

UK and France sign new agreement to tackle illegal migration

The number of officers patrolling French beaches will double as a result of a new agreement reached by the Home Secretary and her French counterpart today to tackle migrant activity in the Channel.

Home Secretary Priti Patel and French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin reaffirmed their commitment to make this route unviable. They signed an enhanced agreement which builds on the joint co-operation that has already seen the proportion of crossings intercepted and prevented rise from 41% in 2019 to 60% in recent weeks.

This increase in officer numbers represents a major uplift in capability that will significantly enhance law enforcement operations against illegal immigration, including doubling the number of gendarmes, French police, patrolling the beaches from 1 December. This will bolster the patrolling of the 150-kilometre stretch of coastline regularly targeted by people-smuggling networks and enable quicker response rates to suspicious activity, stopping migrants leaving French beaches in the first place and preventing more dangerous and unnecessary crossings.

In addition to increased officer numbers, the Home Secretary and Interior Minister also agreed an enhanced package of cutting edge surveillance technology – including drones, radar equipment, optronic binoculars and fixed cameras. The specialist equipment will allow the French to be more efficient in searching and clearing areas faster and help ensure officers are deployed in the right place at the right time, as a result increasing the number of migrants and facilitators detected and prevented from entering the water.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Today's agreement is a significant moment for our 2 countries, stepping up our joint action to tackle illegal migration. Thanks to more police patrols on French beaches and enhanced intelligence sharing between our security and law enforcement agencies, we are already seeing fewer migrants leaving French beaches.

The actions we have agreed jointly today go further, doubling the number of police officers on the ground in France, increasing surveillance and introducing new cutting edge technology, representing a further step forward in our shared mission to make channel crossings completely unviable.

On top of these new operational plans, we will introduce a new asylum system that is firm and fair, and I will bring forward new legislation next year to deliver on that commitment.

This focus on tackling criminal smuggling networks builds on collaboration between the UK and French law enforcement agencies which has already seen the creation of a new Joint Intelligence Cell (JIC). Since it opened in July, the JIC has helped secure around 140 arrests and prevent approximately 1,100 crossings.

In addition, this year Immigration Enforcement have convicted 57 individuals for people smuggling, including those convicted of facilitating small boats Channel crossings, resulting in sentencing of over 138 years. A further 46 people have been convicted of offences related to the small boat crossings. The total sentencing for small boats related convictions is over 26 years.

The package agreed at the meeting today also includes:

- steps to support migrants into appropriate accommodation in France in order to take them out of the hands of criminal gangs; and our continued support to accommodation centres where migrants can be supported and advised on claiming asylum in a safe third country
- measures to increase border security at ports in northern and western France to reduce opportunities for smuggling and ensure that we avoid the illegal migration threat shifting towards freight traffic

Both sides also agreed the importance of a continued close dialogue to reduce migratory pressures at the shared border both today and next year.

This is just one element of the plan to make this route unviable. We are fixing our broken asylum system to make it firm and fair, welcoming people by safe and legal routes and stopping the abuse of the system by people who come here from safe EU countries.

The new plan will come into force in the coming days. It will be subject to regular evaluation by the UK's Clandestine Channel Threat Commander Dan O'Mahoney and his counterpart in France.