

French patrols doubled to tackle migrant crossings

The UK and France have agreed an enhanced action plan which will see patrols on French beaches doubled, as activity is stepped up to tackle migrants crossing the Channel in small boats.

Under an enhanced action plan, the Home Secretary, Priti Patel, and the French Interior Minister, Christophe Castaner, have agreed to redouble efforts to address the issue. The updated plan includes:

- doubling patrols and deploying new detection equipment to increase interceptions on French beaches
- action to intensify efforts to tackle criminal gangs through strengthened intelligence sharing
- engaging directly with migrants to discourage them from making the journey

Assets on the ground will be doubled to provide 24/7 cover of the beaches in northern France, ensuring more detections before boats are able to leave the shore, cutting the number of attempted crossings.

The new plan follows a meeting between the Home Secretary and the French Interior Minister on 29 August, at which they agreed tougher action was needed following the concerning rise in incidents over the summer months and agreed to draw up an enhanced plan.

The Home Secretary, Priti Patel said:

As Home Secretary, I have a duty to protect our borders and prevent the loss of life. That's why I am absolutely committed to doing everything in my power to stop these dangerous Channel crossings which are putting vulnerable lives at risk.

The plan we have agreed builds on the extensive joint work we are already doing with our French neighbours, and I am confident that it will lead to a considerable reduction in this illegal activity.

The French Interior Minister, Christophe Castaner, said:

This addendum clearly marks a new and very concrete level of commitment of the United Kingdom to tackle irregular crossings through the Channel.

Eradicating this phenomenon should allow us to save lives as well as reduce the migratory pressure in Northern France.

The enhanced plan came into force on Saturday 28 September and the ultimate goal of both Ministers is for attempts to cross the Channel in small boat to be an infrequent phenomenon by Spring 2020.

To supplement increased resources on the ground, the UK and France are going to step up intelligence gathering and sharing on criminal gangs, including through UK intelligence sources being deployed to France.

There will also be greater engagement directly with migrants, to change their behaviour and deter them from making the journey to the UK. This will be based on the successful Operation Focal, which sees UK and French authorities directly countering the misinformation put forward by criminal gangs.

Finally, action will be taken to increase returns and prevent people who have already made the journey and been returned to Europe from making the journey again, through improved capturing and sharing of data.

The boosted plan follows on from the Joint Action Plan agreed by the former Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, and Christophe Castaner in January.