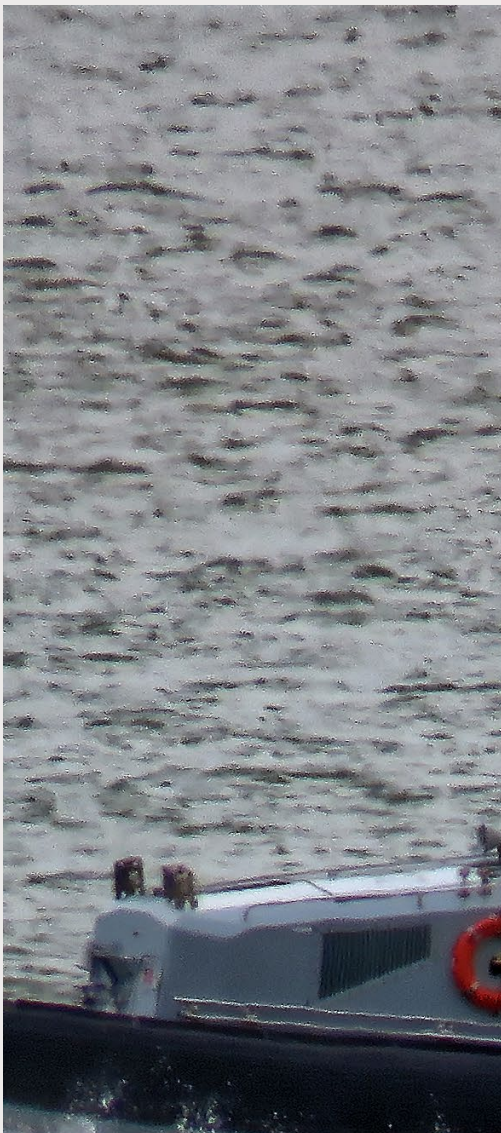


Research Briefing

6 July 2025

By Melanie Gower

Unauthorised migration: Timeline and overview of UK- French cooperation



Summary

- 1 UK spending commitments since 2014
- 2 Topical issues
- 3 Statistics
- 4 Timeline of cooperation 2014 to 2024

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Summary

There is a long history of cooperation between the UK and France over immigration controls at their shared borders. This has been formalised through a series of bilateral agreements, including the Sangatte Protocol (1991) and the Treaty of Le Touquet (2003). The latter allowed for France and the UK to carry out immigration controls in each other's territories at seaports. The Sandhurst Treaty (2018) provided a legal framework for broader cooperation on border and migration issues.

Early agreements addressed security around the Channel Tunnel and ferry terminals and preventing people crossing the border by hiding in vehicles. Since 2019 cooperation has focused on small boat crossings. [Small boats have been the predominant recorded method of irregular arrival in the UK since 2020.](#)

UK funding commitments

Under [a three-year deal made in March 2023](#), the UK agreed to provide €541 million (around £476 million at the time of the agreement) between 2023/24 and 2025/26. France agreed to make an unspecified “substantial and continuing” contribution.

In February 2025 the two countries agreed to extend the cooperation until 2027 and [to redirect over €8 million of existing funding](#) in support of some “new, stronger enforcement plans”.

There is limited official information published about how the funding attached to successive agreements is spent and monitored. France and the UK jointly assess the impact of cooperation and funding through regular strategic reviews. The government doesn't publish details of review outcomes. It says doing so could undermine border security controls and the UK-France relationship.

Topical issues

Search and rescue operations in the English Channel are carried out under safety of lives at sea protocols. French authorities don't intervene if no-one on board asks for assistance, due to a concern that a forced intervention could heighten the risk of injuries or people falling into the sea. Instead, they keep the vessel under surveillance from a distance and share its location with UK

authorities. Once the boat is in UK waters, UK authorities assume responsibility and bring the passengers to the UK.

Generally, French police don't enter the water to stop people boarding boats or intercept departures. An absence of legal powers and concerns about potential physical assaults against officers have been offered as explanations. [France is now reviewing this approach](#), with a view to giving its police more powers to intervene in shallow waters.

The UK and French Governments [are also in discussions over a potential bilateral agreement](#) which could enable the UK to return some small boat migrants to France, in exchange for admitting an equivalent number of migrants in France who have grounds to come to the UK (such as for family reunion).

There is speculation that the two governments will provide an update on cooperation at the UK-France summit over 8 to 10 July 2025.

Statistics

The [March 2023 UK-France Joint Leaders' Declaration](#) expressed an agreement to increase the interception rate of boats crossing the English Channel and "drastically reduce the number of crossings year on year".

In 2023, 36% fewer people and 46% fewer boats were detected arriving in the UK compared to 2022. The Home Office said this was largely explained by a 93% reduction in Albanian nationals arriving by small boats in 2023.

More people and boats were detected arriving in the UK in 2024 compared to 2023.

In 2025, people have been arriving by small boat at a faster rate than in previous years, with arrivals in the first six months of 2025 [48% higher than the equivalent period in 2024](#).

[Provisional Home Office figures](#) show arrivals had exceeded 20,000 people by 2 July 2025. Favourable weather and sea conditions, and an increase in the average number of people travelling in each boat (partly attributed to authorities' success in disrupting supply chains and preventing boat launches), [have been suggested as contributing factors](#).

1 UK spending commitments since 2014

Published information about how much money the UK has committed and paid to France for border security measures is not always clear. Commitments have been reported in inconsistent ways (in euros or pounds sterling, attributed to calendar or financial years, and sometimes rounded up), and published information doesn't always clearly identify who has received the funding.

1.1 Three-year funding deal, 2023/24 to 2025/26

A joint multi-year funding arrangement was agreed at the UK–France leaders' summit in March 2023. It consisted of a “substantial and continuing” French contribution, and UK funding commitments of €541 million (around £476 million) over three years.¹

Some reports suggested the French Government would spend around three to five times more than the UK.²

1.2 Total UK funding, 2014/15 to 2025/26

The table overleaf shows UK funding commitments to the French Government as set out in successive published agreements, as well as additional confirmed spending on border security measures in northern France (including payments to other recipients, such as Eurotunnel).

¹ Gov.uk, [UK–France Joint Leaders' Declaration](#), 10 March 2023

² The Independent, [“UK will give France nearly half a billion pounds in major push to solve small boats crisis”](#), 10 March 2023

Funding to support joint UK-France work to tackle small boats crossings

Annual UK investment; by currency; millions

	GBP	EUR
2014/15	£14.7	
2015/16	£46.0	
2016/17	£17.0	
2017/18	£36.0	
2018/19		€50.0
2019/20 (tranche 1)		€3.6
2019/20 (tranche 2)		€2.5
2020/21		€31.4
2021/22		€62.7
2022/23		€72.2
2023/24		€141.0
2024/25 *		€191.0
2025/26 *		€209.0

*committed funding as part of 2023 UK-France Summit multi-year deal.

Source: PQ HL 1170 [[Undocumented Migrants: English Channel](#)], answered on 12 January 2024

Breakdown of UK spending 2014/15 to 2022/23

The UK spending commitment to the French Government was slightly more than £232 million between 2014/15 and the end of financial year 2022/23, through successive published agreements:

- 2014: £12 million over three years (Joint Ministerial Declaration)
- 2015: £10 million over two years (Joint Ministerial Declaration)
- 2016: £17 million (UK–France summit Annex on migration)
- 2018: £45.5 million (Sandhurst Treaty)
- 2019: £3.25 million (Joint Action Plan)
- 2020: £28.1 million (Joint Statement)
- 2021: £54 million (Joint Statement)
- 2022: £62.2 million (Joint Statement)

Answers to parliamentary questions detail additional payments of just under £87 million during that period, some of which also appear to have been paid to the French Government.³ They referenced the following dates and amounts:

- 2014: additional £2.7 million for security improvements at Calais.

³ PQ 217553 [[Human Trafficking and Immigration: France](#)], answered on 12 February 2019; PQ HL8269 [[Asylum: English Channel](#)], answered on 2 October 2020

- 2015: an overall commitment of £45.96 million under the 2015 Joint Declaration (mostly to Eurotunnel but includes £10 million to France as detailed above).
- 2017: £36 million to strengthen the border and maintain juxtaposed controls.
- 2019: a further €2.5 million (£2.25 million) supplementing the Joint Action Plan, to support deployment of Gendarme Reservists and further strengthening of security measures.

1.3

Monitoring of spending

UK-France agreements have been criticised by some actors for lacking transparency and giving poor value for money.⁴

There is little publicly available information about how funding is spent and monitored. UK authorities have refused freedom of information requests seeking detailed information.⁵ They have cited concerns that disclosure could prejudice diplomatic relations, the detection of crime and the operation of immigration controls, or a person or public authority's commercial interests.

Joint oversight arrangements

France and the UK jointly assess the impact of UK investment made under the Sandhurst Treaty and subsequent related bilateral agreements “through maintaining operational and policy level contact and regular strategic reviews”.⁶ Recent governments have been unwilling to publish the outcomes of the reviews, reasoning that they relate to sensitive operational activities.⁷

The funding commitments and related actions identified in the declaration arising from the UK–France leaders’ summit in March 2023 are underpinned by a range of unpublished metrics. The government has said that UK and

⁴ Daily Mail, “[Ministers accused of seeking ‘gimmicks’ with ‘one in, one out’ migrants deal with France to solve small boats crisis](#)”, 26 June 2025; The Sun, “[Fury as Home Office refused to say if work has started on migrant centre in Calais for fear of upsetting French](#)”, The Sun, 3 July 2024 ; The Guardian, “[MPs, unions and refugee groups condemn Braverman’s small boats deal with France](#)”, 14 November 2022

⁵ For example, Whatdotheyknow.com, [£12 million UK-FR border security funding](#), 27 March 2018; [UK- France Migration Committee](#), 18 June 2020; [Agreement with French Government relating to migrants arriving in Dover](#), 14 April 2021; [British funding for French immigration detention centre](#), 17 August 2023

⁶ PQ 40909 [[Undocumented Migrants: English Channel](#)], 6 September 2021. See p.17-18 of this briefing for an overview of commitments made in the Sandhurst Treaty.

⁷ PQ 40909 [[Undocumented Migrants: English Channel](#)], 6 September 2021

French officials work together to continuously monitor the impact of the three-year deal.⁸

The government released some high-level information about oversight arrangements in an answer to a freedom of information request in 2021.⁹ It said a UK-France Migration Committee, comprising policy and operational officials from both countries, was responsible for overseeing cooperation between the two countries, including implementation of the Sandhurst Treaty and the 2019 joint action plan.¹⁰

It also confirmed the Home Office and French Interior Ministry had jointly signed off a review of the Sandhurst Treaty ('the Sandhurst Review') in June 2020. The purpose of the review was "to assess how the funds allocated to the Sandhurst Treaty were spent and to assess whether the funded projects had delivered on the objectives outlined in the Treaty."

Use of funds provided under the Sandhurst Treaty

In November 2023 the French authorities released information about France's use of UK funding provided under the Sandhurst Treaty, under French freedom of information laws.¹¹ It showed that most of the money had been spent on materials, specifically transport (including helicopters, cars, motorbikes, e-scooters and quad bikes) and surveillance equipment (such as binoculars, drones, dash cams and hunting cameras). Money was also used to buy equipment such as charging devices, microwaves, and car vacuums; to support a horse brigade in the Somme Bay; and to buy equipment for French police operating by the French-Italian border. Half of the spending occurred in 2023.

⁸ PQ HL 2058 [[Immigration Controls: France](#)], answered on 13 February 2024

⁹ Home Office, [FOI response 63850](#), 21 May 2021 (accessed through [Whatdotheyknow.com](#), [UK-France](#), accessed 7 November 2024)

¹⁰ See p.18 of this briefing for an overview of the joint action plan.

¹¹ Politico.eu, "[Helicopters, riding boots and vacuum cleaners: How French border force spends UK money](#)", 13 November 2023

2 Topical issues

2.1 Conduct of search and rescue operations

Search and rescue operations in the English Channel are carried out under safety of lives at sea protocols. Cooperation with France is governed by the Anglo-French Joint Maritime Contingency Plan for the English Channel, [also known as Mancheplan](#) (PDF).

French authorities carry out search and rescue operations for migrant boats in French waters. People rescued by the French authorities are returned to France. Details of specific rescue operations are confirmed in [press releases issued by France's Maritime Prefecture of the Channel and the North Sea](#).

The French authorities don't intervene if no-one on board asks for assistance, due to a concern that a forced intervention could heighten the risk of injuries or people falling into the sea.¹² If only some people on a vessel want to be rescued, they are helped to disembark and the remaining people on board are left to continue their journey.

When people don't ask for assistance, the French authorities keep the vessel under surveillance from a distance. They share information about its location with the British authorities. UK agencies (usually Border Force) provide help when the boat reaches a British search and rescue region and bring the people onboard to the UK.¹³

Agreements for Border Force to operate in French waters

In July 2024 the UK and French Governments confirmed that a UK Border Force vessel had returned a group of rescued migrants to France.¹⁴ It was believed to be the first time Border Force assisted a French search and rescue operation at the invitation of the French authorities. The UK Government confirmed the return was due to operational decision-making and didn't represent a broader change of policy.

¹² Maritime prefecture of the Channel and North Sea, press release, [Results of the Assistance and rescue operations of Sunday 11 and Monday 12 May 2025 in the Strait of Dover \(62\): 192 people rescued at sea in 24 hours](#), 12 May 2025

¹³ For example, Daily Mail, ["Moment French navy officers refuse to rescue 60 migrants from dinghy filling with water – instead demanding UK Border Force step in even though they were spotted just 1.3 miles from French coast"](#), 6 March 2025

¹⁴ BBC News, ["British vessel takes Channel migrants back to France"](#), 19 July 2024

UK media has reported the existence of a similar-sounding UK-French agreement, codenamed ‘Operation Windspire’. This has reportedly been used by Border Force on three occasions since October 2024 to enter French waters to rescue migrant boats in distress and return them to France, based on considerations such as whether there are any medical emergencies and conditions in the Channel.¹⁵

2.2

Interventions at the coastline and in shallow waters

The UK Government said in early 2025 there had been “better co-operation and use of resource” between the UK and France in recent months.¹⁶ It highlighted France’s deployment of additional reservist officers along the coastline since January 2025 and plans for an increased presence on transport routes towards the coast.

A March 2025 BBC News article described how resources provided through successive UK-French cooperation and funding agreements are deployed to prevent migrants, boats and engines coinciding: “The French have 1,200 security personnel deployable daily on coastal smuggler operations. Some 730 of them are paid for by the British. French pilots are now in the air most days, using thermal cameras to spot migrants in the dunes. Drones move rapidly over wild coastline, providing pictures back to small mobile units of officers in military-grade beach buggies. (...) The French say their teams have become more adept at reaching dinghies and destroying them in the dunes, but the migrants try to repel the police with missiles until they’ve launched”.¹⁷

There have been some reports that French police have intervened more on the beaches since the 2023 UK-France funding agreement. Migrants’ rights activists have contended that the 2023 deal has led to “more police, more violence on the beaches, and thus more of the dangerously overcrowded and chaotic embarkations in which people lose their lives”.¹⁸ The Minister for Border Security and Asylum has similarly said “more pressure is being put on the gangs, the boats are being overloaded and there is more anarchy on the beaches in France.”¹⁹

The “taxi boat” method of launching crossings shows how gangs have adapted to evade law enforcement at key departure points and take advantage of French police not entering the water (discussed below). Boats are launched from more distant departure points by a small number of

¹⁵ Daily Express, “[It’s a start! At least 60 migrants have been taken back to France by British vessels](#)”, 28 March 2025

¹⁶ Home Office news story, [New UK-French action to go after smuggler gangs](#), 28 February 2025

¹⁷ BBC News, “[Can the tide turn on the Channel migrant boat crossings?](#)” 1 March 2025

¹⁸ Alarmphone.org, [The deadly consequences of the new deal to ‘Stop the Boats’](#), 28 January 2024

¹⁹ [HC Deb 6 November 2024 c311](#)

people and then travel to collect larger groups of migrants waiting in shallow waters at agreed departure points.

Use of interception tactics

In March 2024 a joint investigation by Lighthouse Reports, the Observer, Le Monde and Der Spiegel reported that French police authorities had used “aggressive” ‘pullback’ interception tactics against small boats in French waters, including while in a patrol boat bought with UK funding.²⁰ The tactics reported included circling and ramming into boats and puncturing them while at sea. The reports cited film footage, leaked documents and witness testimonies.

Generally, French police haven’t entered the sea to stop migrants boarding boats or intercept departures. An absence of legal powers and concerns about potential physical assaults against officers have been offered as explanations.²¹

The French Government has recently agreed to change this approach so police will be authorised to act in shallow waters. France is currently carrying out a review to consider potential new operational tactics.²² The UK Government regards this as a “hugely important” development.²³

France’s Minister of the Interior, Bruno Retailleau, has also said he wants to reinstate a criminal offence of illegal residence in France.²⁴ He has suggested this would enable the police to arrest migrants and smugglers before they make a Channel crossing attempt and to use “investigative powers which will allow us to carry out identification when we have mobile phones for example, and to fight more effectively against illegal networks”.

²⁰ Lighthouse Reports, “[Sink the Boats](#)”, 23 March 2024; The Observer, “[Revealed: UK-funded French forces putting migrants’ lives at risk with small-boat tactics](#)”, 23 March 2023

²¹ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, [Small Boats, Big Business: The Industrialization of cross-Channel migrant smuggling](#), February 2024, p22 ; ITV News, “[Undeterred, unfazed, and uninterrupted: French police watch on as migrants cross Channel illegally](#)”, 12 April 2024; Sky News, “[Dozens of police officers are powerless on French beaches as people smugglers exploit loopholes to pack dinghy](#)”, 18 June 2024

²² [HC Deb 2 June 2025 c17](#)

²³ The Independent, “[We have persuaded France to change rules to stop migrants reaching Britain, Cooper says](#)”, 29 April 2025

²⁴ RFI, “[France and UK find common ground on tackling illegal Channel crossings](#)”, 28 February 2025; InfoMigrants, “[France: What is the ‘illegal residence offense’ that Bruno Retailleau wants to reinstate?](#)”, 6 March 2025

Belgium's approach

Some people have contrasted France's practices with Belgium's approach towards people smuggling and its perceived success in suppressing small boat departures.²⁵

Belgian police have authority to intercept small boats, arrest the people on board, and return them to Belgium where they have the option of claiming asylum.²⁶ They have confirmed they have intercepted boats during rescue operations but say small boat crossings from the Belgian coast have been rare because of the longer crossing and strong sea currents.²⁷

Belgian authorities have sought to prevent the country from being used as a transit point for people smuggling gangs and migrants wishing to travel to the UK.²⁸ The number of migrants detected trying to enter the UK from Belgium without permission fell by 90% between 2018 and 2022 (from slightly under 13,000 people to around 1,000).²⁹ The figures include attempted departures by small boat as well as other clandestine entry methods such as hiding in lorries and containers. Belgian authorities said legal powers to seize migrants' phones and extract data to help identify people smugglers, increased police checks, international cooperation, and stronger sentences for people smugglers had been particularly effective. There has been some speculation that some illicit activity has been diverted to France.³⁰

Belgium's UK-facing coastline is significantly shorter than France's. Belgian police regularly patrol the coastline near the French border and physical barriers have been installed to make it harder to access the beaches with a trailer and boat.³¹ As in France, Belgian police use equipment including night vision goggles, cameras, drones and beach buggies.

The UK has provided £1.3 million to Belgian law enforcement in support of disrupting small boat equipment flows and preventing boat launches from Belgium.³² More broadly, it was reported in 2022 that the UK had paid Belgium £10 million for border security and surveillance measures, including at ports where people might seek to enter the UK hidden in cross-Channel traffic.³³

²⁵ [HC Deb 5 September 2023 c234; HC Deb 11 December 2024 cc902-3](#)

²⁶ The Sun, "[No-Go Zone: Inside Belgium's zero-tolerance approach to stop small boat migrants crossings using drones, cameras and patrols](#)", 19 August 2023

²⁷ BBC News, "[Why UK can't just return migrants to France, as Reform says](#)", 20 September 2024

²⁸ The Sun, "[No-Go Zone: Inside Belgium's zero-tolerance approach to stop small boat migrants crossings using drones, cameras and patrols](#)", 19 August 2023

²⁹ The Brussels Times, "[Efforts are paying off: 90% fewer migrants try to reach UK from Belgium](#)", 23 February 2023; European Migration Network, [Annual report on migration and asylum in Belgium 2022](#) (PDF), July 2023 p.113

³⁰ InfoMigrants, "[Belgium says sharp drop in migrants headed to UK](#)", 23 February 2023

³¹ BBC News, "[We have to hit small-boat smugglers hard](#)", 11 December 2024

³² BBC News, "[We have to hit small-boat smugglers hard](#)", 11 December 2024

³³ The Telegraph, "[Britain pays Belgium £10m to help stem tide of Channel migrants](#)", 25 March 2022

2.3

Prospects for a return agreement with France or the EU

The possibility of making return agreements with France and other EU states often gets raised in commentary on the response to unauthorised Channel crossings. In recent months there has been increasing optimism about the prospects for such an agreement.

UK-France bilateral deal

In early April 2025, Bruno Retailleau, France's Minister of the Interior, publicly expressed support for a bilateral returns agreement to facilitate the return of people arriving by small boat to France.³⁴ He suggested returning even a small number of people would send a "clear message" to smugglers and prospective migrants. Until that point France had only publicly favoured an EU-wide agreement with the UK.

UK and French government officials have subsequently confirmed they are discussing a possible 'one in, one out' pilot scheme.³⁵ This would reportedly enable the UK to return some small boat migrants to France, in exchange for admitting an equivalent number of migrants in France who have grounds to come to the UK (such as for family reunion).

UK-EU deal

Media reports suggest there are hopes that a UK-France deal could serve as a precursor for an EU-wide agreement. The UK and European Commission agreed to cooperate to reduce irregular migration as part of the UK-EU 'reset' agreement made in May 2025.³⁶ The [UK-EU Common Understanding](#) issued after the summit highlighted a need to work together on "practical solutions and returns", including preventing irregular Channel crossings.

Reaching an agreement would likely be time-consuming and politically difficult for both sides.³⁷ EU member states are divided over negotiating a return agreement with the UK. In autumn 2024 France and Germany called on the European Commission to develop proposals for talks with the new UK government on asylum and migration cooperation, including a returns agreement.³⁸ They argued that the absence of EU-UK migration and border security agreements since Brexit is a pull factor which attracts irregular

³⁴ The Times, "[France open to taking back migrants as Albanians switch tactics](#)", 2 April 2025

³⁵ Financial Times, "[UK and France in talks over a migrant returns agreement](#)", 15 April 2025

³⁶ Cabinet Office, [UK-EU Summit – Common Understanding](#), 19 May 2025, paras 57 - 61

³⁷ The Telegraph, "[France and Germany want post-Brexit concessions in return for migration deal](#)", 24 September 2024; The Times, "[Why Labour is setting its sights low for an EU migrant deal](#)", 19 July 2024; the i, "[EU won't make asylum returns deal unless UK takes in thousands of migrants, source says](#)", 15 September 2023

³⁸ The Times, "[Germany and France call for EU asylum deal with UK](#)", 23 September 2024

migrants into the Schengen area. Belgium and the Netherlands have also expressed support for a UK-EU return agreement, through their membership of the Calais Group.

Some other EU states are less supportive. An internal EU discussion document leaked in December 2024 said that many EU member states would consider a returns agreement with the UK unacceptable.³⁹ Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain have raised objections to France and the UK making a bilateral agreement, partly because of concerns about how they could be affected by returns to France due to responsibility-sharing arrangements within the EU.⁴⁰

³⁹ The Telegraph, "[Leaked negotiating papers reveal EU's price for post-Brexit trade deal](#)", 13 December 2024

⁴⁰ Financial Times, "[Italy and Spain slam France over proposed migration pact with UK](#)", 27 June 2025

3

Statistics

3.1 Small boat arrivals and interception rates

The March 2023 Joint Leaders' Declaration expressed an intention to increase the interception rate of boats crossing the English Channel and "drastically reduce the number of crossings year on year".⁴¹

In 2023, fewer people and boats were detected arriving in the UK than in 2022. The number of people prevented from crossing also fell.

- 36% fewer people were detected arriving by small boats than in 2022. The Home Office said this was largely explained by a 93% reduction in Albanian nationals arriving by small boats.⁴² Arrivals of other nationalities reduced by 14% overall.
- 46% fewer boats were detected arriving in the UK without permission than in 2022, although the average number of people in each boat increased from 41 to 49.
- France prevented fewer crossing attempts than in 2022. The Home Office said that reflected the decline in the overall number of attempts.⁴³

In 2024, more people and boats were detected arriving in the UK compared to 2023 and the average number of people per boat increased. There is incomplete data on the number of people or boats intercepted by France.

- 25% more people (36,816) were detected arriving by small boat compared to 2023.
- Between January and September 2024, the number of boats arriving (479) was less than over the same period in 2023 (506), but the number of people arriving (25,244) was slightly higher compared to the first nine months of 2023 (24,830).⁴⁴
- Significantly more people and boats arrived in the last three months of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023. The Minister for Border

⁴¹ Gov.uk, [UK-France Joint leaders' Declaration](#), 10 March 2023

⁴² Home Office, Irregular migration to the UK, year ending December 2023, '[How many people were detected arriving by small boats?](#)', 29 February 2024; Gov.uk, press release, [UK and Albania working innovatively to build on migration partnership success](#), 22 May 2024

⁴³ PQ 11956 [[Undocumented Migrants: English Channel](#)], answered on 7 February 2024

⁴⁴ Home Office, Immigration system statistics, year ending September 2024, '[How many people come to the UK irregularly?](#)', 28 November 2024

Security and Asylum cited “benign weather conditions” as a significant factor.⁴⁵

- Provisional estimates supplied by France show that between May and December 2024 it intercepted 21,317 people and 694 boats.⁴⁶

Trends in 2025

People have been arriving by small boat at a faster rate in 2025 than in previous years, with arrivals in the first six months of 2025 48% higher than the equivalent period in 2024.⁴⁷

Provisional Home Office figures show arrivals had exceeded 20,000 people by 2 July 2025.⁴⁸ Favourable weather and sea conditions, and an increase in the average number of people travelling in each boat (partly attributed to authorities’ success in disrupting supply chains and preventing boat launches), have been suggested as contributing factors.⁴⁹

A Home Office [statistical note on small boat arrivals and the impact of crossing conditions](#), published in June 2025, said in the year ending April 2025 there had been a higher number of “red days” (days when the crossing conditions are favourable and crossing attempts are estimated to be “highly likely”) compared to the previous year.⁵⁰ It observed that there were more than double the number of red days (60) in January to April 2025 compared to the same period in 2024 (27), and that this coincided with small boat arrivals being 46% higher in January to April 2025 (11,074 people) than during the same period in 2024 (7,567 people). Experts at Oxford University’s Migration Observatory have expressed doubt about the importance of weather conditions as an explanation for long-term increases in small boat arrivals, suggesting that supply and demand for smugglers’ service are likely to be more influential.⁵¹

⁴⁵ [HC Deb 6 November 2024 c311](#)

⁴⁶ Home Office, Transparency data, [Migrants detected crossing the English Channel in small boats – time series](#), table SB_02. Separately, 607 boats were prevented from crossing from January to 6 October 2024 [PQ 8693, [on Undocumented Migrants: English Channel](#), answered on 22 October 2024]

⁴⁷ BBC News, “[Small boat crossings in first half of year up 48%](#)”, 1 July 2025

⁴⁸ Home Office, [Migrants detected crossing the English Channel in small boats](#), table SB_02 and Transparency data, [Small boat arrivals: last 7 days](#), updated 3 July 2025

⁴⁹ The Telegraph, “[Channel migrant crossings break second record in a week](#)”, 1 May 2025

⁵⁰ Home Office, [Small boat arrivals and the impact of crossing conditions](#), 3 June 2025

⁵¹ BBC News, “[Small boat crossings in first half of year up 48%](#)”, 1 July 2025

Figures for the number of people and boats detected arriving in the UK or prevented from departing France over the years since 2018, which draw on the official quarterly immigration statistics, are provided in the table below.

Number of small boat arrivals and French interception rates				
Year	Number of detected arrivals (people)	Number of detected arrivals (boats)	Average number of people per boat	Number of people prevented from departing or returned to France
2018	299	43	7	228
2019	1,843	164	11	1,447
2020	8,466	641	13	6,801
2021	28,526	1,034	28	23,923
2022	45,774	1,110	41	33,791
2023	29,437	602	49	Over 26,000
2024	36,816	695	53	-
2025 (Jan to March)	6,642	119	56	-

Sources: Home Office, [Irregular Migration to the UK summary tables](#), year ending March 2025, table Irr_02a; PQ 11956 [[Undocumented Migrants: English Channel](#)], answered on 7 February 2024; [Chiffres petites embarcations 2018 à 2023](#) (PDF) via [“Helicopters, riding boots and vacuum cleaners: How French border force spends UK money”](#), politico.eu, 13 November 2023

3.2 Migrant fatalities

The number of migrants recorded as dead or missing on the route from mainland Europe to the UK each year has been increasing since 2022.

According to figures collated by the International Organization for Migration, 85 people were recorded as dead or missing on the migration route from mainland Europe to the UK in 2024, with drowning recorded as the cause of death in 59 of those cases and accidental death recorded in 11 cases.⁵² This compares with 24 deaths in 2023 (15 people recorded as drowning and one accidental death) and 16 in 2022 (with five people recorded as drowning and one accidental death). As of 4 July, 19 people have been recorded as dead or missing in 2025 (including eight people recorded as drowning; four mixed or unknown causes; and three accidental deaths).

⁵² IOM Missing Migrants Project, [Data/Europe](#) (undated; accessed on 4 July 2024). Other deaths in 2024 were attributed to harsh environmental conditions or lack of adequate shelter, food or water (eight people); vehicle accident or death linked to hazardous transport (three people); sickness or lack of access to adequate healthcare (one person); mixed or unknown (two people) and violence (one person).

Some migrants' rights activists have linked the increased funding to the French authorities with an increase in migrant fatalities, contending that the 2023 deal has led to "more police, more violence on the beaches, and thus more of the dangerously overcrowded and chaotic embarkations in which people lose their lives".⁵³ The Minister for Border Security and Asylum similarly said in late 2024 the increase in loss of life that year was because "more pressure is being put on the gangs, the boats are being overloaded and there is more anarchy on the beaches in France."⁵⁴

⁵³ Alarmphone.org, [The deadly consequences of the new deal to 'Stop the Boats'](#), 28 January 2024

⁵⁴ [HC Deb 6 November 2024 c311](#)

4

Timeline of cooperation 2014 to 2024

2014

20 September 2014

UK and France issue a [Joint Ministerial Declaration on France/UK/migration](#) (PDF) detailing a “comprehensive action plan”.

It includes a UK commitment to contribute €5 million (£4 million) per year for three years (total £12 million) to a new Joint Intervention Fund, to be spent on strengthening security in the Calais port areas and ensuring effective measures to protect vulnerable people, such as victims of trafficking.

The action plan aims to:

- Reduce the number of irregular migrants, through joint or parallel information campaigns.
- Respond to health emergencies and protect vulnerable people, with a focus on victims of human trafficking.
- Strengthen port security to deter illegal crossings, preserve and promote economic activity in the region and address public order issues arising from the number of illegal migrants in Calais.
- Increase operational cooperation against people smuggling.
- Stop illegal migration into Europe, together with the EU and with source and transit countries.
- Ensure that all measures taken will deter illegal migrants from congregating in and around Calais.

The UK supplemented its contribution to the Joint Intervention Fund with a further contribution of £2.7 million for fencing and improving security in the freight zone at Calais.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ PQ HL8269 [[Asylum: English Channel](#)], answered on 2 October 2020; PQ 217553 [[Human Trafficking and Immigration: France](#)], answered on 12 February 2019

2015

20 August 2015

UK and France issue a [Joint Ministerial Declaration on UK/French cooperation on managing migratory flows in Calais](#), which sets out a “comprehensive programme of work” to address issues related to the passage of migrants through Calais.

The declaration specifies a UK contribution of €10 million (over two years) to be spent on managing migrants in Calais, including support for migrant reception facilities across France. An answer to a parliamentary question described the UK’s contribution as £10 million “towards the security reviews of the juxtaposed controls and moving migrants into reception centres across France”.⁵⁶

The declaration also commits to establishing a joint command and control centre in Calais, led by French police, with “a strong focus on developing and deploying intelligence and operations in real-time against criminal activity on both sides of the Channel”. It also commits to holding joint ministerial meetings every six months to receive formal progress reports.

The government has separately said that the total financial commitments arising from the Joint Declaration amounted to £45.96 million, the majority of which was paid to Eurotunnel.⁵⁷

2016

3 March 2016

[Annex on migration issued at the UK–France summit](#), setting out agreement on various further measures to intensify coordination in response to the migration crisis.

The UK commits to provide €22 million (£17 million) in 2016 to be spent in Calais on priority security infrastructure; moving migrants out of camps and into reception facilities across France; and joint work to return people not in need of protection to their home countries.

⁵⁶ PQ 217553 [[Human Trafficking and Immigration: France](#)], answered on 12 February 2019

⁵⁷ PQ HL8269 [[Asylum: English Channel](#)], answered on 2 October 2020

The annex sets out measures intended to scale-up joint action to address issues arising from migration pressure in the Calais region and enhance action at European and international levels.

2017

20 November 2017

UK and French defence ministers sign an [agreement to increase cooperation on countering illegal migration in the Channel](#). The agreement is described as building on existing maritime cooperation and ensuring that “both countries use the most modern technologies and share knowledge, to help identify suspicious activities and conduct maritime security operations.”

Further payment by UK to the French Government (£36 million) to strengthen the border and maintain juxtaposed controls.⁵⁸

2018

18 January 2018

UK and France sign the [Sandhurst Treaty concerning the reinforcement of cooperation for the coordinated management of their shared border](#).

The UK committed an additional €50 million (£44.5 million) for 2018 in support of the Treaty’s objectives.

The Sandhurst Treaty provides a legal framework for UK–French cooperation. Commitments in the treaty include:

- To further enhance cooperation to reduce the number of people attempting to cross the border illegally; to working together to reduce migratory pressure at the shared border; and to implementing a programme of mutually agreed specific measures to combat organised crime rings, fraud and illegal movements and to discourage illegal immigration through action in source and transit countries (Article 1).
- To facilitate access to the asylum procedures in their respective territories for people seeking protection (Article 4).
- To deploy liaison officers to facilitate operational cooperation, including transfers under the EU Dublin Regulation (Article 5).
- To establish a Joint Information and Co-ordination Centre (Centre Conjoint d’Information et de Coordination – ‘CCIC’) with responsibilities

⁵⁸ PQ 217553 [[Human Trafficking and Immigration: France](#)], answered 12 February 2019

spanning the management and prevention of threats to public order in Nord and Pas-de-Calais; acting as an operational crisis management centre in the event of acute pressure; and supporting action to counter the operations of smuggling rings, human traffickers and criminal networks in Nord and Pas-de-Calais (Article 6).

- To cooperate to increase the effectiveness of the policy of removing people with no lawful basis of stay in France (Article 7).
- To implement a joint approach to managing migration and combatting illegal migration in upstream countries (Article 8).

2019

24 January 2019

UK and France sign a '[joint action plan on illegal migration across the Channel in small boats](#)'.⁵⁹

It includes an additional €3.6 million (£3.2 million) UK contribution for new security equipment (in addition to some money from funds committed under the Sandhurst Treaty).

The action plan expresses both countries' determination to stop the emerging trend of small boat crossings, which is attributed to the success of measures previously taken to secure the ports on the French coast.

Actions identified in the joint action plan are:

- Coordinating action on land and at sea to prevent crossings.
- Funding for new security equipment – a pledge of up to €7 million, of which €3.6 million is new funding.
- Expanding a communication campaign to deter migrants from trying to cross the Channel.
- Using all lawful avenues to manage migration including transfers under the EU Dublin Regulation and returns to countries of origin.

25 January 2019

[Then Immigration Minister Caroline Noakes and the French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner visit the Joint Co-ordination and Information Centre \(CCIC\) in Calais.](#)

⁵⁹ Gov.uk, [UK and France sign action plan to tackle small boat crossings](#), 24 January 2019

9 June 2019

[Then Home Secretary Sajid Javid meets French counterpart](#) to speak about ongoing efforts to stop small boat crossings.

29 August 2019

Then Home Secretary Priti Patel meets her French counterpart to review the progress of the joint action plan agreed in January 2019.⁶⁰ They agree an [addendum to the joint action plan](#) (PDF) to “intensify joint action to tackle small boat crossings in the Channel”.

The addendum sets an “immediate objective” to halve the number of successful migrant crossings between summer 2019 and October 2019, and to continue to reduce them so that they are an “infrequent phenomenon” by spring 2020.

Further actions outlined include:

- Increasing the number of active patrols along the French coast to increase interceptions before departure.
- Deploying additional Gendarmerie Reservists (to a total of 45 officers per day providing 24/7 cover) and UK officers in a “liaison role”.
- Tackling criminal gangs through strengthened intelligence collaboration, including making “efforts to streamline the necessary permissions and protocols required”.
- Changing migrant behaviour through direct engagement and deterrence, including deploying joint debriefing teams in France.

The addendum confirms that “Any additional funding intended to meet new challenges would be subject to a new agreement and based on a robust results framework.”

The government subsequently confirms that the UK made an additional payment of €2.5 million (£2.25 million) in the financial year 2019/20 “dedicated to the deployment of Gendarme Reservists and further strengthening preventative security measures”.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Gov.uk, [Britain and France to strengthen joint action against small boats](#), 30 August 2022; Gov.uk, [French patrols doubled to tackle migrant crossings](#), 15 October 2019

⁶¹ PQ HL8269 [[Asylum: English Channel](#)], answered on 2 October 2020

2020

12 July 2020

UK and France sign a “Declaration of Intent” to establish a UK–French Operational Research Unit (Joint Intelligence Cell), staffed by British and French officers. A [Home Office news story describes the role of the Joint Intelligence Cell](#) as to “collate, centralise and analyse operational intelligence to prevent crossings from taking place and to dismantle the gangs behind them”.

28 November 2020

UK and France sign the [UK–France joint statement: next phase of collaboration on tackling illegal migration](#).

The agreement includes UK investment of €31.4 million (£28.1 million) to support France’s efforts against small boats in Boulogne and Dunkirk.

It reiterates both parties’ “absolute commitment to working together to eliminate the small boats phenomenon” and announces a new joint operational plan with the overarching aim of completely stopping small boat crossings. The plan includes:

- a “significant” increase in law enforcement deployments
- new surveillance and detection technology
- actions to support migrants into appropriate accommodation
- measures to increase border security to reduce smuggling opportunities

31 December 2020

End of Brexit transition period. [UK no longer participates in the Dublin Regulation](#) which provides a framework for transferring asylum seekers between EU member states.

[A joint political declaration accompanying the Trade and Cooperation Agreement](#) (PDF) notes the UK’s intention to engage in bilateral discussions with relevant member states “on suitable practical arrangements on asylum, family reunion for unaccompanied minors or illegal migration”.

2021

The UK Government confirms it is having discussions with several EU member states about bilateral agreements to facilitate the return of asylum seekers from the UK. It refuses to comment on specific negotiations.⁶²

20 July 2021

UK and France sign a new [UK–France joint statement: next phase of tackling illegal migration](#).⁶³

It includes a UK commitment to invest €62.7 million (£54 million) in the financial year 2021/22 “to help France expand its enforcement and technological capabilities”.

The package includes agreements about:

- Improving law enforcement deployments along the coast of France, more than doubling resources focused on addressing illegal migration, to enable patrols of wider areas of coastline and bolster hinterland surveillance.
- Deploying more wide area surveillance technology to improve coverage of the coast of France, including the use of aerial surveillance.
- Investing in infrastructure to increase border security at key border crossing points along the Channel coast.
- Investing in support facilities for migrants in France.

It also details plans for further collaboration, including a long-term plan for a ‘smart border’ using networked surveillance technology, as well as sharing covert policing expertise, capacity and capability. This will support joint intelligence work to disrupt organised criminal groups.

The statement also expresses the UK and France’s support for negotiating a UK–EU readmission agreement and enhanced cooperation with near neighbours.

9 September 2021

[The French Government criticises the UK Government’s reported interest in the use of ‘pushback’ techniques by UK Border Force staff](#) to prevent boats from entering British waters in the English Channel, as well as a reported threat by the Home Secretary to withhold funding previously committed to France unless more Channel crossing attempts are intercepted.

⁶² PQ 171668 [[Asylum: Deportation](#)], answered on 26 March 2021

⁶³ Gov.uk, [UK–France agreement strengthens efforts to tackle illegal immigration](#), 20 July 2021

25 November 2021

In the aftermath of an accident in which 27 people drowned in the English Channel, [the Prime Minister Boris Johnson writes to President Macron proposing further joint action to address Channel migration](#) (PDF). This includes securing an EU–UK “systematic” readmission agreement and in the meantime, establishing a bilateral agreement between the UK and France “to allow all illegal migrants who cross the Channel to be returned.”

The letter makes specific proposals to build on existing cooperation:

- joint or reciprocal maritime patrol operations in each other’s territorial waters
- deployment of more advanced technology
- reciprocal airborne surveillance by manned and unmanned aircraft.
- strengthened work of the Joint Intelligence Cell with better real-time intelligence sharing to make arrests and prosecutions on both sides of the Channel

[The decision to make the letter public, and the content of the UK's proposals, are criticised by representatives of the French Government](#). Reports suggest that France would prefer British immigration officers to consider UK asylum requests while stationed in France, rather than a simple readmission agreement.

France reportedly privately responds to the Prime Minister’s letter with its own proposals for a “balanced agreement” between the UK and EU.⁶⁴

28 November 2021

France withdraws the Home Secretary’s invitation to attend a meeting on migration issues and cooperation in the Channel and North Sea.

The meeting is attended by interior ministers from France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, representatives from Frontex (the EU’s external border agency) and Europol. [The joint statement issued by the attendees highlights commitments to pursue various structural and operational responses](#) and acknowledges “the need for the EU to work on these issues with the UK”.

1 December 2021

Frontex (the EU’s border and coast guard agency) provides a surveillance plane to fly over the French coastline.⁶⁵ Home Office ministers had previously told the Home Affairs Committee that there was less scope for aerial night-time surveillance in French rather than UK airspace because of French privacy

⁶⁴ BBC News, “[Channel migrants: France to propose deal with UK](#)”, 30 November 2021

⁶⁵ French Embassy in the UK, [Migrants in the Channel: a few facts](#), 22 March 2022

laws. The UK Government says France is bringing in new legislation to address the issue.⁶⁶

20 December 2021

[Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, casts doubt on a potential EU agreement of a new migration treaty with the UK](#). She suggests there is a lack of political will among member states, citing concerns about the implementation of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and Northern Ireland protocol.

2022

10 January 2022

[The Guardian reports that France intends to propose an EU-wide asylum and migration treaty](#) with the UK during its presidency of the Council of the European Union (from January 2022 to June 2022).⁶⁷ Quoting a “senior French official”, it reports that the agreement envisaged by France would provide a legal route for people to travel to the UK to claim asylum and enable the UK to return migrants to EU states.

Summer 2022

Various media outlets report that a new UK–France deal is in the pipeline.⁶⁸

27 September 2022

[The Daily Mail reports that France has pulled out of a “ground-breaking” deal with the UK](#), which was “on the cusp of being signed and sealed”. This follows comments by then Prime Minister Liz Truss about whether President Macron is “a friend or foe”.

11 November 2022

[Joint statement issued by UK and French foreign ministers following talks in Paris](#) welcomes “progress made towards a significant new UK–France agreement” and agrees to reinforce cooperation with near neighbours.

⁶⁶ Home Affairs Committee, [Channel crossings, oral evidence, HC 194](#) (PDF), November 2021, Q706; Q752-756

⁶⁷ The Guardian, [“France to push for EU-wide UK migration treaty over Channel crossings”](#), 10 January 2022

⁶⁸ For example, The Telegraph, [“Britain and France set for new £50m deal to tackle Channel migrants”](#), 7 July 2022

14 November 2022

[Joint statement on enhancing cooperation against illegal migration](#), signed by the Home Secretary and her French counterpart.

The statement includes a UK commitment to provide up to €72.2 million (around £62.2 million) in 2022 to 23.

It sets out further measures “to intensify co-operation with a view to making the small boat route unviable, save lives, dismantle organised crime groups and deter illegal migration in transit countries and further upstream.” It specifies three overarching objectives:

- To stop the expansion of illegal crossings and make the small boats route unviable, using technological and human resources dedicated to surveillance, detection and interception (‘smart border’).
- To dismantle organised crime and facilitation networks through genuine joint work (‘resilient border’).
- To prevent and deter illegal crossing attempts through joint work across a range of policy, operations and communication activities spanning as far upstream as possible (‘deterrent border’).

Specific actions to achieve “a more integrated and effective approach” include:

- Expanding the capacity of the Joint Intelligence Cell.
- Increasing French patrol officers by 40% in the next five months.
- Allowing UK officers to join French counterparts as embedded observers, “to increase joint understanding of the threat”, strengthen migrant debriefing and increase information sharing.
- Establishing a taskforce focused on reversing the rise in Albanian nationals and organised crime groups exploiting illegal migration routes.
- Introducing “More intricate operational cooperation [...] supported by joint UK–France analysis teams”.
- Investing in surveillance technology, detection dogs at ports and port security infrastructure.
- Investing in reception centres in the south of France “to deter migrants entering France [...] from moving to the Channel coast” and removal centres to support voluntary returns to countries of origin.

The statement also confirms both parties’ intention to secure a “more ambitious and comprehensive partnership”.

[Some stakeholders, including asylum advocates, Border Force unions, and some Members of Parliament, criticise the latest agreement](#) for falling short of what is needed. They call for a formal readmission agreement with France; new powers for French officers to arrest and detain intercepted migrants;

powers for UK officers in France; and additional safe and legal routes for asylum seekers wishing to come to the UK.

8 December 2022

[Joint statement on migration issues](#) released after a meeting of French, Belgian, German, Dutch and British interior and migration ministers (the ‘Calais Group’).

The statement confirms the group’s desire to work towards an EU–UK cooperation agreement on migration “in consistency with the Trade and Cooperation Agreement [...] and without prejudice to necessary discussion on EU level”. It also expresses support for a formal working arrangement between the UK and Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, which supports EU and Schengen states to manage their external borders), calling for a prompt start to discussions.⁶⁹

The group agrees to “bolster cooperation” within the existing structures and agreements, by strengthening law enforcement and border management cooperation as well as judicial cooperation, and greater exchange of information and intelligence. They intend to convene annual meetings.

14 December 2022

[Joint statement issued by the Home Secretary and her French counterpart](#), Gérald Darmanin, following an incident in the Channel earlier in the morning involving a small boat in distress, which resulted in 43 people being rescued and four confirmed fatalities.

2023

10 March 2023

[UK–France Joint Leaders’ Declaration](#) issued after the 36th UK–France summit in Paris.

The leaders reiterate support for work towards an EU–UK readmission agreement.

The declaration confirms both leaders’ commitment to reinforce bilateral cooperation to “break” the problem of human trafficking, people smuggling and illegal migration “from the Channel to the Mediterranean and beyond”. It also pledges to increase the interception rate in the Channel and “drastically reduce the number of crossings year on year”.

⁶⁹ When the UK was an EU member state it didn’t have full membership of Frontex but had observer status at board meetings and could participate in Frontex operations on a case-by-case basis.

A joint multi-year funding arrangement is agreed. It consists of a “substantial and continuing” French contribution, and UK funding commitments of €541 million (around £476 million) over three years:

- €141 million (around £124 million) for 2023–24
- €191 million (around £168 million) for 2024–25
- €209 million (around £184 million) for 2025–26⁷⁰

Media reports suggest the French Government’s contribution is three to five times more than the UK.⁷¹

UK funding will pay for 500 more officers in France and new infrastructure and surveillance equipment (including more drones, helicopters and aircraft). These will enable faster detections of attempted crossings and monitoring of a larger area of northern France.

UK money will also be used to increase France’s capacity to manage irregular migrants. This includes establishing a new immigration detention centre in Dunkirk.⁷² According to some media reports, the new detention centre isn’t expected to be operational until the end of 2026.⁷³

The declaration states that the new detention centre “will contribute significantly to improve the number of returns and prevent the recurrence of crossing attempts”. Some commentators question how much impact it will have on small boat crossings.⁷⁴ They highlight that there is already a detention centre near the Channel Tunnel entrance and that, under French law, only people under a legal obligation to leave the country, who are subject to a deportation order or who have been banned from France can be detained. There is a 90-day time limit for immigration detention in France.

The declaration says the funding commitments and related actions are underpinned by a range of agreed metrics to measure progress.

Actions highlighted in the declaration are:

- France establishing a new “zonal coordination initiative” to maximise the operational response to migratory issues in the Channel. This will coordinate all relevant French law enforcement and embed a British officer permanently on site.

⁷⁰ Online currency conversion from euro to GB pound as at 16 March 2023

⁷¹ The Independent [online], “[UK will give France nearly half a billion pounds in major push to solve small boats crisis](#)”, 10 March 2023; Financial Times [online], “[UK signs \\$41mn deal with France to curb cross-Channel migration](#)”, 10 March 2023; BBC News, “[Sunak and Macron summit: UK to give £500m to help France curb small boat crossings](#)”, 10 March 2023

⁷² BBC News, “[Sunak and Macron summit: UK to give £500m to help France curb small boat crossings](#)”, 10 March 2023

⁷³ BBC News, “[Sunak and Macron summit: UK to give £500m to help France curb small boat crossings](#)”, BBC News, 10 March 2023

⁷⁴ The Independent [online], “[UK will give France nearly half a billion pounds in major push to solve small boats crisis](#)”, 10 March 2023

- Further developing intelligence sharing, joint investigations, and cooperation to stop the organised crime groups facilitating small boat crossings. Actions include the National Crime Agency (NCA) providing training and deploying a liaison officer to France's counterpart agency.
- Co-leading a multi-state initiative "using customs powers and intelligence capabilities" to identify and disrupt supply chains for equipment used for small boat crossings and limit the availability of equipment in France.
- Developing joint upstream activities in source and transit countries to disrupt trafficking networks and address the root causes and enablers of illegal migration. This includes working with other European partners, especially via the 'Calais Group' and taking into account related EU initiatives.
- Intensifying cooperation to prevent a new route taking hold in the Indian Ocean, with an aim of establishing a joint plan of action on illegal migration in the Indian Ocean by summer 2023.

15 August 2023

UK media reports a European Commission official told the UK Government earlier in the year that the Commission was not interested in making an EU-UK readmission agreement.⁷⁵ The European Commission denies the reports.⁷⁶

8 November 2023

The [Marine Accident Investigation Branch publishes its investigation into the incident in November 2021](#) when at least 27 people died during an attempted Channel crossing.⁷⁷ It recommends the Maritime and Coastguard Agency work with French authorities to devise a tracking and identification system to limit error and confusion when sharing information about small boats attempting a crossing.⁷⁸

The following day, the Transport Secretary announces an independent non-statutory inquiry into the incident ([the Cranston Inquiry](#)).⁷⁹ It is modelled on a coroner's inquest and will investigate the circumstances of the deaths and what lessons can be learned to prevent similar incidents.

⁷⁵ The Times, "[EU rejects new deal for return of migrants](#)", 15 August 2023

⁷⁶ The Independent, "[War of words erupts over Britain's plea for post-Brexit migrant return deal](#)", 15 August 2023

⁷⁷ Marine Accident Investigation Board, [Report on the investigation into the flooding and partial sinking of an inflatable migrant boat resulting in the loss of at least 27 lives in the Dover Strait on 24 November 2021](#), Accident Investigation Report 7/2020, November 2023

⁷⁸ Marine Accident Investigation Board, [Report on the investigation into the flooding and partial sinking of an inflatable migrant boat resulting in the loss of at least 27 lives in the Dover Strait on 24 November 2021](#), Accident Investigation Report 7/2023, November 2023, p.90

⁷⁹ HC WS27 [[Channel Incident of 24 November 2021: Inquiry](#)], 9 November 2023

13 November 2023

[Information about France's use of UK funding provided under the Sandhurst Treaty](#) is released by the French authorities following a freedom of information request.⁸⁰ Analysis shows that half of the spending occurred in 2023. Most of the money was spent on materials, specifically transport (including helicopters, cars, motorbikes, e-scooters and quad bikes) and surveillance equipment (such as binoculars, drones, dash cams and hunting cameras).

2024

4 January 2024

[The Court of Accounts, France's independent auditor of public spending, publishes a report on France's policy to counter irregular migration.](#)⁸¹ It says France is having difficulty developing operational cooperation arrangements with its neighbours, including the UK. It criticises the quality of information shared by the UK authorities, such as the types of boats and engines used and suggests there is an “unbalanced” exchange of information between the two countries. The Home Office rejects the criticism, saying the report is based on outdated information and doesn't reflect current working relationships.⁸²

23 February 2024

Launch of a non-legally binding working arrangement between the UK and Frontex to enhance operational responses to illegal migration and cross-border crime. The agreement includes provisions to cooperate on information and intelligence exchange; training and capacity building; deployment of UK and Frontex staff in observation, advisory or coordination capacities; and exchange of liaison officers.⁸³

4 March 2024

[A joint ministerial statement issued after the first meeting of the Calais Group since December 2022](#) takes note of progress made against the commitments made in 2022. Actions highlighted include joint law enforcement operations, disruption of supply chain activity, cooperation to remove online content and cooperation upstream. The statement also confirms agreements to deepen

⁸⁰ Politico.eu, “[Helicopters, riding boots and vacuum cleaners: How French border force spends UK money](#)”, 13 November 2023

⁸¹ Cour des Comptes, [Policy to counter irregular migration](#), 4 January 2024

⁸² BBC News, “[French report criticises UK effort on small boats](#)”, 4 January 2024

⁸³ HCWS287 [[Working Arrangement between the United Kingdom and Frontex](#)], 23 February 2024; [DEP 2024-0212](#)

cooperation to further disrupt the criminal supply chain and migrant smuggling through operational and legislative measures.

23 March 2024

A joint investigation by Lighthouse Reports, the Observer, Le Monde and Der Spiegel reports footage, leaked documents and witness testimonies of French police using interception tactics against small boats in French waters, including while in a patrol boat bought with UK funding.⁸⁴ It alleges the use of such tactics has escalated since summer 2023.

17 July 2024

The King's Speech formally announces a Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill in the 2024-25 session. It will include measures to implement the government's manifesto commitment to establish a new Border Security Command.⁸⁵

The government says the command will be given "substantial additional resources" with "more investigators, experts and analysts to tackle organised immigration crime" with "a significant number ... based across Europe, working with Europol and European police forces."⁸⁶

18 July 2024

[The Prime Minister and President Macron issue a joint statement](#) after a meeting of the European Political Community in the UK. It says they are committed to strengthening cooperation on irregular migration and confirms the UK will host a bilateral summit with France in 2025.⁸⁷

At the broader European Political Community meeting, the Prime Minister pledges the UK's willingness to help combat organised immigration crime and people smuggling, in cooperation with Europol, Frontex and individual member states.⁸⁸

Other announcements made over the course of the summer detail government measures to 'reset' the UK's relationship with Europe, with a focus on increasing security cooperation and tackling illegal migration. Measures announced include funding for new technology such as covert cameras, additional specialist investigators for the National Crime Agency, a 50% increase in British officers stationed at Europol, and increased work in

⁸⁴ Lighthouse Reports, "[Sink the Boats](#)", 23 March 2024; The Observer, "[Revealed: UK-funded French forces putting migrants' lives at risk with small-boat tactics](#)", 23 March 2023

⁸⁵ Gov.uk, [The King's Speech 2024: background briefing notes](#), p.54-5

⁸⁶ Gov.uk, [Home Secretary launches new Border Security Command](#), 7 July 2024;

⁸⁷ Gov.uk, [Joint Statement between UK and France: 18 July 2024](#), 18 July 2024

⁸⁸ Gov.uk, [Security at the heart of the UK's reset with Europe': PM to tell world leaders as he pledges closer cooperation to dismantle European smuggling rings and bring order to British borders](#), 17 July 2024

transit countries to prevent small boat equipment reaching the French coast.⁸⁹

19 July 2024

For the first time, a Border Force vessel returns a group of migrants rescued in the Channel to France.⁹⁰ Border Force was assisting with a French search and rescue operation at the invitation of the French authorities. The Prime Minister confirms the return was due to operational decision-making and doesn't represent a broader change of policy.

15 August 2024

The [Marine Accident Investigation Branch publishes a report into the flooding of an inflatable migrant boat in December 2022](#) which happened shortly after it had crossed into UK waters and resulted in the loss of at least eight lives. The investigation is limited to the activities within the UK's search and rescue region and actions taken by the UK authorities, explaining that "the French authorities' response to the presence of inflatable migrant boats differs significantly from that of His Majesty's Coastguard and any recommendation made to the French authorities on this matter would most likely not have been implemented."⁹¹

29 August 2024

A press release issued after a further meeting between the Prime Minister and President Macron says the leaders "agreed to do more together to dismantle smuggling routes further upstream and increase intelligence sharing."⁹²

7 November 2024

At a meeting of the European Political Community, the Prime Minister calls for an intensification of international cooperation to intercept people smuggling gangs and reduce irregular migration across Europe.⁹³

10 December 2024

A statement issued by the Calais Group countries points to the success of joint investigations over the past six months which "resulted in dismantling numerous criminal networks through arrests, ... and seizures of small boat

⁸⁹ Gov.uk, [Home Secretary launches new Border Security Command](#), 7 July 2024; Gov.uk, [New Border Security Commander appointed as Prime Minister's European reset continues in Italy](#), 15 September 2024; Gov.uk, [New investment for Border Security Command](#), 17 September 2024

⁹⁰ BBC News, ["British vessel takes Channel migrants back to France"](#), 19 July 2024

⁹¹ Marine Accident Investigation Branch, [Accident Investigation Report 9/2024](#), p.1

⁹² Gov.uk, [PM meeting with President Macron of France: 29 August 2024](#), 29 August 2024

⁹³ Gov.uk, [PM: Closer international collaboration will be key to smashing the criminal gangs who profit from migration misery](#), 6 November 2024

equipment”. The group publishes a five-point [Priority Plan on Countering Migrants Smuggling for 2025](#).

27 February 2025

The Home Secretary visits Calais and Le Touquet and meets with her French counterpart, Bruno Retailleau. The ministers agree to extend cooperation until 2027 and [to redirect over €8 million of existing funding](#) in support of a series of “new, stronger enforcement plans from spring”.⁹⁴ They highlight plans:

- To establish a new specialist French intelligence and judicial police unit (Groupe d’Appui Operationnel) which will have dual powers to investigate and prosecute. The unit will be based in Dunkirk and will focus on disrupting organised immigration crime activity and the flow of small boats equipment. Over €1.3 million reallocated funds will support 12 intelligence officers.
- To mobilise a new specialist French policing unit (Compagnie de Marche), which will patrol France’s northern coast from May 2025. The UK Government says the unit will have enhanced public order powers with the ability to address violence on French beaches and conduct “more dynamic patrols of the shoreline to apprehend smugglers, intercept crossings and prevent loss of life in the channel.” It will be supported by €2.67 million of reallocated funds and increased local policing.
- To increase in the number of French reservists deployed, supported by reallocating €3,980,000.
- To train additional drone pilots and reallocate €326,500 to spend on additional funding for safety of life at sea equipment, including surveillance cameras, drones and life jackets.

The Times reports that the UK made the extension of the agreement conditional on completion of the new migrant detention centre in Dunkirk which had been agreed in March 2023.⁹⁵ It said the detention centre is expected to detain “criminals, people smugglers and individuals with no right to enter France” and that UK counterterrorism police and security agencies consider it is “critical to protecting national security.”

Bruno Retailleau also confirmed during the Home Secretary’s visit that he was seeking changes to give French law enforcement agencies more powers to intervene while migrant boats are in shallow water, and to create a criminal offence so migrants and smugglers could be arrested for illegal residence in France.

⁹⁴ Home Office news story, [New UK-French action to go after smuggler gangs](#), 28 February 2025

⁹⁵ The Times, [“UK Channel migrant deal with France extended until 2027”](#), 2 March 2025

6 March 2025

The UK's Border Security Commander, Martin Hewitt, and his French counterpart, Patrick Stefanini (France's Special Representative on Immigration), [sign an unpublished "roadmap" for a joint working group to deepen cooperation on people smuggling](#). The roadmap reportedly covers four "priority issues": disrupting the criminal gangs; deterring migrants from making illegal and dangerous journeys to France and the UK; ensuring the effective and prompt return to source and transit countries; and tackling the root causes of irregular migration.

25 March 2025

The Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration publishes a report of [an inspection of Border Force's operation to deter and detect clandestine entrants to the UK](#), carried out between August and November 2024. It highlights the possibility for successful action to prevent small boat crossings to have a 'displacement effect' on other modes of unauthorised travel to the UK (such as concealment in vehicles) and calls on the Home Office to do more to develop its understanding of the relationship between small boats and clandestine entry through juxtaposed ports.

The inspection found that the Home Office's processes and systems for capturing data and information "are poorly designed, not followed, and obsolescent", and that "At the same time, data capture and sharing by key partners, including the French authorities at the juxtaposed ports (Calais, Coquelles, and Dunkerque) and UK police forces, is at best patchy."⁹⁶

30 March to 1 April 2025

The UK [hosts an international summit on organised immigration crime](#), attended by interior ministers and representatives from 40 partner countries, including France and other European countries, and representatives from social media.

During the summit, the government announced plans to increase the capacity for UK law enforcement agencies and prosecutors to liaise with prosecutors in other countries.⁹⁷ The Times reports that the British authorities are particularly keen to strengthen relationships with French prosecutors.⁹⁸

A further Home Office news story issued after the summit announced plans for joint work with France in source and transit countries "to educate local communities on the dangers of irregular migration and people smuggling

⁹⁶ Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration, [An inspection of the Border Force operation to deter and detect clandestine entrants to the UK, August 2024 – November 2024](#) (PDF), March 2025, para 2.4

⁹⁷ Home Office news story, [UK hosts first major international summit to tackle illegal migration](#), 31 March 2025; CPS press release, [New investment supports the CPS work to crackdown on illegal immigration](#), 31 March 2025

⁹⁸ The Times, "[UK will pay foreign prosecutors to hunt down people smugglers](#)", 31 March 2025

gangs, raising awareness of the realities and difficulties with travelling to Northern France to cross the Channel to the UK.”⁹⁹

12 May 2025

The [Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill](#) completes its stages in the Commons.

The bill includes proposals for some new criminal offences which are intended to disrupt supply chains for small boat crossings and people smuggling. The offences would apply to acts done inside or outside the UK and domestic courts would have jurisdiction over offences committed outside the UK. The offences would target acts of supplying or handling almost any item to be used in connection with illegal immigration and collecting information to be used for arranging an unauthorised journey to the UK.

The bill also proposes a new offence of endangering another person during an illegal crossing in the English Channel. Members of the public bill committee queried whether the French authorities have committed to supporting investigations of potential offences committed outside UK territorial waters.¹⁰⁰

19 May 2025

The UK and EU [agree a new strategic partnership](#) at the first UK-EU summit. The agreement contains [commitments to deepen cooperation on tackling irregular migration](#), including a recognition that the European Commission and UK “should work together to prevent irregular Channel crossings.”

8 to 10 July 2025

A UK-France bilateral summit will take place during President Macron’s state visit to the UK. [Irregular migration is due to be one of key areas for discussion](#). There is speculation that the governments might confirm plans for a bilateral deal in which the UK would be able to return some Channel migrants to France in return for taking responsibility for an equivalent number of migrants who have a connection with the UK, and changes in France’s operational response to boat launches.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Home Office news story, [Landmark summit agrees new measures against organised immigration crime](#), 31 March 2025

¹⁰⁰ [BBC Deb 6 March 2025 c142](#)

¹⁰¹ The Telegraph, “[‘One in, one out’ migrant deal with France to tackle Channel crossings](#)”, 26 June 2025

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