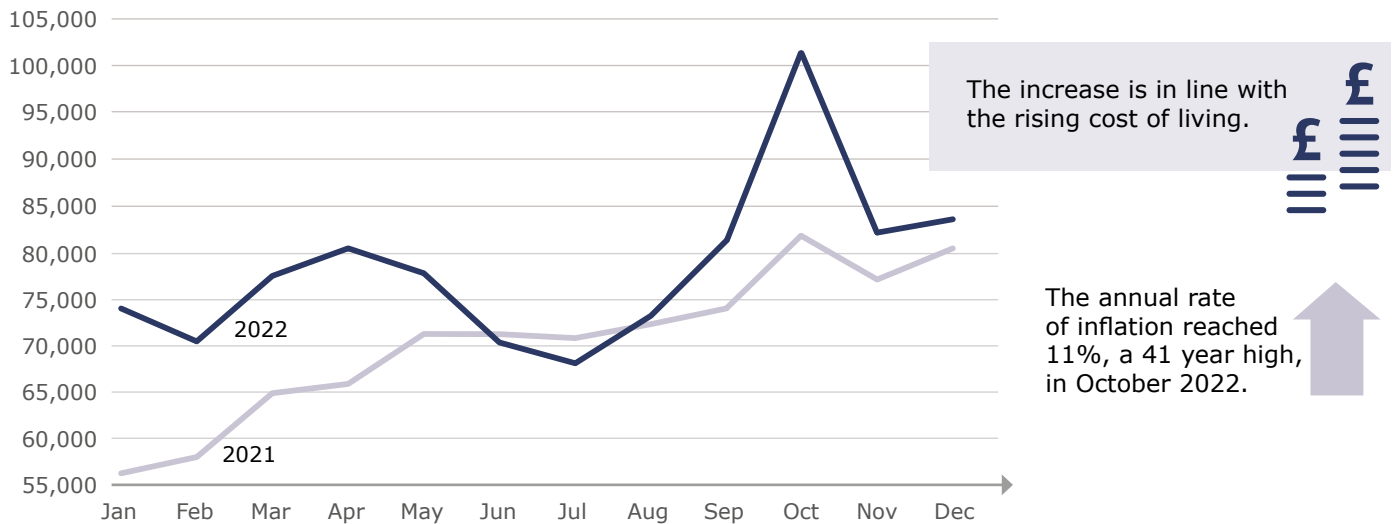
In February 2022, police forces across the UK visited over 600 premises, including catalytic converter process plants, scrap metal dealers (as shown in image), vehicle dismantlers and catalytic converter buyers, and made 30 arrests as part of a crackdown on metal crime and money laundering in the waste industry.

British Transport Police coordinated the operation, which saw police forces join experts from the Joint Unit for Waste Crime, Smartwater Group, and motor industry to carry out this synchronised enforcement action.



## Robbery and Business Crime are Increasing

Monthly Combined Total of Robbery and Business Crime Incidents.



Source: Opal - Police National Database.

## Throughout 2022, the average number of migrants on board each boat increased



HOME OFFICE

# Organised

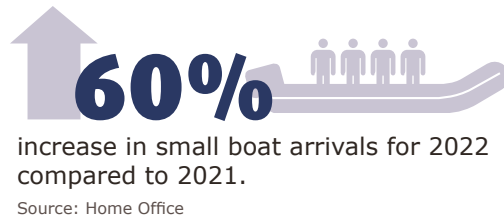
# Immigration Crime

Organised immigration crime involves moving a person across borders without legal permission or documentation, with the assistance of an organised crime group.

Rigid-hulled inflatable boats travelling from northern France, commonly referred to as small boats, were a frequent method of entry to the UK

for irregular migrants in 2022. Apart from February, November and December, which had unfavourable weather conditions, every month of the year saw increased small boat arrivals compared with 2021.

Organised criminals arranging small boat Channel crossings for irregular migrants prioritise profit over safety, frequently overloading boats. This increases the likelihood of a mass casualty event. Throughout 2022, the average number of migrants on board each boat increased as organised criminals transported a greater number of people in fewer launches.



### 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

There was a steep increase in Albanians using small boats in May, which continued to increase throughout the summer months before rapidly declining in the autumn, with negligible numbers detected in winter 2022/2023. The rise was due to a number of factors including an increased collaboration between Albanian organised crime groups and the Kurdish crime groups controlling much of the small boat crossing criminal marketplace. Albanian organised crime groups acted as brokers to secure places on small boats for irregular migrants. Albanian drug gangs recruited other Albanian nationals into crime in exchange for their crossing fee, a form of debt bondage.

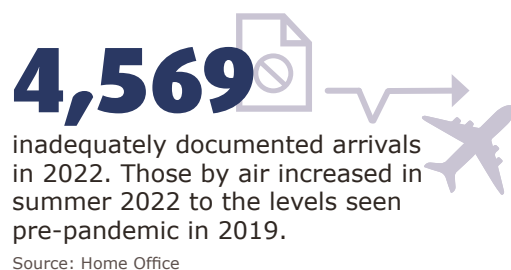
Afghans were the second most commonly detected nationality arriving by small boat in 2022. The rise is likely due to a combination of displacement from the August 2021 Taliban takeover and secondary migration from Europe. Other irregular migrants from nearby Middle Eastern countries were detected entering the UK in large numbers in 2022, specifically Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian nationals.

Social media has played an important role in advertising small boat migration to the UK. Organised crime groups use particular social media platforms to attract specific nationalities of migrants. The use of social media to advertise the sale of fraudulent identity documents also continued in 2022.

Irregular migrants continue to enter the UK clandestinely within vehicles. However, detections decreased in 2022, highly likely as a result of displacement to small boats. Entry by small boat is typically cheaper than by vehicle and has a high success rate.

The use of air routes by organised immigration crime groups increased in 2022. The continued easing of COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions has resulted in more air

travel. During the summer, the number of passengers attempting to travel to the UK without adequate documentation increased.



landfall, or crew showing signs of nervousness.

- People coming out of the back of HGVs 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 [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.

## Case Study

Six men who set up a storage base for a small boat people smuggling network in northern France have been jailed after an investigation by NCA and French police that began in summer 2022. NCA officers working with the Anglo-French Joint Intelligence Cell identified a location where boats and equipment were being stored by the crime group.

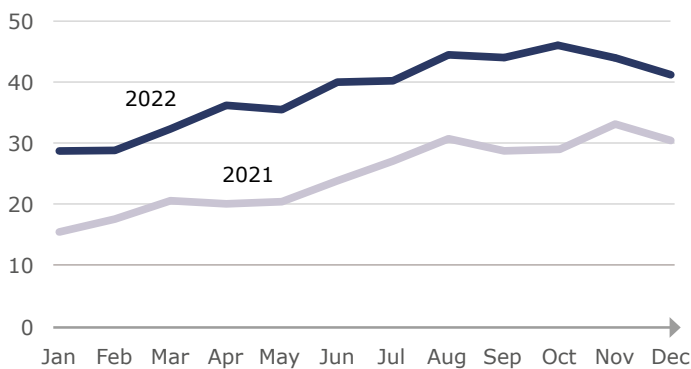
The group sourced boats from Turkey, engines and life jackets, taking them to the premises 25 miles south of Lille. The lock-up was being used as a staging post for the crime group, who would move boats from there to the French Cote d’Opale when they were required for migrant crossings.

The group included an Iraqi national who as chief organiser controlled access to the lock-up, an Afghan national acting as a recruiter for migrants, and two drivers.

The investigation of this criminal network demonstrates the roles played by small boat facilitators as they obtain boats from distant countries and then transport them to northern France ahead of the launch.

## Increasing Small Boat Arrivals

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



Highest monthly average number of people per boat January-December 2021.



Highest monthly average number of people per boat January-December 2022.

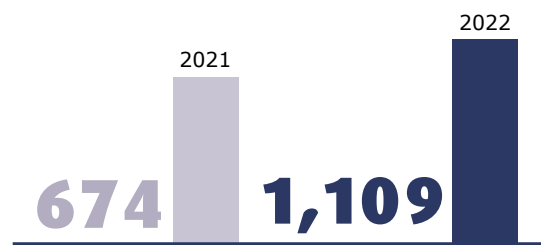
### Increased Numbers Per Boat

This rise 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.

### Increased Incidents

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

Source: Home Office.



Number of Incidents January-September

Throughout 2022, UK law enforcement and its partners have focused on targeting high-harm, high-impact criminals



NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

# Tackling the Threat

Throughout 2022, the NCA and its partners have focused on targeting high-harm, high-impact criminals who exploit the vulnerable, dominate communities and chase criminal profits, and undermine the UK's economy, infrastructure and institutions.

This has resulted in a wide range of activity to pursue offenders through prosecution and disruption, prevent people from engaging in serious and organised crime, protect individuals, organisations and systems and prepare for when crime occurs.

Examples of this activity can be found in the timeline of success below.

## Operational Response

The NCA will degrade the most harmful organised crime groups and lead the UK's operational response.

We will continue to work closely with our operational partners, with Government and with the private and third sectors.

## Timeline of Success 2022

### January



The NCA participated in an international investigation leading to the takedown of VPNLab (as shown in image), a service used by cyber criminals to facilitate their illicit activities. This global law enforcement operation resulted in 15 server infrastructures across the world hosting the VPNLab service being seized. VPNLab was established in 2008 offering virtual private network services on the dark net which cyber criminals used to create a criminal infrastructure and deploy ransomware to conduct cyber-attacks.



A sex offender and cyber voyeur who hacked computers to spy on victims was jailed for 26 months after he admitted illegally accessing victims' electronic devices to spy on them and build a collection of indecent images of both children and adults. The offender utilised Remote Access Trojan (RAT) software that allows cyber criminals to remotely take over, monitor and control operations on their victims' infected computer. NCA officers identified over 30 victims of his activity including a 13-year-old girl on whom he used his illegal access to spy on her through her webcam, turning the encounter into a number of indecent images.

### February



A long-running civil recovery investigation resulted in the NCA obtaining a settlement of £530,000 against property held by the family of two brothers convicted of drug trafficking and money laundering. The NCA issued a claim for civil recovery in the High Court and successfully argued the criminals had profited from supplying Class A drugs for over a decade while trying to hide the wealth using their relatives' identities and buying land and property in West Yorkshire between 2005 and 2018.

A powerful, well-connected, multi-millionaire and prominent Azerbaijan parliamentarian with links to the UK had £5.6 million held in UK bank accounts belonging to family members seized following a complex operation by officers from the Criminal Asset Denial Team. Investigators uncovered that illicit funds were being layered through a complex network of shell companies that operated bank accounts in Estonia and Latvia. Multiple entirely fictitious documents were produced to mask the underlying money laundering activities of those orchestrating the accounts within a significant money laundering scheme based in Azerbaijan, Estonia and Latvia.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the NCA launched a number of initiatives to protect the UK from the Russian state and state linked criminals. The Combatting Kleptocracy Cell is part of a coordinated package of measures tackling the widespread abuse of the UK's financial sectors by hostile states and corrupt elites to launder money and conceal the proceeds of crime. As of 04 January 2023, the Combatting Kleptocracy Cell has amassed 110 disruptions since the invasion of Ukraine. In addition, the National Cyber Crime Unit have been working closely with partners on the country's cyber resilience, and ability to prevent, investigate and respond to any cyberattacks/ ransomware from the Russian state and Russian organised crime groups. Meanwhile NCA Intelligence, Investigations and National Economic Crime Centre have been looking at further actions against licit and illicit funds flowing in to or through the UK.

## March



A man who ran the UK arm of a major international organised criminal network dismantled by the NCA was jailed for 21 years for orchestrating the importation of multi-million pound drug shipments. The Irish male, part of an organised crime group involved in drugs supply, firearms and money laundering acted as the figurehead of the organisation in the UK. He lived with his family in a fortified mansion, complete with reinforced doors and bulletproof glass from where he ran his criminal empire. The raid following co-operation with An Garda Síochána (as shown in image) in Ireland was part of a wider investigation to dismantle his drugs empire, with officers also targeting his associates. Investigators were able to evidence involvement in large scale drug shipments worth about £30 million at UK street value, as well as movements of cash and firearms. Two of his associates were also convicted and received 20 and 19 year sentences.



A man and woman from Nottingham were arrested for sexually abusing a child and sharing the footage online. The man was arrested by the National Crime Agency in March 2022 after it was identified he had been discussing his sexual interest in children and uploading indecent material to an online child abuse group. The offender shared a video and a number of images which he had taken himself of a young child being sexually abused. Investigators identified that it was his female partner carrying out the abuse. The child was safeguarded early on in the investigation. In February 2023, the offenders were jailed for a total of 10 years.

## April



Five individuals were collectively sentenced to 71 years' imprisonment following a complex International Corruption Unit investigation around a convicted drug dealer who continued to run his criminal enterprise from prison alongside associates who helped him fix deals on the outside and launder the profits. Working with criminal associates across the UK and within the Netherlands, the crime group is believed to have been behind at least two tonnes of Class A drugs that were imported into the UK and sold across London and the South East. The three-year investigation dismantled an established criminal enterprise which had imported tonnes of cocaine to the UK. Criminal associates helped to launder cash through bank accounts, as well as making various payments to foreign drug suppliers and their UK associates (as shown in image).



A principal member of a drugs organised crime group was jailed for 20 years for supplying £21 million worth of cocaine. Officers from the Organised Crime Partnership (a joint NCA and Metropolitan Police unit) established that the group sourced and distributed huge quantities of cocaine and handled millions of pounds in associated cash (some of it shown in image). The criminals had also supplied quantities of ketamine throughout the south east of England. Five members of the gang had previously been jailed for a total of 68 years having been caught after the takedown of the encrypted communication system EncroChat which they had used to aid their criminality.



## May



A drug smuggler who used a luxury yacht (as shown on left in image) to smuggle two tonnes of cocaine with a street value of up to £160 million into the UK was jailed for 18 years. The British man was aboard the Jamaican-flagged yacht when it was intercepted in international waters 80 miles off the coast of Plymouth in an operation led by the NCA and supported by Border Force and the Australian Federal Police. The suspect was the link between senior members of an international organised crime group and a UK criminal group that had planned to take delivery of the drugs near the English Channel.



A man who admitted raping and sexually assaulting a baby was given a life sentence of 27 years. The suspect was arrested in October 2021 after NCA investigators identified that he had uploaded a number of indecent images of children online. If ever released, he will remain on licence and on the sex offenders register for life.

## June



An Albanian national, who was responsible for arranging for Albanian migrants to board vessels in France to be smuggled to the UK, was sentenced to four years and four months' imprisonment. In total four suspects were convicted of conspiring together to breach UK immigration laws. The convictions result from a joint operation in June 2020 involving the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit (SEROUCU), NCA and French authorities where five Albanian nationals were found on board an intercepted small boat. Two other criminal associates were also located on board the vessel and were subsequently prosecuted in France.

Four gang members who trained in chemistry techniques to run one of the largest amphetamine factories ever found in the UK were convicted. Investigators identified encrypted messaging platform EncroChat was being used to run a sophisticated and well established production facility near Redditch which was assessed as producing over 500kg of amphetamine per month and earning the gang in excess of £1 million per month at wholesale prices. The NCA investigation formed part of Operation VENETIC, the UK law enforcement response to the July 2020 takedown of the EncroChat encrypted communication service. It is believed that the laboratory (as shown in image) had been fully operational for about 12 months before the NCA dismantled it.



## July



NCA officers working with Border Force seized more than half a tonne of cocaine at London Gateway port striking a huge blow to the criminal network involved in the shipment, preventing them from making millions of pounds that would have been invested in further criminality. The seizure was made from a consignment of bananas (as shown in image) that was destined for the Netherlands and had been shipped by boat to the UK from Colombia. Officers estimate the haul would have had a UK street value of more than £40 million once cut and sold.



NCA officers targeted a prolific people smuggling network, suspected of smuggling up to 10,000 people, in a joint international operation. The NCA deployed officers to Germany where more than 60 boats and 900 life jackets (as shown in image), which would have been used to transport people across the Channel, were recovered. Further boats, engines and life jackets were also found in the Netherlands, along with pumps used to inflate dinghies. In total the operation saw 135 boats, 45 outboard engines and more than 1,200 life jackets seized and 40 people arrested.



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## August



A child sex offender who targeted and blackmailed teenage girls online admitted 65 offences relating to 26 victims aged from 12 to 22-years-old. The 26-year-old suspect sought out young girls on online chat platforms where he would pretend to be a younger male and ask girls to send him a nude photo of themselves. He then used these initial pictures to make demands for increasingly graphic and depraved images. If they did not comply with his demands, he would threaten to release their images to their own friends and family via social media. In total 82 victims were identified and safeguarded, including children outside the UK. He was sentenced to a total of 18 years' imprisonment.

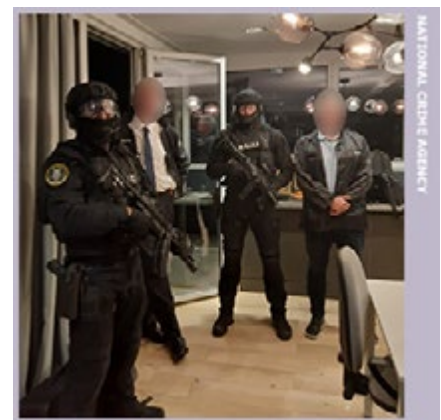
In a case at the High Court a Yorkshire man agreed to forfeit properties and money worth £1.14 million to the NCA. It was alleged that he had been involved in serious criminality since the 1990s, including the importation and supply of drugs, money laundering, fraud, and tax evasion. It was further alleged that he had links to serious and organised criminals in the UK and overseas, including in the Netherlands and Spain, using his car dealership and property development businesses to launder the proceeds of his unlawful conduct. The NCA asserted that his declared income was not sufficient to fund his property purchases and luxury lifestyle.

The NCA utilised a range of specialist capabilities to gather intelligence, and deployed armed surveillance officers who were involved in the initial arrest of Thomas Cashman for the murder of Olivia Pratt-Korbel and the attempted murder of Joseph Nee. Our officers working in the Merseyside Organised Crime Partnership – a joint unit with Merseyside Police – and were able to provide information to support the Crown Prosecution Service charging decision and his arrest when it looked like Cashman was about to leave the UK. In April 2023 Thomas Cashman was jailed for life, to serve a minimum term of 42 years.

## September



A suspected organised crime group were disrupted in Bucharest, Romania, after the NCA and Romanian police (as shown in image) searched two apartments believed to be operating as boiler-rooms for fraud. The fraudsters operated by pretending to help victims get their money back from a trading scam before defrauding them for a second time. After receiving data from the Romanian authorities, the NCA Complex Financial Crime Team launched an investigation into the group, who were believed to be carrying out fraud on a mass scale by using tactics familiar in both recovery and advance-fee fraud. Under the guise of the Financial Conduct Authority or other regulatory bodies, they pretended they would be able to help recover losses and asked the victims for an upfront fee. When victims paid, the money was swiftly transferred away into a crypto wallet and communication would cease. Over 700 potential UK victims were identified by law enforcement, with an additional 4,000 potential victims identified worldwide.



A British man who was Principal of an international school in Iraq was jailed after sending sexual messages to children in multiple countries and attempting to sexually exploit a 13-year-old boy using social media. He was arrested on his return to the UK where investigators established he had been in communication with 131 potential victims aged from 10-year-old in Indonesia, Iraq, Morocco, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Turkey amongst others. Using social media platforms the 38-year-old had told the children he was looking for a boy to sponsor. He was caught after he contacted a 13-year-old boy from Cambodia on Facebook and asked for naked photos. NCA investigators identified the offender who had arranged to pay for the boy to travel to Malaysia so they could meet.

## October



Following an increase in the number of people buying blank-firing weapons and converting them into firearms capable of lethal force, three men who bought scores of blank-firing handguns to convert into live weapons were jailed for a total of almost 14 years. The criminals who were arrested in Birmingham by West Midlands Police on behalf of the NCA had purchased about 45 legal blank-firing pistols from gun stores in the Midlands area. Each weapon (as shown in image) costing about £100 would have been worth at least £2,500 on the criminal market once converted to fire lethal ammunition. To avoid the risk of being caught purchasing illegal firearms, criminals often turn to other ways of getting their hands on weapons.



A man who attempted to import drugs from the Netherlands was convicted and sentenced to 31 months' imprisonment after Border Force intercepted a suspicious package destined for an address in Consett, County Durham. When examined the parcel was found to contain 1,925 units of the Class A drug LSD. This led to officers from the North East Regional Organised Crime Unit (NEROCU), working with the NCA and Durham Constabulary, executing a warrant at his home address in June. After arresting the suspect, officers found large amounts of Class A and B drugs, including cannabis infused sweets which can pose a significant risk to the public.

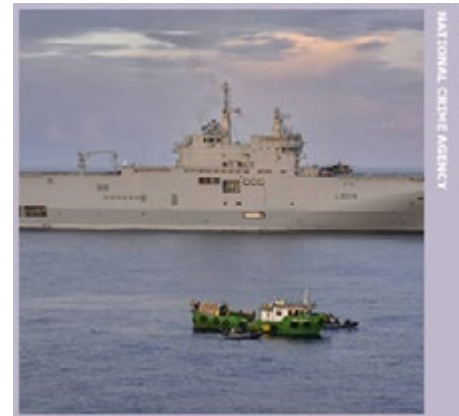
An Albanian organised crime group involved in smuggling migrants to the UK via Spain was dismantled, following a joint operation involving the NCA and Spanish Guardia Civil. Collaborative work between NCA officers based in both Spain and the UK successfully identified the ringleaders of the organisation. The network who were arrested in Spain facilitated mainly Albanian migrants through the northern cities of Bilbao and Santander into the UK using ferries and freight shipping routes to Liverpool, Portsmouth, and Southampton. The migrants were believed to have come directly from Albania to Spain for onward travel, but were also recruited from camps located around Spanish ports facilities. Each migrant is believed to have paid between 3,000 and 15,000 Euros to be smuggled. The high level and well organised criminal gang now face prosecution in Spain.

## November



The NCA obtained a ruling from the High Court allowing Barclays to hand over criminal funds to the NCA in a first-of-its-kind civil recovery case. The money, amounting to over £50 million, was identified by the bank in a number of suspect accounts and transferred to secure holding accounts. The civil recovery order means that legal powers were used to recover the proceeds of crime where the account holders were not named in the court action, while identifying and recovering funds and assets linked to criminal activity. The money will be credited to the public purse and a portion used to fund a range of work including programmes designed to prevent fraud and protect potential victims.

A huge multi-national law enforcement effort resulted in 4.6 tonnes of cocaine with a UK street value in excess of £300 million being intercepted at sea from a Brazilian tug boat travelling to Europe. The operation was the result of intelligence sharing between the NCA, US Drug Enforcement Administration and Brazilian Federal Police who have been working together to identify and combat criminal networks involved in drug trafficking between Brazil, Africa and Europe. Co-ordination by the NCA working alongside the US, French and Europol authorities through the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre (Narcotics) in Lisbon resulted in the vessel being boarded by the French Navy (as shown in image) in international waters around 400 miles off the coast of Sierra Leone. The Brazilian crew were detained and the cocaine was seized and destroyed.



The NCA worked with the Metropolitan Police Service and City of London Police in an international operation which saw the takedown of fraud website iSpooft. The site enabled criminals to appear as if they were calling from banks, tax offices and other official bodies. Confirmed losses to UK victims was £43 million, with estimated global losses in excess of £100 million. At one stage, almost 20 people every minute of the day were being contacted by scammers hiding behind false identities using the site. The operation saw the dismantling of iSpooft, and those responsible for running it were arrested. Fraudsters who paid to use its services were also targeted. The NCA provided specialist technical support, including the rebuilding of a server to identify victims and suspects. NCA officers based overseas also helped broker international support for the operation from Europol, Eurojust, Dutch Authorities and the FBI.

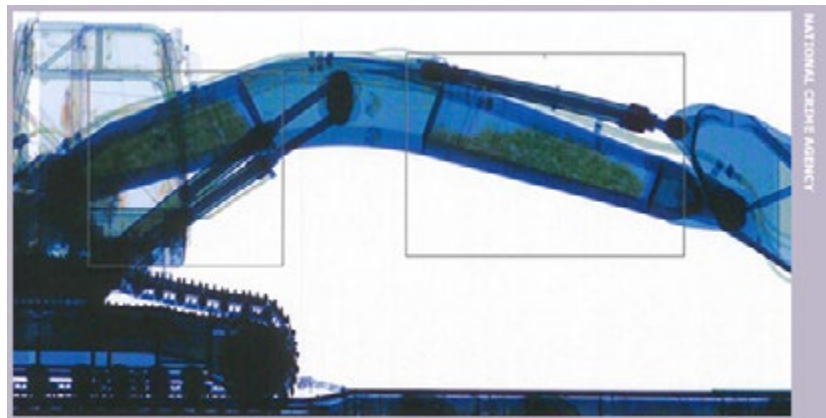
## December



A seven year NCA investigation, supported by the Crown Prosecution Service, resulted in three City fund managers being convicted of a large-scale fraud which amounted to losses of £17.8 million which were meant for the people of Libya. Investigators identified how the three defendants had abused their position to defraud a £822 million Sovereign Wealth Fund belonging to the Libyan people. The fraudsters set up an investment company, based in Knightsbridge, London, to make investments on behalf of the Libya Africa Investment Portfolio. Structured through a Swiss investment banker they generated finder fees that were under declared and laundered through a series of shell companies set up in the Seychelles and the Cayman Islands by the defendants.

Five members of a Kurdish gang who ran a sophisticated and lucrative people smuggling ring were jailed for a total of almost 24 years. The NCA investigation which began in 2017 identified that the gang trafficked migrants into the UK hidden in the back of lorries through their connections with other people smugglers overseas. They operated a sophisticated and lucrative criminal enterprise, utilising complicit lorry drivers, usually from Turkey, to facilitate Kurdish and Iranian migrants to the UK where they would claim asylum. Recordings found on one of the suspect's phone suggest that he may have been involved in the smuggling of at least 1,900 migrants from the Balkans into France or Germany during a 50-day period, charging about 1,800 Euros per migrant.

Six UK members of an organised crime group were sentenced to a combined 140 years in jail for attempting to smuggle £45 million worth of MDMA (ecstasy) into Australia. The gang in the UK and Ireland had purchased an industrial digger and cut open an arm to seal the Class A drugs inside. It was then shipped to Brisbane, where they planned for organised



crime group members based in Australia to win an auction for the digger. However, Border Force officers x-rayed the machine (as shown in image), found and removed the drugs then sealed the arm installing tracking equipment before letting it move onto the auction house. As planned, the Australian gang members won the auction and the digger was sent to them. When the drugs were missing the UK organised crime group launched their own investigation, holding meetings to find out who had 'stolen' them. When arrested two of the criminals were in possession of EncroChat devices, which revealed their illicit planning and communications which corroborated material obtained

through Operation VENETIC. Through EncroChat one of the members of the organised crime group was identified through a picture of his dog which showed a name and number on its tag.

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