

Eleven arrested linked with illegally facilitating Channel crossings

Eleven people have been arrested in relation to illegally facilitating migrant crossings of the Channel.

The joint operation took place in a number of locations this week (Tuesday 21 July) and was led by Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigations. The operation, which was conducted in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police, the National Crime Agency (NCA), Border Force and French law enforcement counterparts, was into organised immigration crime.

During the searches £150,000 cash was discovered and 2 vehicles were seized from the premises.

Those arrested are suspected of being members of an organised crime group that are enabling the facilitation of illegal migrants using small boats between France and the UK.

They were allegedly engaged in the movement of funds to support the illegal crossings and promoting the illegal entry of migrants into the UK, these arrests will significantly disrupt this activity.

Ten individuals arrested on Tuesday 21 July were taken to Wembley Police Station and released under investigation pending further enquiries. Another individual was arrested on Thursday 23 July. 12 properties were raided, 11 of which were in London and one in Sheffield.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

I will not tolerate ruthless criminals looking to break the law by smuggling people into the UK illegally. I will put whatever resource is necessary to dismantle these gangs and stop these dangerous crossings, including going after the groups financing these criminal operations.

This is a clear message to those behind these reckless crossings. We will find you and we will stop at nothing to put you behind bars and strip you of your ill-gotten gains.

Minister for Immigration Compliance and the Courts Chris Philp, who attended the raid, said:

This action shows that we have the intelligence and capability to track down anyone involved in people trafficking. Through this operation we have hit them where it hurts – their pockets.

We will stop at nothing to stop these dangerous and illegal Channel crossings and to make sure the criminals behind them are locked up and their assets are stripped.

The arrests mark the culmination of months of intelligence sharing and collaborative working between UK and French law enforcement agencies into the organised criminal gangs facilitating immigration crime.

Matthew Long, NCA Deputy Director, said:

People smuggling gangs treat migrants as a commodity to be profited from, with no thought for their safety and security. This can have tragic consequences as we've sadly seen.

Tackling this crime type and protecting life are priorities for us. We are working as one team with partners such as Immigration Enforcement, Border Force and policing. NCA officers in the UK deployed on this operation and our teams based in France also contributed. This is how we need to tackle this threat, using our international network, day in, day out.

We have a shared determination to disrupt and dismantle organised immigration crime networks, and this operation is an example of that co-operation in action. Those who profit from misery should be ready to be brought to justice.

Priti Patel met the new French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin on Sunday 12 July to discuss how the French and UK governments can do more to tackle illegally-facilitated Channel crossings by small boats. Through a Declaration of Intent, it was agreed that a Franco-British Operational Research Unit to combat migrant smuggling will be established.

The new unit will collate, centralise and analyse operational intelligence to prevent crossings from taking place and to dismantle the gangs behind them.