



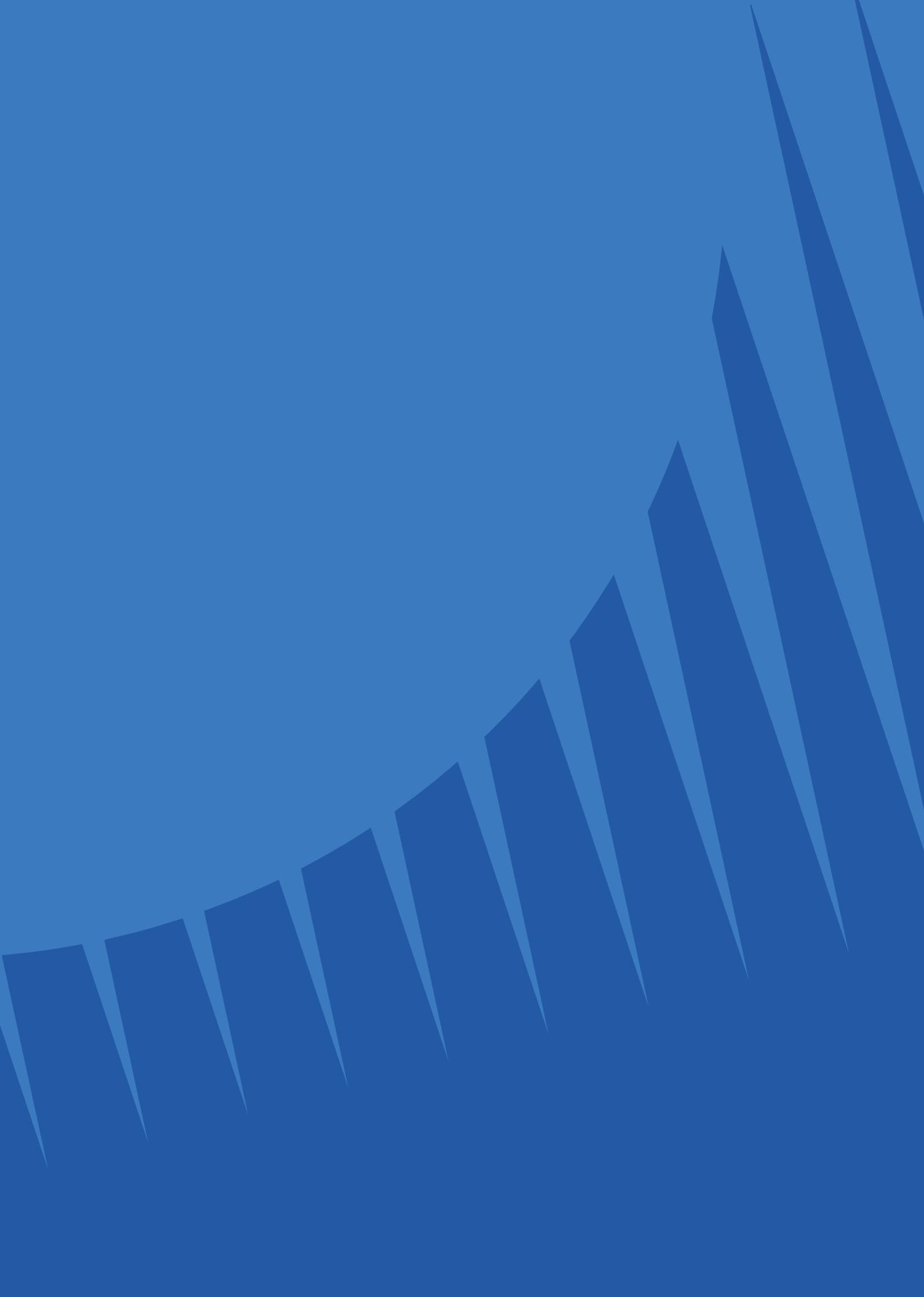
**ORGANISED  
CRIME**  
TASK FORCE

# ANNUAL REPORT & THREAT ASSESSMENT 2021/22

**Organised Crime  
in Northern Ireland**

[www.octf.gov.uk](http://www.octf.gov.uk)







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# **ANNUAL REPORT** & THREAT ASSESSMENT 2021/22

22 AUGUST 2023

## FOREWORD

### FOREWORD BY PERMANENT SECRETARY RICHARD PENGELLY

I am pleased to publish this 2021/2022 Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) report, which outlines the efforts and successes of OCTF partners and sets out the assessed threat assessment and response in relation to key organised crime types.

The work to disrupt organised crime groups, pursue criminals and bring them to justice is complex and challenging. Criminals set out to exploit and threaten hard working people, to spread misery and fear across communities and to exploit the vulnerable; they have nothing to offer society. As 2021/2022 saw a gradual decrease in the spread of the Covid-19 virus, organised crime groups continued to find ways to further their criminal activities and prey on unsuspecting victims. In response, the OCTF partners proactively assessed the ongoing and emerging threats and worked collectively to suppress organised criminality and seize the proceeds of crime.

The work of all partners represented on the OCTF is essential in delivering the aim of the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Strategy 2021-2024; to protect individuals, communities and businesses from organised crime. An update on the outcomes achieved in 2021/2022 are set out in this report, which demonstrates progress across a range of themes to reduce the harm caused by organised crime.

Organised crime groups are motivated primarily by profit and financial gain is the key driver for almost all serious, organised and acquisitive crime; it is therefore essential that we send a clear and consistent message that crime does not pay. The introduction of new powers and capabilities to recover the proceeds of crime and tackle money laundering is supporting our collective efforts to make Northern Ireland a more hostile place for those seeking to move, hide or use the proceeds of crime.



In addition to disruption activities, the ongoing recovery of criminal assets has enabled the allocation of funding through the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS), which supports initiatives aimed at preventing crime and reducing the fear of crime across local communities.

I commend the work of OCTF partners highlighted throughout this report and welcome their ongoing engagement and continued commitment to tackling all forms of criminality. I encourage everyone to note the outcomes achieved and to consider ways in which we can all support the professional teams working to help create safer communities across Northern Ireland.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Pengelly'.

**RICHARD PENGELLY CB**

**EVERYBODY'S HELP IS NEEDED  
TO COMBAT ORGANISED CRIME...**

**DON'T SUPPORT IT – REPORT IT!**

## TELEPHONE NUMBERS

PSNI

**101**

ACTION FRAUD

**0300 123 2040**

HMRC HOTLINE

**0800 788 887**

CONSUMERLINE

**0300 123 6262**

ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

**0800 807060**

MODERN SLAVERY HELPLINE

**0800 0121 700**

CRIMESTOPPERS

**0800 555 111**

**\*CrimeStoppers Northern Ireland is an independent charity that takes information about crime 100% anonymously via the freephone or by completing a secure anonymous online form.**

Professional and trained Contact Centre staff are available 24/7, 365 days a year.

Every day concerned members of the public pass on what they know about crime – providing valuable information that otherwise might never reach law enforcement were it not for the charity's cast-iron guarantee of anonymity.

That promise has been kept since the charity began over 34 years ago.



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The **OCTF Website** provides information on the structure and purpose of the Task Force. It is a source of up-to-date information, guidance and support to the public throughout the year on how to identify, report and protect individuals and businesses from organised crime.

Take a closer look at [www.octf.gov.uk](http://www.octf.gov.uk)

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# INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

### ORGANISED CRIME

Organised crime can be defined as planned and coordinated criminal behaviour, conducted by people, groups or networks working together on a continuing basis, their motivation is usually financial gain. Organised crime operates within and across jurisdictions and causes harm to individuals, communities and businesses.

Organised crime may involve violence or the threat of violence, and in Northern Ireland, some organised crime groups also have paramilitary connections. Criminality does not operate in a vacuum; criminals often bribe, coerce or prey on others to support their criminal enterprises, which can include the assistance of complicit or negligent professionals.

It takes many forms including drug trafficking, modern slavery/human trafficking, cyber crime, counterfeiting, fuel laundering, waste crime, tobacco and alcohol smuggling, fraud or money laundering and acquisitive crime.

Driven primarily by greed, with no regard for the rights, safety and welfare of citizens, organised crime is never a victimless crime and it often affects more than just the direct victim. At an individual level, multiple victims can be targeted by and be vulnerable to scams, often facilitated by technology. When people buy and use counterfeit goods this can cause serious negative consequences for their health and well-being. At a societal level, the corrosive impact that organised criminality, such as drug dealing, can have on local communities is clear. Local commerce can suffer as organised criminals operating outside the law offer lower prices that legitimate businesses cannot compete with. Organised criminality also diverts money away from investment in key public services, while the proceeds of crime are used to fund further criminality and lavish lifestyles at the expense of victims.

### ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Organised crime is not static, neither are organised crime groups. At the end of the 2021/22 financial year, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) assessed that 63 organised crime groups (OCGs) were operating in Northern Ireland. Over this reporting period a number of successful interventions, such as searches, arrests and seizures were carried out, resulting in the frustration, disruption, or dismantling of an organised crime group. Many OCGs are involved in multiple types of organised criminality, with the vast majority linked to drugs offences.

### THE ORGANISED CRIME TASK FORCE (OCTF)

The OCTF is a voluntary, multi-agency partnership, which seeks to support law-abiding citizens and enable the legitimate business community to flourish by identifying and mitigating the effects of organised crime. Established in Northern Ireland in 2000, the Task Force provides strategic leadership and supports a collaborative, joined-up response to the threat posed by organised crime through multi-agency partnership working. OCTF partners work together to identify and assess any new and emerging crime types and keep these under review as well as monitoring the groups and networks active in Northern Ireland and further afield.

The OCTF provides a forum in which expertise and information can be shared. It supports the development of operational partnerships and plays an important role in informing the public about how to protect themselves from, and report any suspicions of, organised crime.

The OCTF Strategy Group membership includes senior representation from statutory agencies and law enforcement partners to provide oversight across a number of thematic Sub Groups and oversee the delivery of strategic actions in the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Strategy 2021-2024. The OCTF Sub Groups focus on a priority assessed area of organised

criminality, including criminal finance, drugs, cyber crime, modern slavery and human trafficking, and intellectual property crime (including counterfeit goods). The coordination of the OCTF structures is supported by the Department of Justice.

A list of OCTF partner organisations and representatives on the Task Force is attached at **Appendix 1** to this report.

## THE NORTHERN IRELAND ORGANISED CRIME STRATEGY 2021-2024

The Northern Ireland Organised Crime Strategy 2021-2024 is a multi-agency strategy to help protect individuals, communities and businesses in Northern Ireland from organised crime. The Strategy came into effect on 1 April 2021 and is accessible at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/organised-crime-strategy>.

The strategic objectives are aligned to four thematic pillars of:

- **Pursue:** pursuing offenders through investigation, disruption and prosecution;
- **Prepare and Protect:** supporting individuals, communities, systems and businesses to mitigate vulnerability and impact;
- **Prevent:** deterring and diverting people from engaging and re-engaging in organised crime; and
- **Partnership:** creating a sustainable, efficient, effective and collaborative system response.

The Strategy articulates a clear common vision and identifies roles, responsibilities, priorities and accountability structures which is important both for law enforcement agencies and statutory bodies delivering the Strategy and also to demonstrate to the public the shared commitment to tackling organised criminality in all its forms.

The Strategy acknowledges interdependences and links with other work streams both at local and national level. It complements and aligns with the work being taken forward through the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC), the operational focus of the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (see **Appendix 2** for

further details) and the cross jurisdictional Joint Agency Task Force (JATF)<sup>1</sup>.

The OCTF Strategy Group, supported by the OCTF Sub Groups, oversees the implementation of strategic actions. A key action in the Strategy is the development of new organised crime offences in Northern Ireland. The Department of Justice continues to develop proposals for bespoke new legislation to strengthen the response to organised crime by creating new offences specific to serious organised crime. Following a public consultation in 2020, the Department proposes, subject to the legislative process, to bring forward draft legislation to the Northern Ireland Assembly to introduce a statutory definition of Serious Organised Crime and new offences of directing and participating in serious organised crime. This work will continue into 2023.

Another important focus of the Strategy is asset recovery. OCTF agencies can draw on powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002<sup>2</sup> to seek to recover criminal assets. Asset recovery is the means to recover wealth and property gained under fraudulent means; to prevent money laundering and prevent the reinvestment of criminal funds into further crime and harm. The seizure and confiscation of assets acquired by criminals is a powerful tool in the fight against organised crime. It is a means to both dismantle and disrupt the activity of OCGs and the individuals connected to them.

Much of the money recovered through relevant POCA powers is reinvested, either into projects aimed at benefitting communities by tackling crime and reducing the fear of crime through the local Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS), or into reinforcing law enforcement's capability to disrupt criminal activity through the pursuit of criminal assets through the Assets Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (ARIS). More information about the projects that benefited from ARCS funding in 2021/22 and how ARIS money is used to support law enforcement is set out in **Chapter 4**.

The key achievements under the Strategy during 2021/2022 are highlighted in the following infographic.

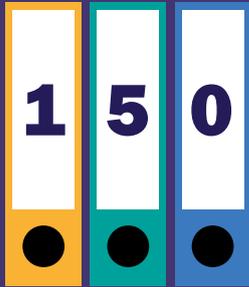
1 JATF is a cross border operational task force established following the Fresh Start Agreement in December 2015

2 POCA – Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 - [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/29/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/29/contents)



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

Improve our understanding of existing and emerging threats, including the motivation and opportunities for modern slavery and human trafficking.



Regular UK **strategic threat** assessments shared with partners



Strategic assessment of **Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking** in June 2021



**Emerging Threats Sub Group** established in June 2021



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Ensure we have effective capability, tools and legislation to tackle organised crime affecting Northern Ireland.

JUNE 2021

Commencement of the outstanding provisions of the **Criminal Finances Act 2017**



**70 Financial Investigators** attended **Proceeds Of Crime Centre awareness session** on new legislative powers



**Electronic money institutions** brought within scope of **POCA powers** through Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Continuous pursuit of those involved in organised crime.

20/21

59

14

21/22

68

29

**Frustrated** **Disrupted**

Number of **Organised Crime Groups** reported by PSNI as **frustrated** or **dismantled** in the final quarter of 2021/22

**8,594**  
PSNI drug seizure incidents

**3,137**  
PSNI drug related arrests



**Border Force drug seizures:**  
**4.45kg**  
of Class A drugs

**471kg**  
of Cannabis  
**294,000** illicit prescription tablets



10

**Account freezing orders (£0.4m)**



130

**Cash seizures (£1.4m)**



20

**Confiscation orders granted (£0.9m)**



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Work with individuals, communities and businesses to build resilience against organised crime, and to ensure a system response which is focused on victim safety and wellbeing.

Engage with public at the **Balmoral Show**, promoting public messaging on the **misuse of drugs**, impact of buying **counterfeit goods**, the benefits of good **cyber hygiene** and alerts of **cybercrimes**



477

Potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking were referred to the **National Referral Mechanism (NRM)**

Asset Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) supported **88 projects** allocating funding of around

**£610K**



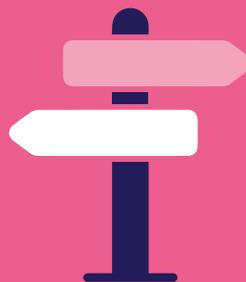
## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5:

Effective work to deter and divert people from becoming involved or re-engaging in organised crime.

**Support Hubs** are operating in all **11 council areas**



**Multi Agency Support Hubs** support vulnerable individuals who may be involved in **offending behaviour**



From April 2021 to August 2022, 8 individuals completed the treatment programme provided for under the **Substance Misuse Court project**



The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime



The **Programme** has invested £17.1m in over 80 projects to keep people **safe**, **develop community resilience** and **increase protective factors** for people at risk



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 6:

Provide an effective and efficient collaborative response to organised crime affecting Northern Ireland.



Strategic and threat-specific meetings to address **organised crime**



Regular **strategic engagement** and ongoing **operational activity** with **other jurisdictions** to tackle **serious organised crime**



**Operation Pangea**, a global, Interpol coordinated week long operation to **disrupt the illicit online supply of medicines**. NI 2022 contribution: over 242,000 illegal, unlicensed tablets and other medicinal products seized



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# KEY PARTNERS



## CHAPTER 2: KEY PARTNERS

### THE KEY OCTF STRATEGIC PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS REPORT ARE:



**The Department of Justice** (DoJ) is responsible for the resourcing, legislative and policy framework of the justice system in Northern Ireland. The DoJ is the lead department for the Organised Crime Strategy and supports the Organised Crime Task Force Strategy Group and its Sub Groups. The Department helps shape the policy context and leads on necessary legislative changes. The Department also funds the provision of analytical support to the OCTF and administers the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS). Representatives from relevant agencies are represented on the OCTF.



**Police Service of Northern Ireland** (PSNI) is responsible for keeping people safe by investigating a range of offences across the crime spectrum. As such, it is a major contributor to the work of the OCTF, including:

- **Cyber Crime** - The PSNI Cyber Crime Centre is a specialist unit to develop capability, capacity and connectivity in respect to the prevention, protection and detection of cyber crime to keep people safe in Northern Ireland.
- **Drugs** - PSNI works closely with partners to target those who import, supply and use drugs. It takes a proactive role to stop drug dealers operating within our communities.
- **Modern Slavery/Human Trafficking** - The PSNI has had a dedicated Modern Slavery/Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) in place since 2015.
- **Economic Crime** - PSNI Economic Crime Unit and Organised Crime Unit work closely to combat money laundering and to prevent organised criminals benefiting from their illegal enterprises.
- **Intellectual Property Crime** - The PSNI supports other OCTF partners to remove counterfeit goods from the market; reduce the physical harm they can cause; reduce the impact on legitimate traders; and to prevent profit being used to fund other forms of organised crime.



**The National Crime Agency (NCA)** is the UK's national law enforcement Agency operating in Northern Ireland since May 2015. The National Crime Agency's mission is to protect the public from serious and organised crime. The Agency will achieve this by disrupting the most harmful organised crime groups and leading the wider law enforcement system to reduce the threat. With the agreement of the PSNI, which retains operational primacy in Northern Ireland, designated NCA officers are able to exercise the powers of a Northern Ireland constable. NCA supports operational partners, including the PSNI, to tackle serious and organised crime impacting Northern Ireland and help protect Northern Ireland communities.



**HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)**, a non-ministerial department of the UK Government, is the UK's tax, payments and customs authority and has a vital purpose collecting the money that pays for the UK's public services and helps families and individuals with targeted financial support. HMRC helps the honest majority to get their tax right and make it hard for the dishonest minority to cheat the system.

HMRC Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) which has responsibility for civil and criminal investigations into the most serious tax evasion and fraud works closely with partner agencies locally and across international borders to draw upon and share expertise to tackle organised criminality in Northern Ireland.



**Border Force** is a law enforcement command within the Home Office. Border Force secures the UK border and promotes national prosperity by facilitating the legitimate movement of individuals and goods, whilst preventing those that would cause harm from entering the UK. This is achieved through the immigration and customs checks carried out by Border Force staff at ports and airports.



**The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)** is an Executive Agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. The Agency's primary purpose is to protect and enhance Northern Ireland's environment, and in doing so, deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth. The NIEA Enforcement Branch focuses its resources on investigating cases, which present a significant risk to the environment and public health, including waste crime.



**The Department for Communities Benefit Security Division** – The Organised Fraud Unit (OFU) within the Benefit Security Division investigates any incident of potential organised criminality against the benefits system.



**Immigration Enforcement** is a Directorate of the Home Office and is responsible for protecting the public by removing immigration offenders and prosecuting the criminals who facilitate immigration crime. Immigration Enforcement carries out operations against document fraud, sham marriages, rogue employers and illegal workers.



The Department for the Economy's **Trading Standards Service (TSS)** delivers consumer protection enforcement in Northern Ireland. TSS delivers a front-line public protection function for the benefit of consumers, businesses and the Northern Ireland economy. That function comprises the twin aims of protecting Northern Ireland consumers - particularly the most vulnerable - from illegal and unfair trading practices, and providing support and guidance for Northern Ireland businesses (particularly small businesses) so that they can deal effectively with regulation.



**The Public Prosecution Service (PPS)** – receives investigation files and determines if the Test for Prosecution is met and conducts criminal proceedings where appropriate.



**The Security Industry Authority (SIA)** is responsible for regulating the private security industry in the United Kingdom. This means the SIA licenses individuals undertaking designated activities within the private security industry and manages the voluntary Approved Contractor Scheme, which measures private security suppliers against independently assessed standards.

The SIA works closely with local and national police forces, local authority licensing partners, other enforcement agencies, security providers, buyers and venue owners to understand, identify and successfully mitigate a broad range of public protection and safeguarding risks. These include terrorism, violence (including against women and girls), drugs and spiking, serious and organised crime, modern slavery, labour exploitation, and child sexual exploitation and abuse.



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# **THREAT AND OCTF RESPONSE 2021/22**





**This chapter highlights the outputs from partner organisations and the outcomes of the strategic approach to tackling criminality in all its forms, assessing how far the work contributes to achieving the objectives of the NI Organised Crime Strategy. The summary infographic highlights some of the key achievements during 2021/22.**

The information is reported according to crime type, the case studies and operations show the benefit of partnership working between the agencies. While this chapter details the disruptive activities and successful operations, it is important to note that this work will also have positive social, environmental and economic benefits not readily quantifiable.

# RESULT HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021/22



**477<sup>#</sup>**  
**POTENTIAL VICTIMS OF MODERN SLAVERY RECOVERED**

**\*Frustrated**

Planned activity by PSNI which prevents OCGs from carrying out criminal activity, or the arrest and or instigation of criminal proceedings against one or more group member(s) (not main principal) for an offence that would normally warrant a prison sentence, or seizure of assets on one occasion.

**\*\*Disrupted**

The arrest and/or instigation of criminal proceedings against one main principal for an offence which would normally warrant a prison sentence, or the arrest and/or instigation of criminal proceedings against two or more group members (not main principal) for an offence that would normally warrant a prison sentence, or seizure of assets on two or more occasions or a substantial single seizure.

# Number of NRM referrals. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK-wide framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery.

## DRUGS SEIZURES AND ARRESTS



**8,594**

Drug seizures



**3,137**

Drug-related arrests



**4.45 kg**

Of Class A drugs



**471 kg**

Cannabis



**53.8 kg**

Cannabis

**PSNI**

**BORDER FORCE  
SEIZURES**

**NCA  
SEIZURES**

## SEIZURES OF OTHER ILLICIT GOODS BY BORDER FORCE



**16.4 million**

Cigarettes



**23,500**

Items of counterfeit  
goods



**294,000**

Illicit prescription  
drugs

## ASSET RECOVERY SUCCESSES BY PSNI

**Cash  
Seizures**

**£1.4 million**

**Account Freezing  
Orders (AFOs)**

**£0.4 million**

**Confiscation  
Orders**

**£0.9 million**

## 3.1 CYBER CRIME

### THE THREAT

The use of technology has led to improvements for individuals and organisations in the way we communicate, educate, shop, bank and keep up-to-date with the news. However, its use in facilitating criminal activity remains a prominent feature through cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent methods.

**Cyber-enabled (or online) crimes** are traditional crime types that have increased their reach and scale by exploiting technology; for example, mobile phones being targeted in 'smishing' campaigns intent on harvesting login credentials for onward sale to criminal groups.

**Cyber-dependent crime** can be defined as any crime that can only be committed using computers, networks or other information communication technology. This is frequently referred to as 'hacking'; for example, gaining unauthorised access to a computer network by way of exploiting a weak password.

**Ransomware Attack** – Most ransomware attacks involve the use of encryption, a legitimate method of encoding data so that the content is not available unless a decryption key is known. Given the strength of current encryption tools, it is not possible to break the encryption without this key. This technology has been embraced by OCGs who target vulnerable computer networks with a view to extracting sensitive data and then deploying encryption to render the victim organisation inoperable.

**Phishing emails** – Phishing emails attempt to look reputable in order to induce the recipient to click a link or download a file. While many individuals and organisations know what to look out for in such emails (for example, generic introductions, a sense of urgency, poor spelling and grammar) many still fall victim to this crime.

While the threat posed by cyber criminals to individuals and organisations in Northern Ireland is similar to that across the UK, a slight decline in reported cyber-dependent crime has been offset by a substantial rise in online crime. Financial losses are challenging to quantify due to under-reporting.

In the case of a ransomware attack, the cost to the victim organisation is not always reflected in the extortion amount sought by the criminal group behind the attack. In many cases the details of the demand are not immediately provided to the victim organisation and will only become known by interacting with the criminals; many organisations choose not to do so. Unseen costs are also associated with post incident support, rebuilding infrastructure, staff training and developing resilience. The PSNI continues to recommend that ransom demands are not paid.

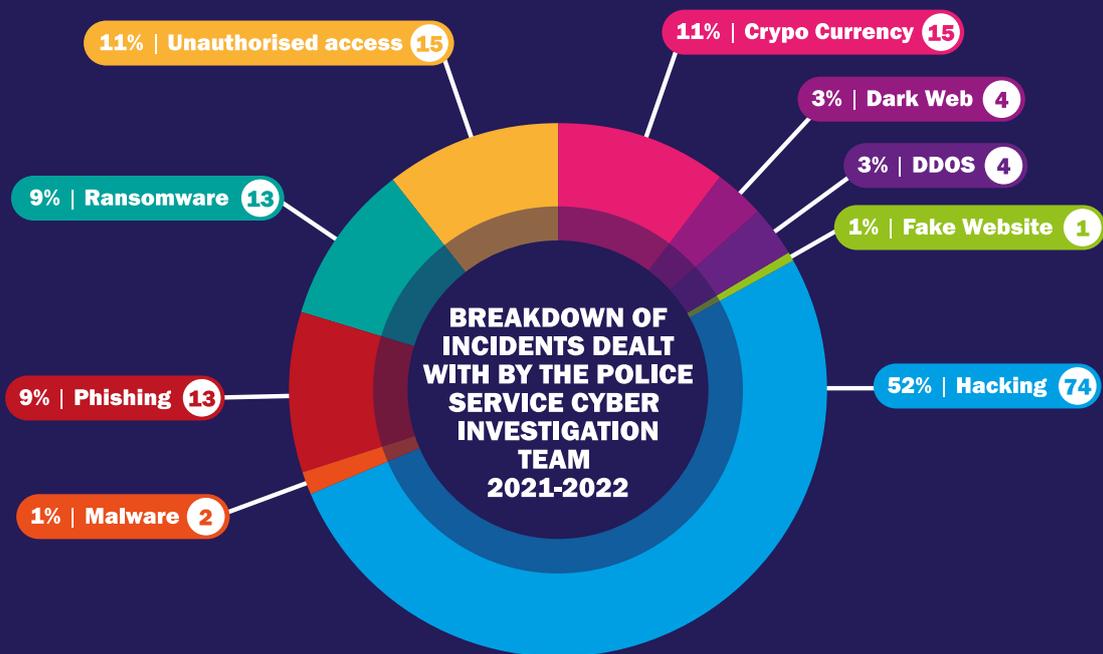
Notwithstanding a small decrease in incidents, the major impact of a ransomware attack on victim organisations has been evident in the reported crime dealt with by the investigative team embedded at the PSNI Cyber Crime Centre. Businesses are left with limited ability to operate and facing a demand for payment, often in cryptocurrency. Recent trends show that the amount demanded and payment address details are not initially known and are only provided if the organisation chooses to engage with the Organised Crime Group (OCG) behind the attack. Such OCGs will often also threaten to, or actually, publish sensitive data in order to leverage an additional payment – referred to as double extortion.

Hacking, and specifically hacking of social media or email accounts, comprises the majority of incidents reported. Loss of control of either can have serious implications for the individual and, of course, the impact cannot be understated. Whether this is in terms of financial loss or loss of intimate and private images, an individual has been affected and could have been protected by using basic security provisions such as multi-factor authentication.

The changes to how and where people work, put in place as a matter of urgency in response to the Global Covid-19 pandemic, remain vulnerable to being exploited by those intent on causing harm. Examples include exploiting remote desktop access, failing to use a Virtual Private Network (VPN), lack of multi factor authentication and weak passwords. Covid-19 contact tracing was used to deceive recipients into following links to duplicate sites designed to harvest information for sale for criminal use.

The dark web continues to offer a platform for those trading in illegal commodities. The anonymity afforded, coupled with the ability to use cryptocurrency, is a stark example of how criminal groups have embraced technology to their advantage. There has been a small increase in associated reports and it is anticipated that this trend will continue.

The motivation to commit cyber crime varies from state sponsored actors seeking to obtain sensitive information or intellectual property, to individuals who are sexually motivated seeking access to social media and the potential of private intimate images of the owner. Overall, the vast majority of incidents reported to the PSNI are driven by a financial motivation.



## RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

As part of Team Cyber UK, the PSNI maintains a specialist and dedicated Investigation Team, staffed by experienced detectives, in order to address and investigate the ongoing threat of cyber-dependent crime. The Investigation Team has a remit to lead on cyber-dependent crime, which impacts on business, government agencies, academia and, in conjunction with national partners, critical national infrastructure which may include transport networks and food supply.

The team is co-located with, and supported by PSNI digital forensic capability, to help address this complex form of criminality. PSNI, UK Police Services, the National Crime Agency (NCA) and international law enforcement partners are supporting current investigations.

This collective approach ensures that investigative opportunities are maximised in this challenging arena, which routinely have an international element.

### PSNI Cyber Prevent Programme

The PSNI Cyber Crime Centre employs one dedicated full time detective who delivers the PSNI Cyber Prevent Programme in line with the UK National Cyber Security Strategy 2022. The 2022 Strategy features the PSNI schools programme delivering educational awareness sessions on the Computer Misuse Act 1990, highlighting the consequences of offending and signposting young people to education and career pathways.

Through the Northern Ireland Cyber Skills Group, the PSNI Cyber Prevent Officer works alongside key members of industry, academia and government to deliver the Prevent message. The NCA has recently updated the Cyber Choices material that contains the key Prevent messaging and associated resources for all age groups, parents and guardians and teachers. The PSNI Cyber Prevent Officer utilises this invaluable resource to help deliver presentations to both primary and post primary pupils, as well as through contacts with local youth groups. Read more about Cyber Choices by following this link: [Cyber Choices: Helping you choose the right and legal path - National Crime Agency](#)

The Cyber Prevent Officer engages in early intervention with low-level cyber-dependent offending, achieved using non-criminal justice alternatives including the use of Cease and Desist notices to include advice and guidance on cyber ethics and behaviour online. This important aspect of the Prevent programme can divert offending at the low level and signpost young people to appropriate pathways. The PSNI Prevent Officer is an Ambassador for the Cyber First initiative run by the National Cyber Security Centre. A Cyber First Girls event was held in Belfast in 2021 aiming to encourage and support females interested in a career in cyber security.

### PSNI Regional Protect Officer

The PSNI Cyber Crime Centre employs one dedicated full time detective as the Regional Protect Officer. Working in partnership with Protect Teams based in the Regional Cyber Crime Units in England and Wales, Police Scotland and the British Transport Police, the PSNI Cyber Crime Centre forms part of the UK Police Cyber Protect Network.

As trusted partners of the National Cyber Security Centre, the Cyber Protect Network works to help protect organisations and individuals from common cyber incidents and provide post incident advice to victims of cyber-dependent crime. As part of the Cyber Protect Network, the PSNI Cyber Protect Officer works alongside the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, within the City of London Police, to provide advice to victims reporting cyber-dependent crime through Action Fraud.

In what is an ever-changing area of crime, this interaction enables a continually updated picture of how cyber crime affects communities in Northern Ireland. In 2021/2022, the hacking of social media accounts continued to be the most frequently reported cyber-dependent crime.

The Cyber Protect officer supports local organisations in their efforts to protect against the threat of cyber crime and prepare to mitigate the impact of a successful attack. This assistance can take the form of delivering public/staff awareness sessions, running cyber exercises, exhibiting at locally held events or supporting local organisations applying to join the National Cyber Security Centre Cyber Security Information Sharing Partnership (CiSP – [nccsc.gov.uk/cisp](https://nccsc.gov.uk/cisp)).

Working in partnership with bodies across the public and private sectors remains key to amplifying the cyber Protect message to organisations of all sizes across Northern Ireland.

### Examples of working in partnership during 2021/2022 include:

- Supporting Danske Bank and Ballymena Chamber of Commerce with the delivery of a cyber protect session to businesses.
- Working in partnership with Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland to create an online package for local Pharmacists covering the National Cyber Security Centre Small Business Guide.
- Supporting the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action with the delivery of cyber protect advice to local voluntary organisations and faith based groups.
- Supporting the Northern Ireland Cyber Security Centre with the delivery of cyber advice on Safer Internet Day.

## RESULTS

During the reporting period, 403 cyber-dependent crimes were reported by Northern Ireland victims to Action Fraud. This compares to 497 during 2020/2021, a reduction of around 18%. Online crime (formerly referred to as cyber-enabled crime), is highlighted by way of a specific 'flag' on the PSNI crime recording system. During the 2021/2022 financial year 6,745 crimes were 'flagged, a substantial increase on the 2020/2021 figure of 4,445 (52% increase). This was not unexpected, given the increased use of mobile phones. However, the reported figures could also have been impacted by a return to office based working as Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed and the enhanced online reporting tool.

### CASE STUDY

#### SEXUALLY MOTIVATED SOCIAL MEDIA HACKING

Cyber Crime Centre investigators joined forces with officers from the PSNI Public Protection Branch to investigate a sustained campaign of sexually motivated social media hacking. The investigation was adopted by the PSNI following initial enquiries made by Essex Police and involved further partnership working with Humberside, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, West Yorkshire and the Metropolitan Police Service. As a result, a local suspect was charged with a number of offences and was placed on remand.

### CASE STUDY

#### WORK WITH SWEDISH LAW ENFORCEMENT ON "ONLINE STRESSOR SERVICE"

The PSNI Cyber Investigation Team worked in partnership with Swedish law enforcement in relation to an "Online Stressor Service" that was owned and operated by a suspect in Northern Ireland. An "Online Stressor Service" offers access to tools that can be used to carry out Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) against computer networks. These tools are sometimes seen by young people as an attractive way to disrupt online gaming activity, effectively enabling them to "Boot" competitors from the game. However, they can also be used to target organisations and cause significant disruption to online services. The PSNI made one arrest during the period of this report and the investigation has continued.

## FORWARD LOOK

The PSNI is part of the Police Cyber Alarm, which is a free online tool aimed at helping member organisations understand and monitor malicious cyber activity.

As a STEM ambassador, (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), the PSNI Cyber Prevent Officer was involved in the roll out of Cyber Explorers, a new initiative from the National Cyber Security Centre. Cyber Explorers is a free interactive cyber security learning platform being rolled out across UK secondary schools to teach 11-14 year olds essential digital skills to meet future talent demand of the cyber security sectors. The PSNI contributed to the pilot stage and Newry is one of six areas throughout the UK taking part.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

There is a wealth of information available to help individuals or organisations take action to protect accounts, network and data. Taking some simple steps around passwords, backups, updates and crucially, 2-step authentication can help prevent the majority of cyber incidents seen across Northern Ireland.

Forward suspicious emails to  
**report@phishing.gov.uk**

Report scam websites to the NCSC by visiting;  
**www.ncsc.gov.uk/collection/phishing-scams**  
for more information.

Forward suspicious texts to **7726**.

**The following websites offer up to date advice and tools to help manage the threats:**

Cyber Aware - **www.cyberaware.gov.uk**

National Cyber Security Centre -  
**www.ncsc.gov.uk**

(Check out the NCSC Exercise in a Box, an online tool that allows organisations to find out how resilient they are to cyber-attacks and practise their response).

National Cyber Security Centre -  
**www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/  
social-media-how-to-use-it-safely**

**If you think you have been a victim of fraud, contact your bank immediately and report it to:**

Action Fraud - **www.actionfraud.police.uk**  
or **call 0300 123 2040**

You can also report any suspicious activity to:

PSNI Telephone 101

Via the PSNI website

**www.psni.police.uk/makeareport**

Crimestoppers Telephone 0800 555 111  
(anonymously)

Via **Crimestoppers-uk.org** website (anonymously)

## 3.2 DRUG CRIME

### THE THREAT

Substance misuse causes significant harm to families and communities across Northern Ireland; OCGs profit from the dependency created and the lives destroyed. The demand for illicit drugs remains high and is increasing in Northern Ireland, as evidenced by general upward trends in seizure incidents, drug-related arrests<sup>3</sup> and the proportion of people receiving support for a problem with drug misuse – the vast majority indicating daily drug use.

Cannabis routinely dominates drugs seizures within Northern Ireland. However, in terms of real harm, Opioids and Benzodiazepines are the two drug types that pose the greatest health risks to users.

The availability of cannabis edibles is increasing. These are cannabis infused food products, either homemade or produced commercially and can take various forms, including sweets, chocolate, cakes or brownies. While they may appear less harmful given their packaging and the form they are in, it is reported that the slower rate of action, when compared to smoking the drug, invokes a tendency for users to over-consume before the cannabis takes effect. It is likely that younger and less experienced users will feel negative side effects and edibles have been linked to a number of hospitalisations.

The fast parcel and postal system remains a threat for the importation of drugs into Northern Ireland with a growing number of purchases made on the open and dark web. Importations are made on a regular basis, containing small amounts of drugs in an attempt to reduce the chance of detection and any potential criminal justice consequences. Working with partners in UK Border Force and the NCA, the PSNI continues to tackle this persistent and growing issue and intercept packages of suspected drugs destined for addresses in Northern Ireland.

### RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

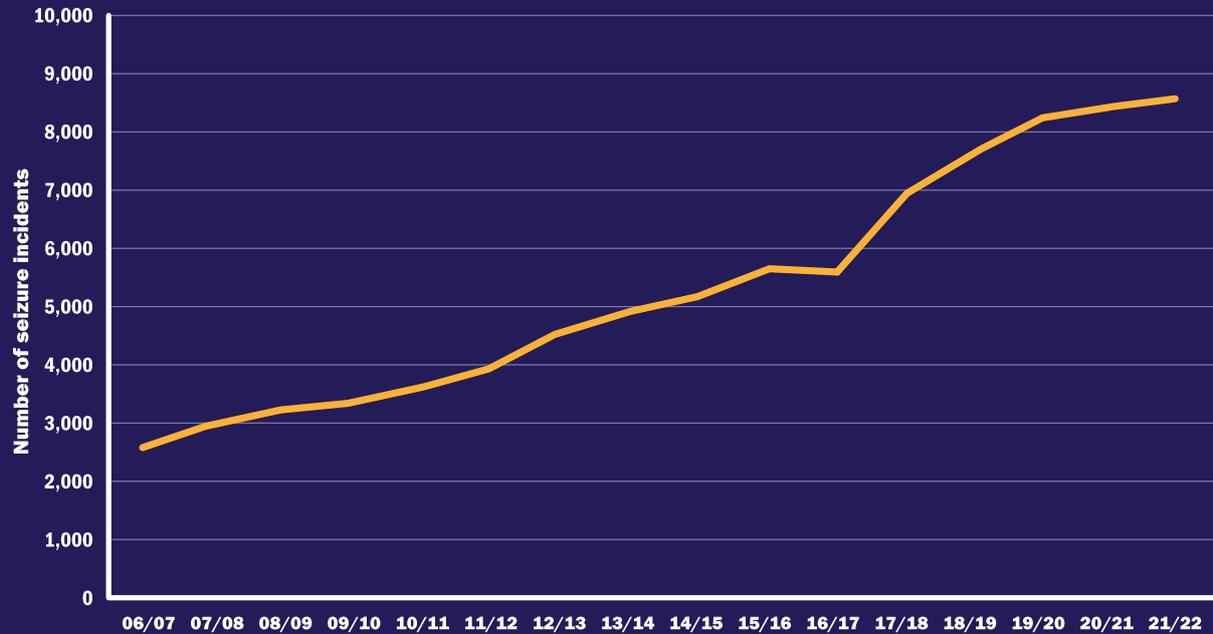
The PSNI continues to work with partners locally and regionally to assist communities to build resilience against OCGs and the harm caused by illegal drugs supply in Northern Ireland.

- Drugs Expert Witnesses have developed a presentation on cannabis by-products, which is used to educate police officers and staff, partners and the wider public on the different types of products presently in circulation and the associated dangers.
- Drugs Expert Witnesses also support the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to implement an illicit drugs protocol. Through this collaboration the PSNI aims to develop a joint policy that will address how to deal with the discovery of illegal drugs in a patient's possession, how hospital staff report such matters to police and, most importantly, address any concerns they have for their own safety as a result of making a report.
- Officers are regularly raising awareness about cannabis edibles and THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) compounds in Vapes in presentations delivered to schools.
- The PSNI continues to work with partners via the Drugs and Alcohol Monitoring and Information System (DAMIS) network to share fast time information around suspected emerging threats in respect of new drug formats, using practices and the strength of current drugs in circulation.
- A pilot scheme for Belfast City officers for the use of Naloxone was successfully completed and will be adopted as a lifesaving emergency response in the Belfast area.
- During September 2021, officers from the Organised Crime Unit attended the Balmoral Show where they represented the Police Service at the Organised Crime Task Force stand. This was an opportunity to educate the public about what actual drugs look like and provide advice on what to do if they discover drugs. In particular, cannabis edibles and vapes were discussed with parents/carers/guardians, given their growing use by adolescents and the associated health risks.

3 Police Recorded Drug Seizures and Arrests in Northern Ireland, update to 31 March 2022 (published 20 May 2022)

## RESULTS

### Trends in Drug Seizure Incidents since 2006/07



*These figures represent seizures by the PSNI only. Seizures within Northern Ireland by Border Force and the National Crime Agency (NCA) are not represented in this graph.*

The number of drug seizure incidents has increased each year since 2006/07, with the exception of a slight fall in 2016/17. The level recorded in 2021/22 (8,594 seizure incidents) is more than three times the level recorded in 2006/07 (2,590 seizure incidents) and an increase of 166 (2%) on the previous 12 month period when 8,428\* were recorded.

Belfast City Policing District regularly accounts for the largest number of drugs seizure incidents. During 2021/22, there were 2,531 drug seizure incidents in Belfast City. This is an increase of 48 (2%) on the previous 12 month period when 2,483 were recorded.

\*Figures validated as per [Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland Monthly Update \(psni.police.uk\)](https://psni.police.uk)

**Number of drug seizures<sup>4</sup> by class and drug type**

Drug class	Drug type	Drug seizure incidents		Numbers
		Apr'20-Mar'21	Apr'21-Mar'22	change
<b>Class A</b>	Cocaine	1,094	1,282	188
	Ecstasy	154	115	-39
	Heroin	172	134	-38
	LSD	21	27	6
	Methadone	22	7	-15
	Morphine	19	14	-5
	Other Class A	107	85	-22
	<b>All Class A</b>	<b>1,508</b>	<b>1,592</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Class B</b>	<i>Herbal cannabis</i>	5,316	5,464	148
	<i>Cannabis resin</i>	138	137	-1
	<i>Cannabis plants</i>	131	97	-34
	<i>Cannabis, other formats</i>	673	700	27
	<b>Total cannabis</b>	<b>5,881</b>	<b>6,010</b>	<b>129</b>
	Amphetamines	131	108	-23
	Mephedrone	7	3	-4
	Other Class B	140	210	70
<b>All Class B</b>	<b>6,058</b>	<b>6,185</b>	<b>127</b>	
<b>Class C</b>	Anabolic steroids	47	38	-9
	Benzodiazepines	1,323	1,203	-120
	Gabapentin	47	43	-4
	Pregabalin	637	803	166
	Other Class C	233	208	-25
	<b>All Class C</b>	<b>1,949</b>	<b>1,912</b>	<b>-37</b>
<b>All drugs</b>	<b>8,428</b>	<b>8,594</b>	<b>166</b>	

In addition to the PSNI drug seizure data above, other law enforcement agencies had successful drug seizures:

**ADDITIONAL SEIZURES****Border Force Seizures**

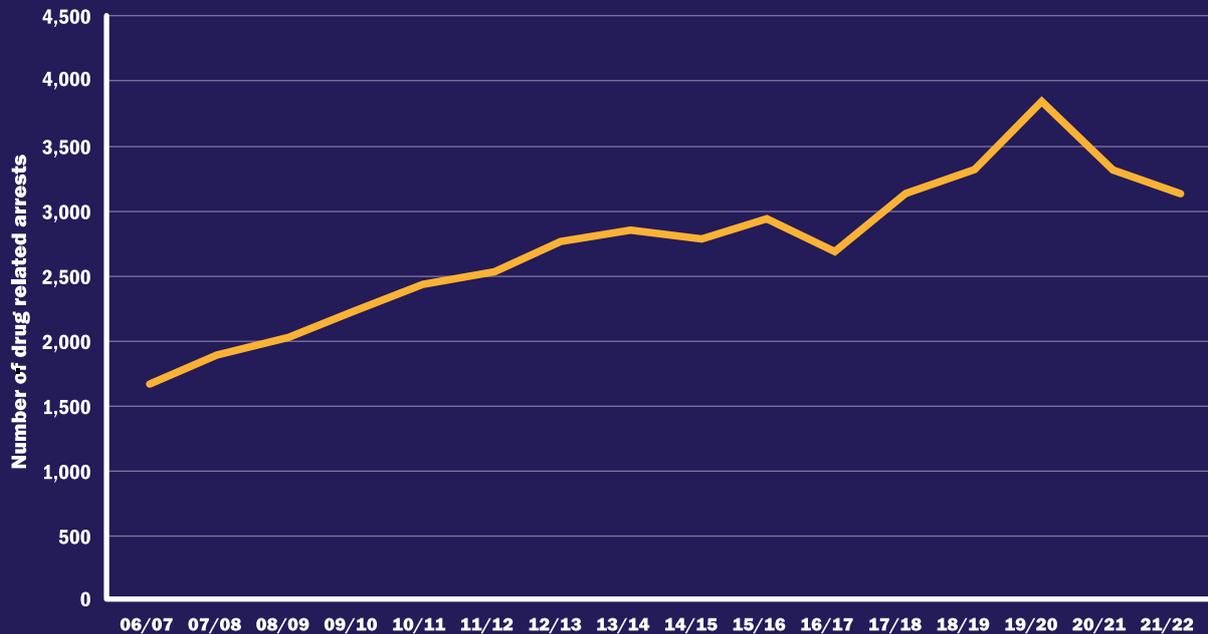
- 4.45kg of Class A drugs
- 471kg of Cannabis
- 294,000 illicit prescription tablets
- 69kg of Khat
- 38kg of Benzocaine

**National Crime Agency Seizures**

- 0.1kg of Cocaine
- 53.8kg of Cannabis
- 1 kg of Amphetamine
- 0.1kg other Class B drugs

<sup>4</sup> As each seizure incident can involve more than one class or type of drug, seizure figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals as this will sum to more than the total number of seizures.

### Trends in Drug-Related Arrests since 2006/07



From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, there were 3,137 drug-related arrests, a decrease of 188 (5.7%) when compared to the previous 12 month period when there were 3,325\* recorded. The level recorded in 2021/22 (3,137) is nearly twice that recorded in 2006/07 (1,709).

\*Figures validated as per [Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland Monthly Update \(psni.police.uk\)](https://psni.police.uk)

#### CASE STUDY

### 44KG OF CANNABIS SEIZED AT PORT OPERATION

In November 2021, as a result of a multi-agency port operation involving the PSNI and HMRC, a vehicle towing a flatbed trailer was stopped. Whilst police conducted checks with the driver of the vehicle, HMRC searched the flatbed trailer and located approximately 44kg of cannabis. It was believed to have an estimated, potential street value of £660,000. The driver was subsequently arrested for possession of Class B drugs and possession of a Class B drug with intent to supply. He was bailed until September 2022, pending forensic examinations.



Cannabis seized during a multi-agency port operation.

## CASE STUDY

**CANNABIS FACTORY  
DISCOVERED IN BELFAST**

During August 2021, police attended an address in the Stranmillis area of Belfast, where a property was discovered to contain a cannabis factory with three rooms full of cannabis plants and related paraphernalia used in the cultivation of cannabis. A man, who fled the scene, was detained a short distance away. He was arrested and later charged for extracting electricity and cultivating cannabis.



The Cannabis factory discovered in Belfast in August 2021.

## CASE STUDY

**PEOPLE CHARGED WITH  
VARIOUS OFFENCES INCLUDING  
DRUGS AND IMMIGRATION-  
RELATED OFFENCES**

In September 2021, officers from the PSNI Organised Crime Unit conducted a proactive policing operation in the South Belfast area, where they apprehended two men and a woman. On searching one of their bags, police located 6.5kg of cannabis, and recovered a further 5.5kg of cannabis from their vehicle. A subsequent house search led to the recovery of 25kg of cannabis and cannabis edibles. The drugs seized had a combined street value of approximately £444,000 and were believed to be linked to an OCG involved in the importation and distribution of controlled drugs. Following interview, the men and woman were charged for various offences including drugs and immigration-related offences.



A packet of cannabis edibles recovered during a house search in Belfast. Descriptions of the contents on the packet refer to "King Candy" and "Oreo."

## CASE STUDY

**DRUGS WORTH £300K AND CASH SEIZED IN COUNTY DOWN**

In February 2022, officers from the Organised Crime Unit seized Class B drugs with an estimated street value of £300,000. They also seized £86,000 cash following a proactive policing operation in the County Down area. Police searched three vehicles and four properties and two men were arrested. Both were charged with nine offences including possession of criminal property, possession of Class B drugs and possession of Class B drugs with intent to supply.

## CASE STUDY

**50,000 PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS FRAUDULENTLY DISPENSED**

In February 2022, officers from the Organised Crime Unit, working in collaboration with the Public Health Agency and the Medicines Regulatory Group, led an investigation, which resulted in the arrest of a person for multiple prescription frauds. Over a number of years, more than 50,000 prescription medications had been fraudulently dispensed. The person was in a position of trust in a GP practice and was creating false prescriptions before deleting them off the system when they were dispensed by a pharmacy. A woman was charged with a number of offences including possession of Class C drugs and fraud by false representation. This action sends a clear message to anyone in such positions of trust. It has also initiated learning and a review in the relevant bodies so that this type of fraud can be prevented.

## CASE STUDY

**DRUGS SEIZED IN POSTAL HUBS**

During September 2021, officers from the Organised Crime Unit, along with colleagues from Border Force, worked at a variety of postal hubs throughout Northern Ireland. The purpose of this activity was to identify and seize any drugs coming into Northern Ireland via the postal system, given an emerging trend of an increase in use of this channel for the supply chain. Results of this targeted activity included the seizure of 37.69kg of cannabis, 1,200 pregabalin tablets, 400 LSD tablets and 3,235 diazepam tablets.



Suspected drugs seized from Postal Hubs

## CASE STUDY

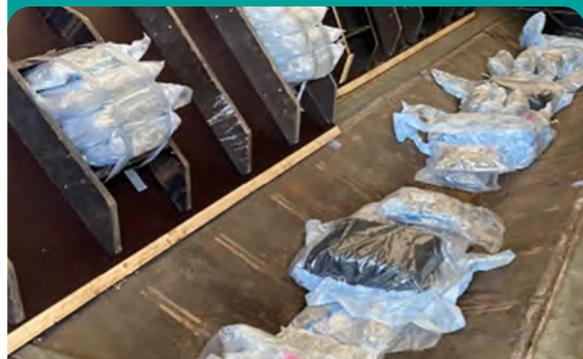
**DRUGS SEIZED AT LARNE HARBOUR**

In conjunction with HMRC, the PSNI stopped and searched an HGV at Larne Harbour while disembarking a ferry from Cairnryan. A substantial amount of drugs (30kg of Herbal Cannabis; 7kg of Cocaine; 5kg of Ketamine) was located in the cab, with an estimated combined street value of £1.25 million. A 60-year-old male was charged.

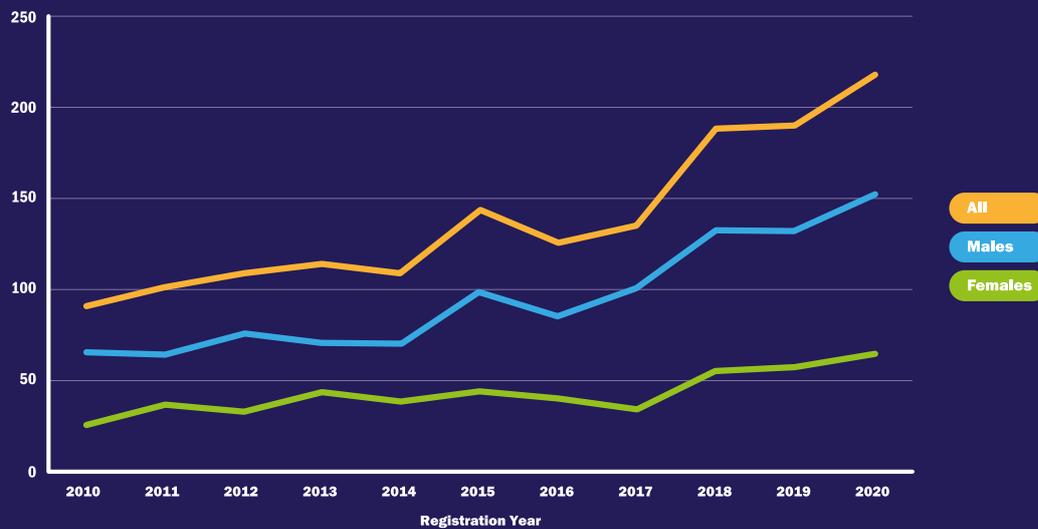
## CASE STUDY

**DRUGS SEIZED WITH STREET VALUE OF OVER £3 MILLION**

In February 2022, as a result of a joint port operation with HMRC, officers from PSNI Organised Crime Unit conducted a stop and search of a lorry at Belfast Harbour estate. Inside the trailer was a van, which, when police searched it they found boxes containing approximately 70kg of Herbal Cannabis. A further search of the rear of the van revealed two bin liners containing approximately 10kg of Cocaine. As a result of this, four further searches were conducted resulting in the seizure of drugs with an estimated street value of over £3 million – one of the biggest drugs seizures in Northern Ireland. A “hide” within the trailer was discovered by HMRC. A man and woman were arrested, with the man being charged for various drug-related offences including possession of Class A and B drugs with intent to supply and was remanded into custody before being released on court bail. The woman was released on police bail pending further enquiries.



One of the largest drug seizure incidents in Northern Ireland and how the drugs were concealed

**Figure 1: Drug-related deaths by registration year and sex, 2010-2020**

### Drug-Related Deaths

In March 2022, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) released the most up to date official figures for drug-related deaths covering the 2020 calendar year. The NISRA statistics are available at: [Drug-related and drug-misuse deaths in Northern Ireland, 2010-2020 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)

#### Key findings in the NISRA Report:

- During 2020 there were 218 drug-related deaths registered in Northern Ireland, which is the highest on record to date. This is an increase from 191 in 2019 (+14.1%) and more than double the number recorded a decade before (92).
- The graph above illustrates that males consistently account for more deaths than females. During 2020, 70.2% (153) of drug-related deaths were males.
- The 25-34 and 35-44 age groups together consistently account for the majority of drug-related deaths.
- Poly drug use, the mixing of multiple drug types, and the misuse of prescription medication, continues to be a prominent feature of many drug-related deaths in Northern Ireland. The risks from this practice are increasing, as shown by a rise in the number of drug deaths with two or more drugs cited on the death certificate.
- There is a strong link between drug deaths and deprivation, with people living in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland almost five times more likely to die from a drug-related death than in the least deprived areas.

### FORWARD LOOK

The increasing numbers of drug-related deaths highlights a growing and significant threat to public safety. The PSNI and OCTF partners proactively work at regional, national and international levels to improve the collective understanding of current and emerging threats associated with illegal drugs in Northern Ireland and to take action to limit the harm caused.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you see or suspect drug dealing in your area help stop it:

Report it to the police: 101

Via the PSNI website

[www.psni.police.uk/makeareport](http://www.psni.police.uk/makeareport)

Call CrimeStoppers anonymously on:

0800 555 111

[www.talktofrank.com/news/spiking](http://www.talktofrank.com/news/spiking)

Your local policing team is operating the 'Silent Guardian' project aimed at tackling drug dealing in your area. Find out more about how you can stop it at: [www.psni.police.uk/crime/drugs/silent-guardian/](http://www.psni.police.uk/crime/drugs/silent-guardian/)

## 3.3 ECONOMIC CRIME

### THE THREAT

Financial gain remains the principal driver of organised criminality, with OCGs seeking to generate income and benefit from the profits of a wide range of illegal enterprises. These illegal enterprises can be wholly within the criminal sphere, such as the supply of controlled drugs, or they can involve exploitation of legal markets, for example through selling illicit goods such as tobacco products, alcohol or counterfeit goods. Regardless of the illegal means by which the income is generated, criminals will seek to legitimise and mask its true source, making money laundering a key factor in almost all organised criminality.

#### Money Laundering

Money laundering is the illegal process of making usually large amounts of money, generated by criminal activity, such as drug trafficking, appear to have come from a legitimate source. The money from the criminal activity is considered 'dirty' and the process 'launders' it to make it look 'clean'. There are numerous methods for laundering money, such as the use of 'mules' which involves a person agreeing to receive money (which has come from a criminal activity) into their bank account from a third party. The money is subsequently withdrawn and transferred back to the third party, with the 'mule' account-holder, on most occasions, paid a 'fee' for the use of their account. Those involved in this type of criminality see it as 'low risk - low harm' and an easy way to obtain cash. However, the account-holder is laundering the proceeds of crime, which is a serious criminal offence, which carries a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison, if convicted.

#### Fraud

Fraud continues to pose a significant threat to individuals, businesses and the wider economy. The threat associated with fraud continues to increase, with offending increasingly enabled by the use of technology. Modern technological advances have reshaped the fraud landscape creating greater opportunities for fraudsters, while simultaneously making fraud investigation more complex and challenging due to its cross-jurisdictional aspects.

The following fraud types continue to feature heavily in the Northern Ireland fraud landscape:

- **WhatsApp Family Scam** – victims are contacted via a WhatsApp message from someone claiming to be a family member texting from a new mobile number before requesting money for an emergency. Tens of thousands of pounds have been lost to this scam to date.
- **Telephone & Email Fraud** – These are cyclical problems that appear to affect those most vulnerable in society, in particular the elderly. The victim receives unsolicited contact from a person purporting to be from an official organisation, for example HMRC. The victim is frightened, believing that they owe the named organisation money and if it is not paid urgently, they will be subject to arrest. The victim normally pays the fraudster using iTunes vouchers; again, this relies on the lack of awareness by the victim. Recent variations of this fraud have seen elderly individuals contacted by someone claiming to be a police officer who persuades them to leave cash or valuable jewellery outside their home, which is then stolen.
- **Bank Security Department Frauds** – The victim is contacted by a fraudster pretending to be their bank or a police officer investigating bank employees. They may provide information about the account, which tricks the victim into believing they are actually speaking to their bank. The victim is told that they are the victim of fraud and need to move their money to a 'safe account' quickly, but this account is actually a mule account controlled by the fraudster.

- **Sextortion** – these scams are a type of phishing attack whereby people are coerced into paying a ransom, usually by means of a virtual currency, because they have been threatened with sharing a video or photographs of themselves visiting adult websites or engaging in a sexual act. Many of the offenders involved in these offences are located overseas, which causes barriers to investigations.
- **Invoice Redirection** – this traditionally involves contact to a victim via email from a trusted source asking for payment to be made to a new bank account. This type of fraud is affecting all sectors of business. The email can appear to be spoofed from a trusted source or may involve the trusted source having their email system compromised. The money is then disbursed via a series of ‘mule’ accounts, typically located in another police force area to hinder investigation.
- **Investment and Pension Fraud** – the threat posed by investment scammers continues to grow across the UK, with the most commonly reported scams involving opportunities for victims to invest in shares, bonds or cryptocurrencies. Scammers traditionally make unexpected contact with the victim and use tactics such as time pressure, fake social proof and outline unrealistic returns to encouraging victims to transfer funds.

## RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

### New powers to assist with the recovery of proceeds of crime

A significant development in relation to financial investigations is the availability of new asset recovery powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002, (including Unexplained Wealth Orders, Account Freezing and Forfeiture provisions and Listed Assets Forfeiture provisions), which came into operation in Northern Ireland on 28 June 2021 following full commencement of the Criminal Finances Act 2017.

Law enforcement agencies in Northern Ireland now have the same asset recovery powers as colleagues in other parts of the UK to recover the proceeds of crime and deny criminals the opportunity to accumulate assets acquired with the proceeds of crime.

## RESULTS

### CASE STUDY

#### ELDERLY PEOPLE TARGETED BY CRIMINALS POSING AS POLICE OFFICERS - A NUMBER OF SUSPECTS ARRESTED

PSNI Economic Crime Unit (ECU) investigated a series of crimes from January 2020 to May 2021. There were over 300 incidents reported to police, mainly from elderly people, where the suspect said they were a police officer, or someone assisting police. The suspect engaged with the victim, to elicit information such as family members' names and persuaded the victim to either:

- Go to their local bank and withdraw cash (usually between £1,500 - £2,000) stating that a police officer will call to collect/check; or
- Leave their bank cards with the PIN numbers, cash and/or jewellery, outside their house for safekeeping or to be examined.

The suspect would keep the victim talking on the phone when they visited the bank or whilst the bank card /PIN numbers, cash and jewellery were being collected. The bank cards would then be used to withdraw cash from various ATMs.

40 victims lost a total of approximately £190,000 cash plus approximately £15,000 worth of jewellery. The crime series culminated in May 2021 with the arrest of a number of suspects.

During the reporting period, there were:

- 58 charges linked to this series;
- 25 offences in this series reported to the PPS;
- 16 premises searches;
- 16 suspects arrested;
- 11 suspects charged;
- 4 suspects reported to Public Prosecution Service (PPS);
- 2 individuals released unconditionally; and
- 1 Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (PACE)<sup>5</sup> interview.

5 PACE – Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1989/1341/contents>

## CASE STUDY

### ART INVESTMENT FRAUD

In November 2021, the residential property of a 60 year old male was searched by virtue of warrants obtained under PACE and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA). As a result, a number of electronic devices and documents were seized. This police activity related to a 'money mule' investigation concerning an art investment fraud targeting the elderly. The modus operandi appeared to be that the victim would receive a cold call from the suspected fraudster (not believed to be within the Northern Ireland jurisdiction), following which they were convinced to invest in pieces of art. The total value of the loss to date up to the end of the reporting period due this criminality is estimated to be in the region of £485,240.

## CASE STUDY

### FORFEITURES

In February 2018, a search and arrest operation took place as part of an ongoing police operation into tackling organised crime and associated drugs criminality. A 34-year-old male was arrested in the Larne area under drugs and money laundering offences. Following his arrest, properties linked to him were searched under Article 10 PACE and Section 23 Misuse of Drugs Act and, as a result, various quantities of cash were recovered. These were seized by ECU under the POCA and a detained cash investigation commenced. A total of £67,335 was seized. In May 2021, a Forfeiture Order was granted in favour of police in respect of this entire amount.

## CASE STUDIES

### CONVICTIONS

- In June 2021, a 42-year-old female pleaded guilty to fraud and money laundering offences. She was sentenced to a 12 month suspended sentence for her part in a sophisticated romance scam in which a male in England met a female on a dating App. Over time, she convinced him to send her over £33,000. This only stopped when the bank became involved. The victim was convinced he was talking to a genuine female who needed help to return from Australia. The female acted as the 'money mule' in this incident allowing others to use her bank account to receive the fraudulent funds. Without her participation, the fraud could not have been carried out.
- In November 2021, a 47-year-old female was sentenced for a number of fraud, forgery and money laundering offences. This was as a result of a five-year investigation into a £1.8 million fraud. The suspect was sentenced to five and a half year's imprisonment.
- In February 2022, a 33 year old female and a 46 year old male entered guilty pleas to fraud and money laundering offences. They were sentenced to two year's imprisonment with the sentence suspended for two years and a twelve-month sentence suspended for two years respectively. A Restraint Order for £310,000 was also authorised and a disposal order was directed for a substantial amount of new infant and toddler clothing which was given to the charity 'Home Start'.

## CASE STUDY

### CASH SEIZURES

- In July 2021, officers attached to a Neighbourhood Policing Team in Carrickfergus conducted two dwelling searches by virtue of warrants obtained under Article 10 PACE and Section 23 Misuse of Drugs Act 1971<sup>6</sup>. As a result, an estimated £100,000 in cash was recovered from the address. The cash was subsequently seized under the POCA and a detained cash investigation followed.
- In July 2021, a vehicle was stopped and searched under Section 23 Misuse of Drugs Act and approximately £117,000 cash was located. The cash was seized under POCA by ECU and a detention order was progressed.
- In February 2022, police conducted a search of a residential address in Lisburn under a section 23 Misuse of Drugs Act warrant and Article 10 PACE. During the search a large quantity of suspected cannabis was seized (approximately 4kg), along with a small amount of prescription medication; £23,000 in cash was also discovered with the drugs. A total of £99,070 was recovered from the property. The cash was seized under POCA and a detention order was granted for consideration of forfeiture.

## CASE STUDIES

### ACCOUNT FREEZING ORDERS

Under the new POCA asset recovery powers available in Northern Ireland from the end of June 2021 the following two Account Freezing Orders (AFO) were granted during 2021/22:

- In January 2022, ECU Enniskillen obtained an AFO in Enniskillen Magistrates Court under Section 303Z3 of POCA, in respect of a bank account belonging to a 39-year-old male from County Fermanagh. The amount frozen was just over £31,000. Police believed this account had been used to launder the proceeds of crime and that it had been used to commit further offences. The account was frozen for six months pending the collection of evidence to justify a forfeiture application, and an investigation continued.
- In January 2022, ECU Belfast obtained an Account Freezing Order in Laganside Magistrates Court under Section 303Z3 of POCA, in respect of a bank account belonging to a 45-year-old male from Belfast. £49,000 was frozen and the subject arrested following a search at his address under S23 Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and Article 10 PACE where quantities of drugs and cash were located. Given the circumstances, police believed that the £49,000 held in a savings account was recoverable property. The account was frozen for six months pending the collection of evidence to justify a forfeiture application, and an investigation continued.

6 Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1971/38/contents>

## CASE STUDY

**CONFISCATION**

In September 2015, police searched business premises in Antrim by virtue of a warrant issued under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The building was a gardening supply shop that supplied plant nutrients, cultivation tents, heat lights, fans and filters for indoor gardening use. During the search, police uncovered evidence that “novel psychoactive substances” (so called legal highs) were being prepared, packaged and supplied for a storage area at the rear of the premises. Approximately 26 kg of Class A and Class B drugs were recovered from the premises.

The proprietor, a 42-year-old male, appeared at Antrim Crown Court in 2017 and pleaded guilty to a number of charges of possession of controlled drugs with intent to supply. He was subsequently sentenced to 4 years imprisonment. In December 2021, following a three-year examination of his business finances by the ECU a Confiscation Order for £130,000 was granted.

**Asset Recovery performance 2021/2022**

Value and volumes of proceeds of crime imposed from Confiscation Order Impositions in Northern Ireland		
Financial year	Total value of Confiscation Order Impositions (millions)	Number of Confiscation Order Impositions
2021 to 2022	£0.9	20

Source: Asset recovery statistical bulletin: financial years ending 2017 to 2022

Asset recovery annual statistical bulletin: methodology and data quality report: Table 3C

GOV.UK - [Asset recovery statistical bulletin: financial years ending 2017 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

Value and volumes of proceeds of crime seized and frozen from all seizure types in Northern Ireland								
Financial year	Total value of proceeds of crime seized – all seizure types (millions)	Total Number of seizures – all seizure types	Value of Cash Seizures (millions)	Number of Cash Seizures	Value of Account Freezing Orders (AFOs) (millions)	Number of AFOs	Value of Listed Assets Seizures (millions)	Number of Listed Asset Seizures
2021 to 2022	£1.7	130	£1.4	120	£0.4	10	0	0

Source: Asset recovery statistical bulletin: financial years ending 2017 to 2022

Asset recovery annual statistical bulletin: methodology and data quality report: Table 5C

GOV.UK - [Asset recovery statistical bulletin: financial years ending 2017 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

## CASE STUDY

### ABUSE OF COVID-19 GRANTS

PSNI worked with Land and Property Services (LPS) regarding an investigation into fraudulent applications for the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSRG) that was administered by Land and Property Services (LPS). The purpose of this scheme was to provide grants to business that were affected by Covid-19 restrictions. To be eligible, businesses should have been trading prior to making an application. LPS identified 64 applications suspected of being fraudulent all connected to one individual. To date, a total of over £300,000 has been obtained from the LRSRG. In March 2022, following a search and arrest operation, three suspects were arrested, released on police bail pending further enquiries, and the investigation continued.

## FORWARD LOOK

The PSNI Economic Crime Unit (ECU) will continue to make use of the additional POCA powers made available by the Criminal Finances Act 2017 to tackle criminal finances and associated organised crime in Northern Ireland. The ECU will continue to work collaboratively with partners and internal policing teams with the aim of increasing the restraint of criminal assets, applications for Account Freezing Orders and Listed Assets and forfeiture of these, as the legislation becomes more widely used throughout the Service.

In addition, the ECU works alongside partners to disrupt OCGs by investigating money laundering offences and seizing assets and working alongside Action Fraud to identify trends, raise awareness of ongoing scams and investigate Northern Ireland-based offending.

The ECU will continue to liaise with the PSNI Scamwise lead to ensure any new scam trends are quickly identified and a crime prevention message is circulated via Strategic Communications & Engagement Department.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Report concerns or suspected economic criminal activity:

- Call police on 101
- Use the PSNI website  
[www.psnipolice.uk/makeareport](http://www.psnipolice.uk/makeareport)
- Call CrimeStoppers anonymously on: 0800 555 11

## 3.4 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY CRIME AND SCAMS

### THE THREAT

Intellectual property crime (IPC) represents a range of threats, including consumer safety, community harm, economic and financial harm, as well as economic loss. Common types of 'IP crime' include counterfeiting and piracy. Counterfeiting is the manufacture, importation, distribution and sale of products, which falsely carry the trademark of a genuine brand without permission and for gain or loss to another. Piracy may include the copying, distribution, etc. of infringing works that inflicts financial loss onto the rights holder. The sale of counterfeit and illicit goods may help to fuel further harm to communities and individuals through other forms of criminality, such as drug trafficking, and those involved in IPC are often linked to various forms of serious organised crime.

The scale and distribution of counterfeit goods continues to grow using the internet, with goods frequently advertised for sale via social media, auction sites and online classifieds. There are also thousands of websites dedicated to the sale of counterfeit goods. While these websites often give the impression of being secure and trustworthy, consumers using these sites and providing their personal and banking details are leaving themselves open to becoming victims of identity fraud or having their devices compromised by malicious software and potentially used for further criminality.

The most common types of counterfeit goods regularly seized in Northern Ireland include clothing, alcohol, tobacco, cosmetics, sunglasses, handbags, footwear, CDs and electrical items. As a result of the current cost of living crisis, there is the potential for a rise in counterfeit foodstuffs as people find it more challenging to make ends meet.

The issue of Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) remains one of the main IPC concerns in Northern Ireland. Rising costs of subscription TV and streaming services are encouraging more people to turn to these illegal devices, and the current cost of living crisis has the potential to exacerbate this.

Using these services places individuals at high risk of being hacked and having their personal details stolen, and as such, this may result in higher levels of fraud and online crime.

### RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Within the PSNI, the formation of an internal email system for IPC advice has seen a greater engagement between detectives and uniformed colleagues uncovering suspected illicit products through routine stop and searches. This direct engagement means that officers can be put in contact with partners providing expert evidence on whether items are indeed counterfeit/illicit.

### Trading Standards Service

#### Scams

The Department for the Economy (DfE) Trading Standards Service (TSS) works to tackle mass marketing scams and disrupt the operations of perpetrators behind mail scams. It works in partnership with other agencies, including the National Trading Standards Scams Team to identify and support victims of mass marketing fraud and reach out to all the known victims of scams in Northern Ireland who have sent money to scammers.

In most cases, victims have lost thousands of pounds and have been identified as vulnerable. TSS officers provide advice and support to victims and investigate the scams, taking enforcement action where possible.

Ongoing criminal investigations, as well as a robust education and awareness-raising policy, has brought the problem of scams to the forefront of the public's attention. TSS continues as a member of the Scamwise NI partnership, which shares intelligence and helps formulate strategy and policy on protecting vulnerable consumers in Northern Ireland.

During the reporting period, TSS worked proactively to combat mass marketed scams and their involvement included:

- Continued participation in ScamwiseNI Partnership with over 30 partner organisations, including the PSNI, Commissioner for Older People, the Consumer Council and Age Sector Platform. The objective of the Partnership is to engage and inform the community about the risks and range of scams that exist. TSS regularly issue warnings advising people to remain vigilant following a rise in reports of scams.
- Working with advertisers to prevent scammers from posting adverts.
- Providing evidence/intelligence to the National Trading Standards Scams Team (NTSST), enabling the team to investigate further and disrupt scammers. Provision of evidence and intelligence has led to the shutdown of PO Boxes and the interception of mail and money. TSS subsequently return money and paperwork to the victims whilst taking the opportunity to educate victims on how to spot a scam in the future.
- Following the easing of restrictions due to the pandemic, TSS have re-commenced the installation of call blocking devices in the homes of known vulnerable scam victims.
- TSS continue to raise awareness regarding scams; this includes issuing press releases during scam awareness month, using social media and providing awareness sessions to local community groups.

- Directing scam victims to sign-up to Mail Preference Service and Telephone Preference Service in order to reduce the amount of scam calls/mail received resulting in a reduction of money lost due to scams.

## CASE STUDY

### WORLDWIDE MASS SCAM MAIL

The National Trading Standards Team has been working with the US Federal Commission investigating worldwide mass scam mail. Households including those in Northern Ireland were targeted with alleged 'cash wins' and 'guaranteed cash pay-outs' asking recipients to send on average between £25 - £40 to claim their prize (some victims responded numerous times). It is estimated that over 100 people in Northern Ireland fell victim to this scam. Action was taken in 2018 against the scammers resulting in \$25 million being made available to compensate victims around the world. The roll out of this project will result in TSS returning an average of £165 to victims at a time when households are attempting to navigate a cost of living crisis. Two victims from Northern Ireland will receive over £1000. You can read more about the scheme at: <https://www.nationaltradingstandards.uk/news/uk-victims-of-international-mass-marketing-scam-to-be-compensated-from-recovered-monies/>

Pictured below, Trading Standards representatives promoting the "Be Scam Aware" campaign.



### Doorstep Crime

Doorstep crime affects a large volume of consumers across Northern Ireland and is a priority work area for Trading Standards. This type of crime is often aimed at elderly and vulnerable consumers. Doorstep crime is considered as being “low risk” to many criminals, has appeal to Organised Crime Groups (OCGs), and is seen as an additional revenue stream for other criminality.

Doorstep crime is carried out by unscrupulous individuals and groups who identify and prey on older or vulnerable members of society. Typically they call uninvited and unexpectedly at someone’s home and offer to carry out property repairs or gardening work. The householder is usually charged an exorbitant price for the work, which is often of poor quality or left unfinished. In some cases, the householder is asked for large sums of money upfront to pay for materials, only for the doorstep criminal never to return.

Doorstep criminals are mobile, work throughout Northern Ireland and across the border with the Republic of Ireland. The impact on victims of doorstep crime can be devastating; they can lose trust in those who are close to them, shutting people out of their lives. There is evidence that suggests that some victims never get over what has happened to them, and they move into assisted accommodation sooner, as they are no longer able or confident to live alone. In some instances, entire life savings are wiped out to pay for often unnecessary work, leaving the victim penniless and once independent individuals can find themselves having to rely on others and the state for support.

Protecting vulnerable people from doorstep crime is a key priority for TSS. A vast number of doorstep crime cases go unreported, leaving the path clear for these criminals to devastate and destroy lives. There is also the impact that doorstep crime has on legitimate traders, drawing trade away from genuine local businesses who can help bolster the local economy. Doorstep crime builds up a degree of mistrust with a knock-on impact being felt by the legitimate trade.

TSS has worked hard to tackle OCGs involved in doorstep crime, most notably through:

- Successfully prosecuting doorstep criminals in the Magistrates’ and Crown Courts. The outcomes have included fines, suspended sentences and the ordering of compensation orders in favour of the members of the public who lodged complaints with the TSS and made witness statements.
- Assisting the PSNI by working jointly on investigations and providing advice to individual officers on consumer protection law as it applies to doorstep crime.
- Working with other partner agencies to increase awareness and reduce the impact of doorstep crime while developing preventative actions to disrupt problem traders and reduce consumer detriment. A good example of this is our work with the Policing and Community Safety Partnership (PCSP), Crime Prevention and local residents on establishing No Cold Calling zones to deter the activities of doorstep and rogue criminals within specific residential areas.
- Continuing to raise awareness of doorstep crime by participating in national schemes, such the National Trading Standards’ Doorstep Crime Campaign, organised in conjunction with Friends Against Scams.
- Constantly alerting the public to the dangers of doorstep crime through issuing press releases and distributing leaflets, e.g., recent publicity has been around the doorstep criminals’ increasing presence on ‘find a trader’ websites.

### Online Market Places

TSS has recognised the shift from the high street to online retail especially driven by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns. The Service instigated operation 'Credit Card' to target online sellers of counterfeit goods based in Northern Ireland. Officers have identified a number of traders selling fake items and criminal investigations are being carried out into their business activities. Among the items seized in respect of trademark abuse in the last year are:

- designer clothes;
- car accessories;
- phone chargers;
- alcohol;
- toothbrushes.

The Service also conducted an inspection of online marketplace sellers in the run up to the Christmas period and reported over 400 adverts to various brand holders for take downs or have the accounts closed.

TSS worked with companies advising on their websites and product offerings to ensure the traders are aware of their legal obligations and that they do not offer counterfeit goods for sale.

Trading Standards Service collaborates with partner bodies including Border Force, the Intellectual Property Office and the PSNI to identify and take action against those involved in intellectual property crime.

In the reporting year, TSS obtained asset recovery powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, and will continue to work with the PSNI in joint operations to recover the criminal gain made by traders through breaches of Intellectual Property legislation.

## RESULTS

### CASE STUDY

#### 92 YEAR OLD SCAMMED

A 92-year-old lost more than several hundred thousand pounds by responding to mail and telephone scams over an 11-year period. Some of these scam letters implied that the person had won thousands of pounds, but in order to claim the prize they had to place an order for goods or send 'up-front fees'. The victim was heavily invested in responding to the scams and replied to prize draws, clairvoyants, buying mobility products and provided bank details for so-called investments in oil and gold. They refused to believe they were being scammed even when challenged by family members and would continue to send money or provide financial details. The impact on the victim and other family members has been devastating. Efforts were made by TSS to discuss and educate the victim on scams.



Examples of scam letters encouraging victims to send up-front fees to scammers who lure them into believing they have won significant amounts of money

## CASE STUDY

**£75K LOST TO FAKE TRADING PLATFORM**

A person invested over £75,000 in a trading company over a 3-month period, which they hoped would be a long-term investment for retirement. They were duped into investing small amounts to begin with. The scammers were sophisticated and answered any queries without hesitation – raising no concerns. They provided fake online trading platforms to check the status of investments. They explained the process of withdrawing funds and allowed a withdrawal of \$500 into the person's bank account in order to convince them they were genuine. The scammers would provide articles to read and they would test the person by asking questions to make sure they had read them, all adding to the illusion of a genuine investment. Unfortunately, they were also able to talk the victim into 'investing' a six-figure sum.

This scam has adversely affected the victim's life; they were targeted at a very vulnerable time in their life, they have suffered ill health and become heavily indebted as a result. TSSNI continued to provide support on a regular basis and assist the victim in raising the issue with their bank. The case went to the Financial Ombudsman Office and resulted in a refund of £137,900 to the complainant.

## CASE STUDY

**THREATENED BY SCAMMERS**

A person initially invested £250 with a scam company dealing in stocks and shares; details were shared with other scammers. After initial investment, they were contacted by another two companies who also convinced them to invest more than £20,000. The victim was provided with fake trading accounts to appear genuine. However, when they tried to withdraw funds the scammers always had an excuse as to why this was not possible. The victim also gave the scammers remote access to their computer, which resulted in unauthorised funds being released from their account. Once the victim realised they were being scammed and refused to send any more money this resulted in aggressive and threatening calls from the scammers.

The scam has caused significant distress to the victim; who has suffered ill health and relationship breakdowns and is wary of answering calls from numbers they do not recognise. TSSNI have been providing practical support and advice on a regular basis. TSS assisted with raising the issue with their bank that has resulted in the person being reimbursed £16,000.

## CASE STUDY

**SCAM TRADER DISQUALIFIED FROM BEING A COMPANY DIRECTOR AND HAD TO PAY £10K IN COMPENSATION**

A criminal called uninvited to a consumer's house and offered to replace paving outside the house for a cost of £950. This was the first of many visits over a period of several months. During each visit, the trader persuaded the householder to agree to a range of home improvement work carried out to the property, taking substantial sums of money until he had amassed a total of £31,300. It was accepted at court that the actual value of the work carried out was in the region of no more than £10,000.

The trader pleaded guilty, in his role as company director, to charges of misleading the homeowner. The trader received an 18-month custodial sentence (suspended for three years) at Belfast Crown Court, for defrauding the consumer. The trader agreed to pay £10,000 in compensation to the householder; he was also disqualified from being a company director for three years.

## CASE STUDY

### TRADER USES UNSCRUPULOUS TACTICS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AN ISOLATED INDIVIDUAL

In another case brought by the TSS, a plumber persuaded a householder that he could install a new energy-saving heating system that would save them money. Over the course of two months, he received payments totalling £9,000 to replace the system – but he neither carried out the work nor did he supply any of the equipment that had been paid for.

The consumer made repeated requests for their money to be returned and eventually received a refund of £1,000. The trader then promised to pay back the outstanding sum of £8,000 in monthly repayments of £500, but no such payments were ever received by the victim.

The plumber received a four-month custodial sentence, suspended for 12 months. The court also ordered the trader to pay his victim £8,000 in compensation. The trader pleaded guilty to one charge under the Fraud Act 2006.

## FORWARD LOOK

The OCTF partners will continue to increase engagement and improve their understanding of Intellectual Property Crime to tackle this criminality that generates significant profits and funds further organised crime. This includes training days at various locations in Northern Ireland with colleagues from the Intellectual Property Office, Trading Standards Service, partners from industry and subject experts.

Work will continue to build on engagement with partners who provide expert evidence, including the utilisation of training to identify and tackle counterfeit and illicit goods to complement organised crime investigations.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Many counterfeits are difficult to spot but consumers should look out for poor packaging, bad spelling or printing, photocopied instructions and lack of regulatory markings.
- Do not be fooled, or enticed, by a replica logo or a seemingly cut-price designer product. Be mindful of where these goods have come from and where the ill-gotten profits will end up.
- Think about the cost – price is usually a good indicator as to whether goods are likely to be counterfeit.
- Be wary about buying branded goods particularly online and outside of usual premises.
- Remember, online photographs of genuine items can be used to promote items but the delivered goods may well be counterfeit.
- There are significant health and safety risks associated with counterfeit goods. Whether skincare, electrical items or children's costumes – these items do not undergo the testing and quality control that genuine items do.
- For example, a counterfeit children's costume will not have the necessary safety-release mechanism, and a counterfeit phone charger will not be up to fire safety standards.

### Report your suspicions to:

- PSNI on 101
- The PSNI website  
[www.psni.police.uk/makeareport](http://www.psni.police.uk/makeareport)
- CrimeStoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111
- Consumerline on 0300 123 62 62
- Trading Standards Service at:  
[www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/consumeraffairs/trading-standards-service](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/consumeraffairs/trading-standards-service)

## 3.5 ARMED ROBBERY, EXTORTION AND ILLEGAL MONEY LENDING

### Cash in Transit robberies and tiger kidnappings

Over the reporting period, there were no reported cases of Cash in Transit robberies or tiger kidnappings. PSNI Organised Crime Unit continues to work alongside industry in enhancing security measures and 'target hardening' with the principal intent of preventing robberies from taking place, or, where they do, to assist police in the quick apprehension of those responsible and rendering the stolen cash unusable.

### Thefts from ATMs

Attacks on ATMs can take many forms including using combustible gas to blow up cash machines, as well as robberies where the ATM is dragged from a wall using heavy machinery or broken into with cutting equipment. Over the reporting period, there was one attempted ATM gas attack in North Belfast (using a can of deodorant), which was subject to further investigation, leading to an arrest and charge. Attacks on ATM machines cause damage, not just to local businesses and buildings, but also to communities as a whole as a result of the damage and loss of services.

### Extortion

Extortion is a crime that targets the vulnerable but it is an under-reported crime. The PSNI continues to work with individuals, businesses and communities to encourage the reporting of incidents for investigation.

### Illegal Money Lending

'Ending the Harm' is a series of hard-hitting public awareness campaigns that highlight organised crime and paramilitary activity and how this can have a devastating impact on victims, their families, local communities and wider society. The current campaign launched in June 2021 highlights how paramilitary groups use illegal money lending to control and coerce vulnerable people.

Illegal money lending is a growing issue, but in Northern Ireland it is another tactic for paramilitary groups to control communities. Unfortunately, this is normalised behaviour and the lenders are seen as protectors of the community. The campaign challenges the acceptability and normalisation of illegal money lending.



It highlights how victims, who are often struggling to make ends meet, are exploited and preyed on by illegal money lenders.

Post campaign tracking revealed that over two thirds of respondents agreed that people who receive loans from local money lenders/paramilitary groups should be considered victims. Almost nine in ten (87%) agreed that the ads show the real consequences of borrowing money from paramilitaries/illegal money lenders. From the advertising, nine in ten respondents agreed that paramilitary groups/illegal money lenders exploit people and hold them forever in their debt. Most participants (87%) agreed that the ads would put them off considering borrowing from paramilitaries/illegal money lenders.

To find out more about the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime Programme or their 'Ending the Harm' public awareness campaign, please visit their website: <https://www.endingtheharm.com/>

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

The public are asked to remain vigilant around banking instructions, cash-in-transit vehicles and ATM sites.

Any suspicious activity should be reported to the police using the 101 number unless the circumstances justify an emergency call to the 999 system.

Alternatively information may be reported anonymously through to the independent CrimeStoppers charity on Tel **0800 555 111**.

## 3.6 MODERN SLAVERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

### THE THREAT

Modern slavery is an umbrella term that incorporates both the offence of slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour and the offence of human trafficking. Victims are often afraid or unable to report their ordeal, due to language barriers or because they are held captive. Although it is not possible to know the exact numbers of victims, modern slavery has been on the increase and the estimated number of victims of modern slavery globally will continue to rise over the coming years.

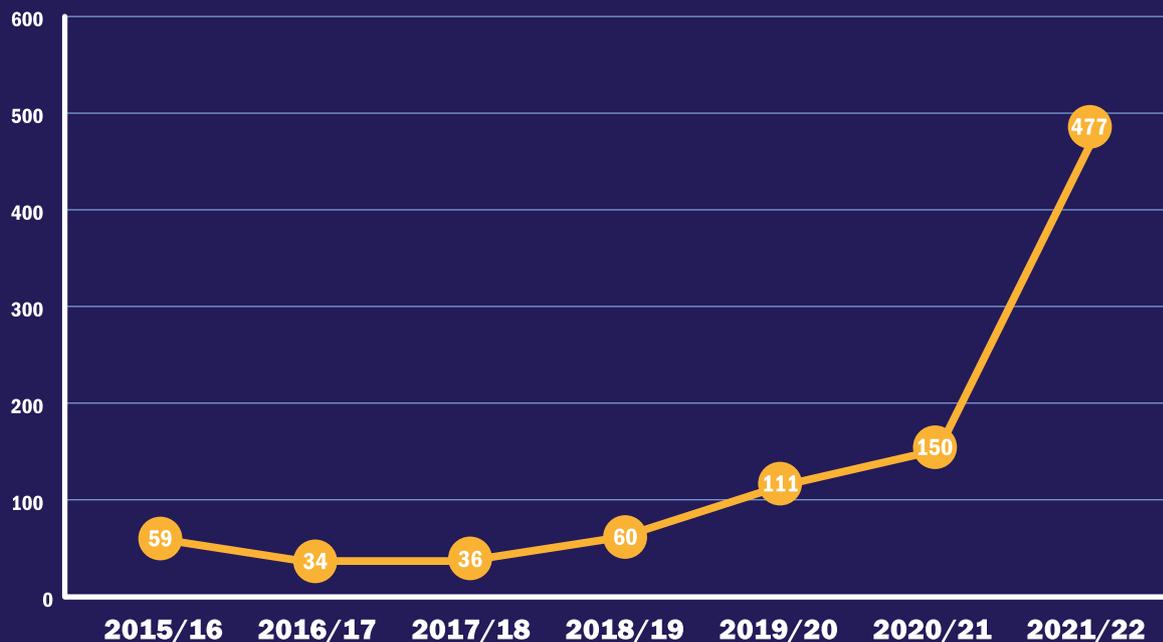
Slavery and trafficking can take many forms and situations can at times appear quite normal until further investigated, which is why it is often referred to as the crime 'hidden in plain sight'. The main driver of MSHT offending is the pursuit of profit by coercing victims to provide a service. In some cases victims are threatened with and can experience extreme violence at the hands of criminal groups and they may have their identity documents removed.

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK-wide framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. The number of MSHT offences and the number of potential victims in Northern Ireland identified through the NRM increased significantly during 2021/22.

The graph below shows the continued increase of NRM referrals in recent years.

The number of NRM referrals in Northern Ireland increased by 218% on the 2020/21 referral figures, from 150 in 2020/21 to 477 referrals in the 2021/22 financial year. From the 477 referrals, 133 were female (including five who were under 18 years) and 344 were males (including ten who were under 18 years). Labour exploitation was the most commonly referred exploitation type in Northern Ireland followed by sexual exploitation.

### NRM REFERRALS



Adult Services Websites (ASW) remain a key enabler for sexual exploitation, again showing the ever-increasing scale of the digital footprint across most organised crime types in Northern Ireland. Of those 477 potential victims referred:

- 354 were in relation to Labour Exploitation.
- 20 were in relation to Domestic Servitude.
- 56 were in relation to Sexual Exploitation.
- 8 were in relation to Securing Services (where the person has been subjected to force, threats, abduction, coercion, fraud or deception),
- 14 experienced both Labour and Sexual Exploitation.
- 3 experienced both Sexual Exploitation and Domestic Servitude.
- 22 were recorded as “unknown.”

Of the 477 referrals there were 28 different nationalities represented.

## RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The PSNI approach to slavery and trafficking is victim-centred, with the need to identify, locate and recover any potential victims of trafficking (PVoT) and offer help and support in line with current legislation. PSNI is focused on tackling the organised crime groups (OCGs) involved, to detain or detect people involved in trafficking.

The PSNI has developed an online learning module for MSHT. To date, in excess of 4,000 police officers and staff have completed this training package. A MSHT mobile App is now accessible on PSNI officers' mobile devices. The App provides:

- Access to the Unseen App hosted by the UK's Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline to support them in identifying the signs and indicators when they suspect someone may be a victim of trafficking or exploitation.
- An Aide Memoire that will take officers step by step through the process of identifying and safeguarding potential victims and guide them through the initial investigative actions that they need to take.
- Digital access to the various MSHT screening forms, which enables officers to remotely submit a screening report to the MSHT Unit.

In addition, MSHT training has been delivered to all student officers and to all newly qualified detectives. Training on MSHT is also disseminated to uniformed officers within each policing district.

Detectives from the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) have delivered training to a number of public and private sector groups over this reporting period including Ballymena and Omagh Police and Community Safety Partnership, Extern, Home Office Single Competent Authority, Home Office Immigration Enforcement, midwives from the Belfast Trust, medical students and many other NGOs and charities.

Detectives from MSHTU have also created a powerpoint presentation for 'First Responder Training' which includes information on the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), Northern Ireland Legislation, how to spot the signs and indicators of MSHT, and recent Case Studies.

MSHTU Detectives have attended conferences and seminars organised by and in conjunction with a number of partner agencies including the National Prosecutions Oversight Group (POG), Modern Slavery Organised Immigration Crime Unit (MSOIC), and the UK Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner. Such events strengthen working relationships, which in turn increases the overall level of skills, knowledge and contacts in areas that can be very relevant in investigating MSHT offences.

## RESULTS

During 2021/22 the PSNI MSHTU:

- Conducted 128 screening assessments (a process to safeguard victims through early recognition and subsequent intervention);
- Carried out 12 Warrant Searches and 75 safeguarding visits/non-warrant operations. These safeguarding visits were conducted across a range of industries from the sex industry to the agricultural industry. Visits have also been conducted to carwashes. 34 of these safeguarding visits were conducted with partner agencies such as Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, Home Office Immigration Enforcement, HMRC, Border Force and the Maritime and Coast Guard Agency;
- Made six arrests for modern slavery/human trafficking and/or related offences;
- Charged two persons with modern slavery/human trafficking and/or related offences; and
- Reported three person to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) for modern slavery/human trafficking and/or related offences.

## CASE STUDY

### HUMAN TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION INVOLVING A ROMANIAN OCG

This proactive investigation into Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation involving a Romanian OCG operating in Northern Ireland began in 2019. In December 2020, a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) was set up with Romanian law enforcement, resulting in a Day of Action in June 2021 in both Romania and Northern Ireland. Two arrests were made in Northern Ireland and nine in Romania. Of the 11 persons arrested, eight were charged with a variety of human trafficking offences. A further male was also arrested in Northern Ireland for human trafficking, controlling prostitution and money laundering offences. The JIT was to facilitate the navigation of evidence sharing between jurisdictions. In September 2021, a further male was also arrested in Northern Ireland for wounding with intent/aggravated burglary on a sex worker in the case. In November 2021, another male was arrested for human trafficking, brothel keeping and other related offences. As part of this investigation, the MSHTU interviewed eleven males for the offence of paying for sexual services. Of the eleven, five received adult cautions, two prosecution decisions were ongoing at the end of the reporting period and the PPS directed no prosecution for four of the cases.

## CASE STUDY

**SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF LOCAL FEMALES**

This was a proactive, investigation into Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation of local females. This was as a result of MSHTU officers locating suspicious adult service website adverts, which raised their concerns. A local male was believed to be trafficking vulnerable local females throughout Northern Ireland for the purposes of sexual exploitation. The vulnerability of many of the victims and their unwillingness to trust the police and support a criminal justice outcome was recognised. MSHTU acted as victim liaison officers and were the regular point of contact with the victims. This ensured they were kept informed, issues addressed quickly, and the victims in turn remained supportive of a criminal justice outcome.

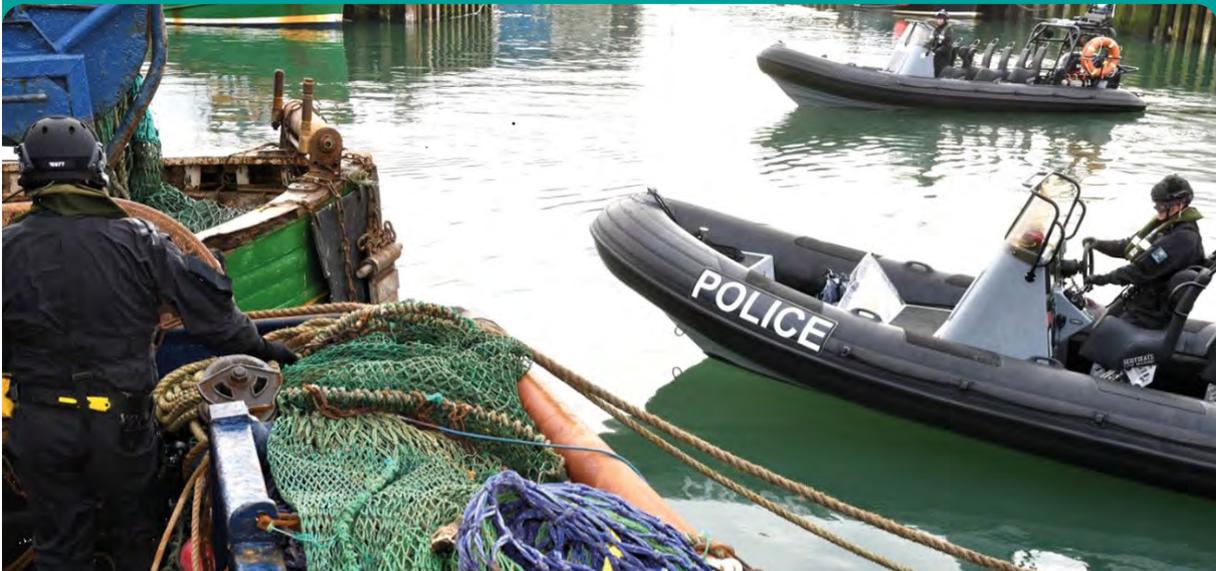
In October 2019, this male was initially arrested on suspicion of human trafficking, controlling prostitution and money laundering. He was later further arrested on suspicion of voyeurism, brothel keeping and paying for sexual services.

In November 2021, he pleaded guilty to 29 charges relating to 12 female victims. Victim Impact Statements were obtained and he was sentenced to 5 years. This was one of the largest investigations carried out by the PSNI Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit. Officers from the MSHTU worked closely with a range of partners, for example Department of Justice, An Garda Síochána, NCA, PPS, and other members of the OCTF. Many local charities also played a vital role in assisting and supporting the victims to rebuild their lives.

## CASE STUDY

**SEARCH AND ARREST OPERATION AT A LOCAL HARBOUR**

Officers from MSHTU, in conjunction with the Maritime Coast Guard Agency, conducted a search and arrest operation at a local harbour. This was in connection with the suspected trafficking and exploitation of four Ghanaian fishermen, who until recently worked on a fishing vessel based at this location. As a result, one man was arrested for human trafficking for labour exploitation and money laundering. He was placed on bail while enquiries continued.



Officers at harbour during search and arrest operation in March

### Operation AIDANT

PSNI continues to support the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme (MSPTP) and the National Crime Agency (NCA) Operation Aidant. This ongoing operation involves weeks of intensification of activities around a particular area of exploitation in which the PSNI participate alongside law enforcement colleagues across mainland GB.

During the reporting period, the MSHTU took part in the following periods of activity:

**Project AIDANT** - Labour Exploitation and Domestic Servitude - 12-30 April 2021

**Project AIDANT** - Child Trafficking - 28 June - 4 July 2021

**Project AIDANT** - Sexual Exploitation – 6-17 September 2021

**Project AIDANT** - Illicit Finances - 8-19 November 2021

In November, the focus of Aidant was on illicit finances, and MSHTU officers attended Belfast International Airport and conducted out-bound cash controls with UK Border Force officers. Detectives from the PSNI's Economic Crime Unit and officers with dogs trained to search for cash were also present to assist with this operation.

### CASE STUDY

#### CROSS BORDER OPERATION HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND ORGANISED PROSTITUTION

An Garda Síochána Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit and the PSNI MSHTU conducted a cross border operation in September 2021. During this operation, a number of searches were conducted in the border counties in relation to organised crime, relating to potential human trafficking and the organisation of prostitution. A number of premises were also visited by way of safeguarding checks on individuals working in the sex trade, who had worked north and south of the border. In total, fifteen individuals from both sides of the border were assessed for indicators of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. No complaints were forthcoming at that time. A number of the individuals assessed asked to be referred to Ruhama (a Dublin-based NGO that works with women affected by prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation) and the Woman's Health Service.

### CASE STUDY

#### SAFEGUARDING ACTIVITY CONDUCTED DURING AIDANT

In June 2021, the PSNI Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit and the HMRC National Minimum Wage Serious Non Compliance Team conducted a Day of Action and visited six car washes throughout Northern Ireland and conducted safeguarding visits. A total of 14 individuals were screened by MSHTU officers, no concerns were raised. The Health and Safety Executive was notified of potential health and safety issues at several of the businesses and Social Services were advised of a juvenile female who was working at one of the premises.



PSNI MSHTU and UK Border Force distributing MSHT awareness leaflets to passengers arriving at the airport.

### Partnership with An Garda Síochána

An Garda Síochána (AGS) Human Trafficking Investigation & Coordination Unit and AGS Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit, which focuses on targeting organised prostitution and associated offences, continues to work closely with the PSNI MSHTU. Two PSNI officers attended training in Dublin with AGS and Ruhama in early March 2022, to provide participants with a greater understanding of prostitution in the Republic of Ireland today, with particular emphasis on the experience of individuals engaged in prostitution and the complex needs they may have.

Due to the increasing cross border element involved in human trafficking, AGS and the PSNI engage on emerging threats. This co-operation assists in progressing investigations and in ensuring the continued safety and welfare of potential victims.

## FORWARD LOOK

The DoJ MSHT team continues to work closely with partners through the OCTF MSHT Sub Group and the NGO liaison group, as well as with colleagues in the Home Office and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales and counterparts in the Republic of Ireland.

The PSNI MSHTU commissioned QUB to carry out further academic research to identify recruitment methods used by traffickers to locate and identify victims of both sexual and labour exploitation in countries outside the UK to encourage them to come to Northern Ireland. The other area of the project will be to consider what action is needed to educate those from other countries of their rights and the law in Northern Ireland in order to prevent exploitation.

### A Strategic Response to MSHT

Work to develop a new three-year strategy for MSHT, moving away from a one-year cycle commenced.

### Changes to the Northern Ireland Legislation

The Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act 2022 has made a number of amendments to the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act 2015. These are:

- Changing the requirement for the Department of Justice to produce a MSHT strategy on an annual basis to a three-year strategy. This will allow a longer-term vision for the Department and its partners to provide for the protection and support of victims of trafficking and exploitation, and the prosecution of traffickers;
- Extending statutory assistance and support to adult potential victims of slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour where there is no element of trafficking;
- Extending statutory assistance to victims of trafficking and exploitation for up to 12 months beyond a positive conclusive grounds decision in the NRM where there is need for such assistance;
- Adding offences involving Class A drugs in the statutory defence provisions under section 22 of the 2015 Act; and
- Providing for the introduction of new measures for strengthening the powers to deal with suspected traffickers and safeguarding potential victims.

### Slavery Trafficking Risk Orders and Duty to Notify Provisions

The Department of Justice launched a public consultation in March 2022 on a range of measures to improve the response to Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, including:

- The introduction of Slavery Trafficking Risk Orders (STROs) in Northern Ireland;
- Commencing Duty to Notify provisions already included in the 2015 Act; and
- The power of the police to search someone suspected of trafficking or exploitation during a search of premises under warrant for evidence linked to MSHT offences.

### Transparency in Supply Chains

Agreement was reached to make reporting requirements on in scope companies more rigorous; changes are subject to the legislative process.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking is on the increase in Northern Ireland and everybody can play a part in addressing this ruthless crime.

Anybody can be a victim of this type of crime – it is not just confined to foreign nationals. Adults and children can be trafficked or enslaved and forced to sell their bodies for sex. People are also trafficked or enslaved for labour exploitation, for example:

- to work on a farm or factory
- to work in a house as a servant, maid or nanny
- to beg on the street

If you suspect that someone has been trafficked or enslaved:

- call 999 in an emergency
- call 101 about the general situation
- call 0800 0121 700 for the Modern Slavery Helpline

## 3.7 ORGANISED IMMIGRATION CRIME

### THE THREAT

Various OCTF partners are working to disrupt organised crime involving the movement of people, goods and money in and out of Northern Ireland. Immigration Enforcement, a Directorate of the Home Office, is responsible for protecting the public by removing immigration offenders, prosecuting the criminals who facilitate immigration crime and driving cross-sector action to increase compliance with immigration law.

Immigration Enforcement's mission is to reduce the illegal (migrant) population and the harm it causes. In Northern Ireland, Immigration Enforcement conducts enforcement operations against a range of immigration crime, including facilitation, document fraud, sham marriages, rogue employers and illegal workers. It also has an important role to play in preventing abuse of the Common Travel Area (CTA).

### RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

During 2021/22, the challenges presented by Covid-19 continued, but ongoing enforcement activities with OCTF partners reinforced Northern Ireland's capacity to tackle immigration-related crime and resulted in convictions and deportations of serious criminals.

Immigration Enforcement uses all available powers to intercept, arrest and/or prosecute immigration offenders, including foreign national criminals seeking to circumvent UK immigration controls. Criminal Investigators are embedded into the PSNI Organised Crime Unit and Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Teams to assist with joint investigations. Immigration Enforcement also works closely with Republic of Ireland's criminal investigators on cross border investigations into organised CTA abuse, facilitation and the production and supply of false documentation.

Photo of an immigration officer intercepting an offender



## RESULTS

### CASE STUDIES

#### DEPORTATION ORDERS

**April 2021:** A Slovakian national, who was subject to a UK Deportation Order, had entered the UK illegally across the land border from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland and was intercepted en route to Scotland. He was found to have previously served prison sentences for theft and robbery totalling five years. He was arrested and prosecuted by Immigration Enforcement for the breach and received a three month sentence. He was subsequently deported to Slovakia.

**May 2021:** A Romanian who was subject to a UK Deportation Order had entered the UK illegally across the land border from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland and was intercepted en route to Scotland. He was found to have previously served a prison sentence for sexual assault and driving offences. He was arrested and prosecuted by Immigration Enforcement for the breach and received a one month prison sentence, along with initiation of a previous six month suspended sentence. He was subsequently deported to Romania.

**November 2021:** A Romanian national who was subject to a UK Deportation Order, had entered the UK illegally across the land border from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland and was intercepted en route to Scotland. He was found to have served multiple prison sentences. He was arrested and prosecuted by Immigration Enforcement for the breach and received a three month sentence. He was subsequently deported to Romania.

**January 2022:** A Romanian national who was subject to a UK Deportation Order had entered the UK illegally across the land border from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland and was intercepted en route to Scotland. He was found have served a prison sentence of five years for robbery in Romania and had a further six convictions and 13 offences in the UK. He was arrested and prosecuted by Immigration Enforcement for the breach and received a two month sentence. He was subsequently deported to Romania.

**February 2022:** A Lithuanian national, who was illegally in the UK in breach of their UK Deportation Order, was referred by PSNI. He was found to have served an eight-year prison sentence in Lithuania for sexual assault. He was arrested and prosecuted by Immigration Enforcement for the breach and received a one year conditional sentence. He was subsequently deported to Lithuania.

### CASE STUDY

#### DAY OF ACTION - ALBANIAN ORGANISED CRIME GROUP

**July 2021:** A Day of Action was conducted following a protracted period of intensification, targeting an Albanian Organised Crime Group (OCG). The OCG was involved in cannabis cultivation on the UK mainland and attempted to smuggle an OCG member through the Common Travel Area (CTA) in an attempt to circumvent UK Frontier Border controls. Immigration Officers at Belfast Docks detected the migrant in December 2020 and a criminal investigation was launched. The OCG was also engaged in 'sham weddings', working alongside a Romanian OCG, and moving migrants from Albania into Republic of Ireland then abusing the CTA to enter the UK. Six warrants were executed at residential premises in the UK and nine Albanian nationals, without valid immigration status were arrested, six cannabis factories were located, £250,000 of controlled drugs were seized, along with false identity documents, criminal cash and high value vehicles. Seven defendants were remanded into criminal custody, with the trial set to take place imminently.

## CASE STUDY

### ABUSE OF COMMON TRAVEL AREA TO SMUGGLE MIGRANTS INTO THE UK

**March 2022:** An OCG was identified smuggling migrants into the UK via abuse of the CTA. It is believed that the OCG was responsible for smuggling 42 illegal entrants into the UK within a three-week period in November 2021. Evidence was collated and four members of the OCG were identified as being strategically placed throughout the UK. A pan-UK wide arrest operation took place in March 2022. Four suspects were arrested in Northern Ireland and London, with subsequent charges implemented and defendants remanded into criminal custody. A significant cash seizure was made alongside the seizure of high value vehicles and a number of electronic devices.

### FORWARD LOOK

In 2022/2023, Immigration Enforcement will continue to extend its reach, making it increasingly difficult for people to live or stay in Northern Ireland illegally and for criminals to commit immigration-related crime.

Immigration Enforcement will continue to intervene upstream through its overseas networks to disrupt organised criminals abroad and provide intelligence to the visa issuing process to prevent inadmissible passengers from travelling to the UK. It will continue to strengthen its relationship with Republic of Ireland to ensure that individuals who would not be admissible to either jurisdiction are unable to travel to the CTA.

Immigration Enforcement will build on its work with other OCTF partners and Republic of Ireland Ireland's law enforcement agencies to target foreign national offenders and organised immigration crime. Immigration Enforcement will continue to play its part in the cross border organised crime structures and continue its work with An Garda Síochána and UK Border Force in conducting intensification campaigns to tackle cross border and wider immigration crime.

## CASE STUDY

### CASH FORFEITURE CASE

**March 2022:** Two successful Cash Forfeiture Orders were granted using Proceeds of Crime Legislation for the sum of £54,929 from two Algerian Nationals based in the Greater Belfast area. Immigration Enforcement officers seized the suspected criminal cash during an enforcement visit to a residential address in the Greater Belfast Area. Investigators seized documentation that alleged the criminal cash was derived unlawfully from working illegally in the UK.



Cash seized from Algerian Nationals

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

You have the information we need to improve the intelligence picture, report it to:

[www.gov.uk/report-immigration-crime](https://www.gov.uk/report-immigration-crime)

## 3.8 BORDER CRIME

### THE THREAT

The UK border is a primary defence against a range of threats but it also has a number of vulnerabilities that are known to, and targeted by, those who seek to undermine the controls in place, for either criminal gain, illegal migration or terrorist activity.

### RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

OCGs attempt to use every means possible to exploit border vulnerabilities. They actively seek gaps at ports, airports and transportation services as well as individuals who are willing to facilitate crime through borders.

Border Force secures the border and promotes national prosperity by facilitating the legitimate movement of individuals and goods, whilst preventing those that would cause harm from entering the UK. This is achieved through the immigration and customs checks carried out by Border Force staff at ports and airports.

### RESULTS

Border Force seizures (including drugs also recorded in the Drugs section of the Report):

#### Border Force Seizures

- 4.45kg of Class A drugs
- 471kg of Cannabis
- 4.88 tonnes of tobacco
- 16.81 million cigarettes
- 294,000 illicit prescription tablets
- 69kg of Khat
- 38kg of Benzocaine
- 23,500 counterfeit items
- £13,210 in cash

#### Partnership Working through the OCTF

During 2021/2022 Border Force worked alongside partner agencies in planned and reactive operational activity. Collaborative working was key in frustrating and disrupting Organised Crime Groups throughout the year.

### CASE STUDY

## 15 MILLION CIGARETTE SEIZURES

15 million cigarettes were detected at Belfast Docks after two containers were examined that arrived from Vietnam via Rotterdam. The containers were manifested as wooden furniture and were destined for an address in Belfast. Rows of furniture were used at the front with the boxes of cigarettes hidden behind (the same boxes were used for the cigarettes and the furniture). Each box contained 40,000 'Yett Virginia' branded cigarettes; these types of cigarettes are often called "cheap whites" and made purely for smuggling. The revenue and VAT evaded was £5.8 million. The seizure was referred to HMRC for further investigation.



Cigarettes branded as "Yett Virginia" seized at Belfast Docks

## CASE STUDY

**4 TONNES OF TOBACCO SEIZURE**

4 tonnes of tobacco was detected in a container that arrived into Northern Ireland from Germany. The container was shipped via Rotterdam to Belfast and was destined for an address in the Newry area. 36 pallets within the load contained the tobacco, which was manifested as Euro bins Polyester. Markings on the pouches indicate the tobacco originated in Luxemburg. The revenue and VAT evaded was £1.5 million. The seizure was referred to HMRC for further investigation.



Pouches of tobacco seized – worth £1.5 million in revenue and VAT evaded

## CASE STUDY

**281KG OF TOBACCO SEIZURE**

Border Force Officers intercepted a van that was travelling to Scotland on the ferry from Belfast. The goods were manifested as printers. A search of the van revealed 281kg of tobacco that had been concealed within boxes of printers. The seizure was referred to HMRC.

## CASE STUDY

**COCAINE SEIZURE**

Border Force Officers discovered 180 grams of Cocaine that had been concealed within a pair of shoes. The parcel had arrived from the Netherlands. A referral was made to the NCA for further investigation.

## CASE STUDY

**MDMA SEIZURE/LSD SEIZURES**

Border Force Officers detected 590 grams of MDMA that had arrived into Northern Ireland in a parcel from France. The pills were a blue triangle shape and had the name 'Punisher' which indicated they were a strong form of MDMA. The goods were referred to the NCA for further investigation.

In a separate seizure, Officers discovered 500 grams of MDMA and 480 LSD tabs (commonly known as Acid and popular in the 1990's) in a parcel that had arrived from France. The seizure was referred to the NCA for further investigation.



MDMA seized in a parcel coming into Northern Ireland from France

## CASE STUDY

**HEROIN SEIZURE**

Officers discovered 700 grams of Heroin when they opened a parcel that was described as a toy. Inside the package was a sloth soft toy. When examined it was found to contain small packages concealed within the sloth. The seizure was referred to the NCA.



Packets of heroin concealed inside a soft toy

## CASE STUDY

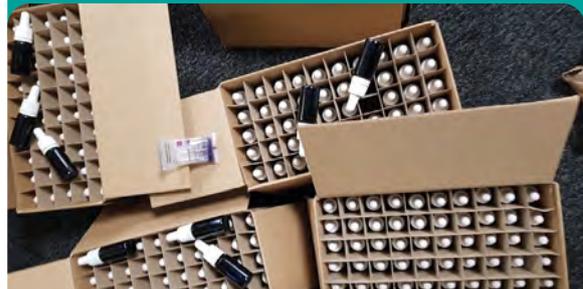
**CANNABIS SEIZURES**

Herbal Cannabis remains the biggest drug seized by Border Force in Northern Ireland. Packages are often detected at parcel depots and smugglers use the 'little and often' method of importing by flooding the various depots with large amounts of parcels containing one or two kg per parcel. A recent seizure was found to have packages dipped in vinegar to put off the scent of detector dogs.

## CASE STUDY

**55KG CANNABIS SEIZURE**

55kg of Cannabis was detected and seized during a routine examination at a parcel depot. The haul was discovered when officers examined 11 boxes that were being exported to France. The consignment had originated in Manchester, shipped to Northern Ireland and was being exported to France. A few weeks later 108kg of Cannabis oil was detected using the same route. The detections were referred to the PSNI who started a joint investigation with Greater Manchester Police. A further two pallets of Cannabis oil were detected in a premises in Northern Ireland after warrants were executed. Three arrests were made by the PSNI and one in Manchester by Greater Manchester Police.



Boxes containing bottles of cannabis oil, being exported to France from Northern Ireland.

## CASE STUDY

**CANNABIS INFUSED SWEETS**

Recent Cannabis seizures have also highlighted the continued growing trend of cannabis-infused sweets. If these fell into the hands of unsuspecting children it could have disastrous consequences. They are often found in brightly coloured packaging with cartoon figures and could be easily mistaken for regular confectionery.



Cannabis infused sweets, packaged to look like genuine confectionery.

## CASE STUDY

**CANNABIS SEIZURES AT BELFAST CITY AND BELFAST INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS**

A US national arrived at Belfast City Airport from Heathrow having started his journey in San Francisco. He was carrying three large suitcases; a search of his baggage revealed 32kg of Herbal Cannabis. He was arrested and referred to the NCA and later charged with drug importation offences.

A week earlier at Belfast International Airport a Spanish national arriving from Alicante had his baggage searched, which revealed 17.7kg of Herbal Cannabis. He was arrested and later charged with drug importation offences. The combined street value of both seizures was approximately £500,000.

## CASE STUDY

**ILLICIT PRESCRIPTION MEDICINES**

Border Force continues to work alongside the PSNI and the Medicines Regulatory Group on imports of illicit prescription medicine, making referrals for further investigation where appropriate. Most seizures originate from China or India and are suspected to be counterfeit.

Operation Pangea is an international initiative that concentrates on illicit prescription medicines and is a prime example where collaborative working has resulted in thousands of illicit tablets being seized.



Thousands of illicit medicines being imported into Northern Ireland

## CASE STUDY

**DIAZEPAM SEIZURE**

Border Force Officers detected over 70,000 Diazepam tablets after examining a parcel that had arrived from India. The goods were referred to the PSNI who conducted house searches and detected more tablets at the premises. Numerous arrests were made in connection with the find.

## CASE STUDY

**1.22 MILLION CIGARETTES SEIZED IN FAST PARCEL DEPOTS DURING A 6-WEEK PERIOD**

1.22 million cigarettes were seized arriving through the fast parcel system during a six-week intensification exercise. Some were concealed within plastic containers and others were discovered within plastic drums containing pellets of fertilizer. A layer of pellets was used at the mouth of the cap so a cursory look would not draw any suspicion. Only once the layer of pellets were removed could cigarettes be seen. Each drum had to be cut open so the cigarettes could be removed. Concealments of cigarettes have also been found in disposable BBQs.



Packets of cigarettes hidden in plastic containers purporting to be drums of fertilizer

## CASE STUDY

**BENZOCAINE DETECTIONS  
(CUTTING AGENT)**

Border Force continues to detect Benzocaine, mainly imported from China.

Benzocaine is a cutting agent that is often mixed with Cocaine to 'stretch' it to increase the profits for drug dealers. During the year, Border Force seized 38kg of Benzocaine. Referrals have been made to the PSNI who have made numerous arrests into the imports.

## CASE STUDY

**COUNTERFEIT GOODS DETECTED  
AT THE BORDER**

Border Force Officers have seized substantial amounts of counterfeit goods that have been imported into Northern Ireland, including trainers, tee shirts, football tops, phones, chargers, face masks, ear pods, hair straighteners, watches and perfume. Items are often mis-described and bear no resemblance to what is detected. These goods are mainly imported from China. Referrals are made to the rights holder who decide what course of action they wish to take against the importer. A recent seizure was found to have packages dipped in vinegar to confuse the scent detector dogs.

## CASE STUDY

**CASH SEIZURE**

Border Force detected £10,000 in a parcel that had been mis-declared. A referral was made to the PSNI who have adopted the case. Investigations have shown links to dark web activity associated with criminality.

## CASE STUDY

**COUNTERFEIT PERFUME  
SEIZURE**

Border Force Officers detected over 4,600 bottles of counterfeit perfume during a routine examination at a postal depot. The goods had originated in China before being shipped to Poland via France and then to Northern Ireland. Brands included Hugo Boss, Paco Rabanne, Carolina Herrera and Creed. The goods, if they had reached the streets, were valued at £740,000.



Boxes of fake perfume being brought into Northern Ireland originally from China

### Op Dealbreaker

Under the Operation Dealbreaker banner, Border Force and PSNI took part in a joint operation that targeted numerous fast parcel depots across Northern Ireland. Joint teams of Border Force officers and detectives from the PSNI Organised Crime Unit supported by PSNI district officers and dog support visited the myriad of postal depots searching for illicit drugs, prescription medicines and any other illicit commodity. The operation was conducted over three phases during the year.

During these phases, the estimated street value of the drugs seized was approximately £3 million. Referrals from Border Force to the PSNI in this operation resulted in:

- 233 searches
- 216 arrests
- 80 people charged

### Safeguarding at the Border

Frontline staff in Border Force are provided with training in identifying potential victims of modern slavery, and guidance issued to staff sets out indicators of modern slavery, including forced labour. In addition, Border Force also has a network of specially trained Safeguarding and Modern Slavery (SAMS) teams who receive classroom training focussing on the knowledge and skills needed for this area.

### Op Limelight (FGM Awareness)

This operation aimed to increase public awareness of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Border Force officers worked alongside the PSNI's MSHTU and the PSNI's Child Protection Unit to distribute leaflets to the travelling public at Belfast International and Belfast City Airports on inbound and outbound flights during planned days of activity.

## FORWARD LOOK

Border Force will continue to engage with its partner law enforcement agencies and conduct planned and reactive operational activity utilising the assets and capabilities to frustrate organised crime.

Border Force continues to work with and assist other law enforcement departments to understand the implications of the Northern Ireland Protocol on serious and organised crime and how OCGs may adapt to vulnerabilities exposed by the Protocol.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you have any information regarding the smuggling of goods or people, please contact:

- CrimeStoppers on 0800 555111
- Customs hotline on 0800 595000

## 3.9 EXCISE EVASION AND TAX FRAUD

### THE THREAT

#### Fuel

Although on a reduced scale compared to previous years, fuel laundering remains the main organised crime risk for oils in Northern Ireland. Criminals use illegally manufactured equipment to attempt to remove the Government markers from rebated fuel and subsequently supply the resulting product as diesel. However, since Accutrace S10 was introduced in 2015, as an additional covert marker for rebated fuel, testing of fuel believed to have been through a laundering process has not identified any samples from which all of the rebated fuel markers have been successfully removed in a way that HMRC cannot detect. Nevertheless, HMRC continues to target laundering and the other main threat, fuel smuggling, as part of its comprehensive anti-fraud oils strategy. This includes routine and intelligence-led interventions throughout the fuel supply chain including inspections at oil suppliers, retail sites and of bulk storage at commercial users' sites. These checks are designed not only to verify the integrity of the fuel but also to educate those involved in the supply chain, particularly Registered Dealers in Controlled Oils (RDCO's) of their obligations during supply.

Going forward the changes in entitlement to use red diesel, which took effect in April 2022, will restrict the amount of red diesel in circulation. To facilitate business and ensure compliance, HMRC will continue to work with trade bodies such as the Northern Ireland Oils Federation and RDCOs to ensure that the supply of rebated fuel is restricted to those entitled to receive it, thus limiting the volume available to those intent on putting red diesel to illegal use. As fuel fraud is an all-island crime HMRC continues to collaborate with the Irish Revenue Commissioners and An Garda Síochána as well as working with the PSNI and NIEA to ensure that intelligence streams are maximised.

#### CASE STUDY

### FUEL LAUNDERING

In November 2021, HMRC officers, accompanied by PSNI officers, searched premises in the South Armagh area. A fuel laundering plant was located in a shed to the rear of a residential property. Found within the shed was 600 litres of laundered diesel, 10,300 litres of red diesel, 53 bags of bleaching earth and 12,500 litres of fuel laundering waste by-product, and various apparatus for use in the fuel laundering process. All fuel and associated equipment were seized, and the laundering plant was dismantled. Investigations continued with a view to prosecutions.



Fuel laundering plant in South Armagh

## Tobacco

The latest published UK tax gap figures estimates the loss to the Treasury from illicit tobacco at £2.5 billion.

In 2021/22, the smuggling of counterfeit cigarettes was assessed as the largest threat within tobacco fraud targeting the UK, followed closely by the smuggling of 'cheap white' cigarettes. UK inland illicit tobacco production and the smuggling of Genuine Non-UK Duty Paid (NUKDP) tobacco products also continue to pose a severe threat.

In addition to production in continental Europe, intelligence continues to identify OCGs intent on operating counterfeit cigarette and Hand-Rolling Tobacco (HRT) facilities in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The threat from the smuggling of 'cheap white' cigarettes, produced and shipped from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has continued to increase and has highly likely overtaken the threat posed from those manufactured in Eastern Europe.

The increase in direct maritime freight services from continental Europe to the Republic of Ireland continues to present an emerging risk. In the past two years, Revenue Commissioners have observed seizures of illicit raw tobacco increase by tenfold and cigarettes increase by fourfold. This indicates an increased level of threat to Republic of Ireland from OCGs and therefore presents a potential risk of cross border smuggling to Northern Ireland.

## CASE STUDY

### OPERATION SALIC TOBACCO FACTORY

In July 2021 HMRC, assisted by OCTF partners undertook enforcement action across Northern Ireland. This resulted in a production line for illicit cigarette production being located. Machinery, 11.69 tonnes of tobacco, 1.69 million cigarettes, filter rods capable of producing over 3 million cigarettes, and associated packaging and waste production were all seized. The investigation continued with HMRC working closely with partner agencies. The factory was capable of evading approximately £161 million in revenue per annum.



Illicit cigarette factory discovered by HMRC and OCTF partners

## Alcohol

Alcohol frauds involve the importing of alcohol into the UK without paying the required import duty. Alcohol fraud carried out by OCGs is a serious problem. The UK tax gap for alcohol fraud (both duty and VAT) is currently £1.2 billion (2020/21).

UK Transit Diversion is a favoured modus operandi (MO) used by OCGs. Fraud occurs when duty suspended (no duty owed until sold for retail) alcohol travelling from mainland Europe (EU) to their destination country of the Republic of Ireland via the UK, is diverted en route to an OCG-controlled location (wholesale and retail supply chains). UK Transit Diversion Fraud is committed through 'mirror loads'. This is where duplicate copies of the transit documents are given to multiple lorries. These documents are re-used if not intercepted at UK borders, to allow the 'mirror' loads to be diverted to OCG-controlled locations within the UK during the life of the transit documentation. In the alcohol sector, as part of the Tackling Alcohol Fraud at Source HMRC initiative, contact is maintained with a number of large producers with interests in the Republic of Ireland to help them understand the potential risks in alcohol supply chains.

Other MOs used by alcohol fraud OCGs include smuggling, where there is no attempt to provide alcohol movement documentation and UK Import Fraud, where, unlike UK Transit Diversion, the goods are destined for the UK but have been mis-described, or undeclared ABV strengths for example. The contribution of other modes of fraud such as counterfeiting are less significant.

Alcohol fraud is tackled at both UK borders by addressing policy regulating the movement of alcohol and the monitoring and interception of perceived risk movements, as well as with working with trade sectors to improve their knowledge with the aim to identify and counter fraudulent activity across their trades.

In 2020/2021 HMRC activity on alcohol fraud at UK borders protected £19.7 million through seizures and intercepted risk movements, which are forced to travel to their destination and therefore cannot be diverted onto the UK illicit market.

This reflects the focus on tackling the profitability of the crime at the borders, as well as ongoing inland disruption activity such as seizures and revocation of approvals for storage, wholesale and retail and inland interventions.

## CASE STUDY

### ALCOHOL CASE STUDY

In December 2021, there was a joint investigation between the Irish Revenue Commissioners, HMRC and with assistance from PSNI Specialist Teams, into an illicit alcohol manufacturing plant in County Armagh. As a result of the enforcement action taken at the property, the production machinery, packaging, bottle tops, 17,620 empty glass bottles and approximately 7,500 of suspected illicit alcohol product were seized.

This action resulted in illicit and potentially toxic alcohol from being distributed and sold in time for the lucrative Christmas and New Year market. The revenue loss prevented on this one seizure equates to £142,000. Ongoing investigations established that the plant may have been in operation for approximately two years and a Northern Ireland-based suspect was identified. HMRC continued to progress the investigation and share information with the Revenue Commissioners.



Illicit alcohol factory in County Armagh

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you have concerns or suspicions, call:  
HMRC HOTLINE 0800 788 887

## 3.10 NATIONAL SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME

### THE THREAT

Serious and organised crime (SOC) continues to have a chronic and corrosive impact on the daily lives of individuals and communities, businesses, public services and infrastructure.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) continues to lead the UK fight to cut SOC and to protect the public and the communities that are affected. The reporting year 2021/22 saw the context in which the NCA operates shift due to geopolitical events. Russia's invasion of Ukraine sharpened the UK's focus on kleptocracy (a government whose corrupt leaders use political power to expropriate the wealth of the people and land they govern); lives were increasingly put at risk in the English Channel; and criminal groups demonstrated their adaptability and resilience in the face of Covid-19 and associated restrictions. SOC almost universally has an online footprint.

### RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

In Northern Ireland, the NCA works closely with PSNI as well as local, national and international partners to protect the public from serious and organised crime by disrupting the most harmful organised crime groups and leading the wider law enforcement system to reduce the threat, and is seeking consistently to maximise the opportunities for further collaboration.

The NCA Director General (Operations) is the strategic lead for the NCA's relationships with partners in Northern Ireland and remains committed to ensuring that any activity takes into account the specific and differing legislative, operational and political requirements. The NCA continues to play an active role in the OCTF, as well as the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) and the Cross Border Joint Agency Task Force (JATF).

### RESULTS

Working alongside partners in Northern Ireland the NCA targets those offenders operating at the high end of high harm and adding value to partner-led investigations through specialist capabilities. This has resulted in a number of successes over the last year. Successes include:

#### Legislation

The NCA supported the Home Office in enacting the Criminal Finances Act 2017 in Northern Ireland, which was ratified via legislative process in June 2021. This Act amends the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002 and increases law enforcement's ability to prevent money laundering, tax evasion and corruption, combat the finance of terrorism and recover the proceeds of crime. It also includes Unexplained Wealth Orders (UWO), Account Freezing Orders (AFO) and Listed Asset Orders.

#### Firearms seized

A long running NCA project in response to Forward Venting Weapons being imported to the UK continues to achieve good results. Since the project's inception, over 600 firearms have been seized through operations conducted by NCA and UK law enforcement partners. This year the NCA has seized five weapons and arrested three suspects in Northern Ireland.

#### CASE STUDIES

##### COMMODITIES

- Supported by PSNI, in May 2021 the NCA seized a cache of firearms in Jerrettspass, which consisted of three handguns, three machine pistols, one MP5 Kurtz, one AK47 type rifle and three submachine guns, magazines and ammunition.
- In 2020, two suspects in Northern Ireland were arrested following a seizure of a SIG P20 handgun and 52 rounds of ammunition from the postal system sent from the USA. A small quantity of Cannabis and Class C drugs were also found. Both were charged and are awaiting trial.

As part of a Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) operation focusing on street and middle market drug dealers who fund paramilitary organisations, a parcel containing a quantity of Cocaine was seized in 2018 and two suspects were arrested. In May 2021, one of the offenders was sentenced to five and a half years imprisonment. £5,285 cash was forfeited and donated to the charity Addiction Northern Ireland.

## CASE STUDIES

### ECONOMIC CRIME

- Following a successful NCA investigation and four convictions relating to the production, importation and distribution of illicit anabolic steroids, a confiscation hearing was held in October 2021. The NCA identified that a UK-based OCG was responsible for at least seven bulk shipments that were destined for Belfast. Two of these were seized and found to contain in excess of two tonnes of illicit pharmaceuticals including steroids. A Confiscation Order of £702,000 has been paid by the relevant subject, avoiding a further five-year sentence. A Restraint Order was secured against another of the subjects to prevent the dissipation of £22.2 million worth of cryptocurrency.
- In January 2022, a Civil Recovery Order by consent was granted against property held by a subject suspected of being linked to a paramilitary group. The subject handed over two properties with a combined value of £150,000. The suspicion is that both properties were acquired with the proceeds of money laundering and fraud offences. The case was referred to the NCA by PSNI and investigated under the auspices of the Paramilitary Crime Task Force. In separate proceedings, the NCA also obtained a Cash Forfeiture Order under the POCA 2002 in respect of £2,500 in cash, which was originally seized during a search of the subject's home address in June 2020 and subsequently ruled to be proceeds of crime.
- During the course of a PCTF investigation, the NCA was granted a Civil Recovery Order by consent for £60,000 in September 2021. This was in settlement of a civil recovery investigation into assets held by a subject with suspected links to a paramilitary group. The settlement figure comprised the proceeds from the sale of a motorhome and an additional amount of £15,000, all suspected of having been acquired through the proceeds of fraud offences and money laundering.

## CASE STUDIES

### CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION (CSAE)

- After a successful NCA investigation, a male was sentenced to 32 years imprisonment with an extended eight years on licence once released, having targeted nearly 2,000 people globally to commit significant sexual offences. The perpetrator blackmailed victims worldwide, inciting them to horrifically abuse themselves, their siblings and children before selling the footage to other offenders. Masquerading as a stockbroker or rich businessman on 'sugar daddy' websites and social media platforms, he targeted vulnerable victims and tricked them into sending indecent images of themselves. An extensive NCA investigation found at least 196 victims in the UK, including one in Northern Ireland. The NCA worked with international partners to safeguard those who had been contacted.
- Following the review of an offender's digital devices for indecent images of children (IIOC) in South Wales in 2016, a further offender was identified as residing in Northern Ireland and arrested. NCA officers worked closely with PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service to build the case, which resulted in the offender pleading guilty to Possessing IIOC, Distributing IIOC, Possession of Prohibited Images of Children and of Extreme Pornography. In February 2022 the offender was sentenced to 12 months in custody that will be served as an enhanced combination order, comprising of 60 hours community service, a three year Probation Order, a five year Sexual Offenders Prevention Order (SOPo) and five years' registry on the Sexual Offenders Register.

## FORWARD LOOK

Over the next twelve months, the NCA will focus on four key priorities within Northern Ireland working closely with PSNI, DOJ and other partners, as laid out in the 2022-2023 NCA Annual Plan:

Operational Response	New and emerging trends	Policy level changes and the strategic intelligence picture	Community engagement
Exploring new joint operating models with PSNI and other law enforcement partners to tackle SOC in Northern Ireland and at its border.	Monitoring and responding to changes in SOC criminality using NCA's international reach and strong operational partnerships.	Working with the Northern Ireland Department of Justice in support of their Organised Crime Strategy.	Working with partners to increase NCA's reach and improve its messaging to Northern Ireland communities, better protecting them from harm.
Scoping opportunities for increased co-location and access to joint investigative capabilities.		Providing intelligence and threat assessments to support the OCTF and wider collaborative, multi-agency approach.	Alongside PSNI, improving its engagement with senior leaders and community groups.
Providing specialist capabilities to Northern Ireland law enforcement partners.			

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Report crimes or suspicious activity to:

- PSNI Telephone 101
- Via the PSNI website [www.psnipolice.uk/makeareport](http://www.psnipolice.uk/makeareport)
- Call CrimeStoppers anonymously on tel: 0800 555 111

If a child has been a victim of sexual abuse online or you are worried this is happening to a child you know, report it safely and securely via the Online reporting portal at [www.ceop.police.uk](http://www.ceop.police.uk)

For general online safety advice please visit [www.thinkuknow.co.uk](http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk)

Beware of fraud – Verifying a NCA officer

If someone has contacted you claiming to be an NCA officer and you are in any doubt as to their identity, you can verify their identity by calling:

- NCA Control Centre Tel 0370 496 7622

An NCA officer will NEVER:

- Ask for remote access to your computer via phone, email or online
- Ask you to verify your personal details such as passwords, account numbers or card details via phone, email or online.
- Ask you to transfer or hand over money via phone, email or online.
- Speak or act in a threatening manner.

## 3.11 ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

### THE THREAT

At the beginning of 2022 the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) identified a new impetus associated with a not so new crime - fuel laundering. This is the illegal process of removing a colour marker from rebated fuel.

As with most serious and organised crime, the motivation is financial. Historically, fuel laundering activities usually increase when fuel costs rise or disparities in currency occur providing a market for opportunistic individuals and businesses. However, this situation has been exacerbated with changes to rebated fuel taxation, the rising cost of fuel and living in general.

This crime not only creates unfair competition for legitimate businesses but it also deprives the exchequer of taxation revenue. This illegal process also produces significant quantities of a sludge-like oily waste, which is then surreptitiously dumped or abandoned on public roads, often leaking and causing pollution to the surrounding environment, which must then be remediated through the public purse.

In the first quarter of 2022, NIEA removed 79.6 tonnes of Fuel Laundering Waste (FLW) at a cost of £56,834. For the same period in 2021, NIEA removed 10.12 tonnes of FLW at a cost of £6,260. This is clearly unsustainable in the long term.



Typical trailer load of abandoned Intermediate Bulk Carriers (IBCs) full of Fuel Laundered Waste (FLW). Each IBC contains approximately 1 Tonne of FLW.

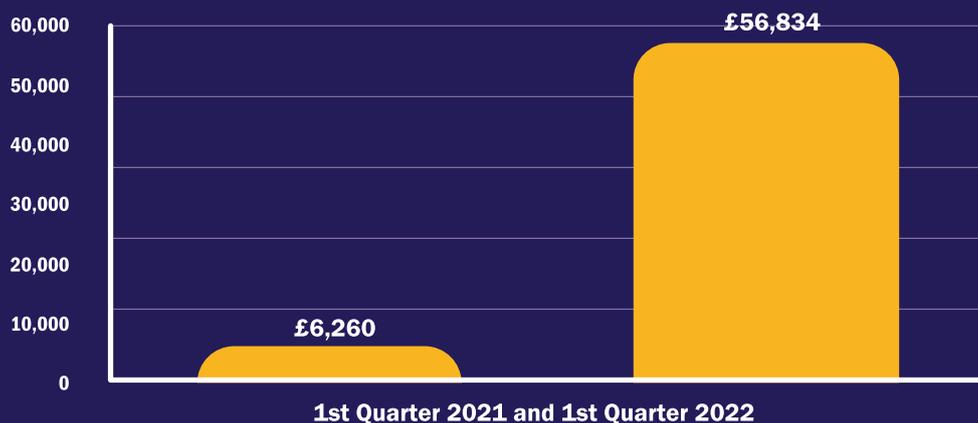


IBCs dumped on roadside near border area. FLW spilling onto roadway and into ground/waterways causing damage to land



Fuel Laundering Plant where rebated diesel fuel is laundered/washed through 'cat litter' or 'fullers earth clay' material to remove colour from product.

### COST TO REMOVE FUEL LAUNDERING WASTE £'S



## RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The NIEA Environmental Crime Unit seeks to achieve a 'compliant, crime free waste sector' reflective of the NIEA business priorities with the primary purpose of protecting and enhancing Northern Ireland's environment, and in doing so, deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth. NIEA investigates and prosecutes the most significant, serious, and persistent environmental waste offenders, which often involve organised criminality. These offenders inflict large-scale and long-term damage on the environment and deprive the local economy of considerable revenue. Their offending also negatively impacts on the ability of legitimate businesses that are regulated by the Agency, to compete in the waste management industry. During the period of this report, 1,135 incidents were reported, ranging from serious crime resulting in files prepared for the Public Prosecution Service to minor breaches resulting in Advice & Guidance or Fixed Penalty Notices.

As the protection of Northern Ireland's environment is the Agency's primary purpose, it is determined to eradicate this crime before it results in waste. Conviction of the perpetrators will hold them accountable for the clean-up costs promoting the 'polluter pays' principle, as well as disrupting and deterring criminal activity.

NIEA has established a dedicated Fuel Laundering Waste Task Force to work with partner agencies, through the OCTF (and beyond), to improve its knowledge, streamline resources and target the criminals behind the waste. NIEA will continue to analyse data to highlight investigative opportunities and target key threats whilst raising awareness in society through targeted liaison, leaflet drops and witness appeals.

Working in partnership has resulted in collaborative operational responses through coordinated joint tasking; reflecting shared priorities whilst facilitating unique areas of remit and thus providing a holistic response to organised crime in line the OCTF strategic objectives.

## RESULTS

During the reporting period, the NIEA secured one Confiscation Order totaling £177,512. This sum represented criminal benefit obtained by a defendant from waste offending.

During the same period, the NIEA managed seven Restraint Orders covering eleven entities with a combined value of £8,394,470.

The ability to pursue Confiscation Orders through the courts remains a vital tool for the NIEA in disrupting and preventing organised crime infiltrating the legal economy thus protecting the environment.

## FORWARD LOOK

NIEA is currently exploring the use of new powers for officers in the form of **Adult Cautions** to provide an effective alternative means of disposing of certain offences without recourse to the courts. This mechanism will allow NIEA to focus on the more serious criminal cases while offering a more graduated enforcement response.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

The NIEA needs the assistance of the public.

If you have any information which would help with the detection and prevention of environmental waste crime, this can be reported to the NIEA's incident hotline: Tel 0800 807 060.

Alternatively you can contact the NIEA's Enforcement Branch by email at: [enviromentalcrime@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:enviromentalcrime@daera-ni.gov.uk)  
Tel: 028 90569453

You may also report environmental crime through CrimeStoppers, 0800 555 111

## 3.12 ORGANISED CRIME AGAINST THE BENEFITS SYSTEM

### THE THREAT

The Department for Communities administers an annual benefit expenditure of just over £7.1 billion, and while the vast majority of these payments are correct, a small percentage are subject to fraud and error, leading to benefit over and underpayments for customers and putting pressure on the public purse.

The Department's Benefit Security Division (BSD) takes the lead in driving activity to minimise fraud and error. The Organised Fraud Unit (OFU) within BSD is responsible for undertaking investigations into allegations of potential organised criminality against the benefit and National Insurance Number (NINO) systems.

Overpayments as a result of customer fraud and error have risen over the past two years and now stand at £174 million, or 2.4% of total benefit expenditure. A significant proportion of these overpayments relate to Universal Credit (UC). The vast majority of UC claimants will self-serve online providing opportunities to make the journey easier for claimants. In addition, the use of a digital delivery channel for UC will also provide further opportunities to use analytical methods to identify system vulnerabilities therefore removing the potential for some fraud and error. This is important given technical capabilities for data sharing and analytics are evolving quickly, both within the benefit system and those seeking to defraud the benefit system.

OFU has continued to see a surge in cyber-related attacks on benefit systems, with hijacked identities and false identities accounting for the majority of cyber-related fraud detected. This has highlighted the requirement to build, maintain and develop further working relationships with other Government Departments and other agencies not only in Northern Ireland but throughout the UK, allowing for the identification of new trends and patterns to be established and investigated across all areas involved.

### RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Throughout 2021/22, OFU continued to focus on investigations into serious and complex fraud allegations. These include:

- Examination of false employment documents provided as evidence to support claims to Social Security Benefits either as proof of low income for Housing Benefit and Tax Credits or to satisfy the Habitual Residence Test;
- Issuing Intelligence Reports to other law enforcement agencies in order to detect and prevent criminality;
- Multi-agency collaboration and investigations with partners aimed at disrupting criminals who seek to exploit the NINO Gateway and the Social Security system through hijacked identities, counterfeit documents and identity fraud; and
- Joint collaboration with partner law enforcement organisations to identify individuals in receipt of benefit under an assumed identity, or those who have circumvented the NINO Gateway with a false identity to avoid prosecution or deportation.

### RESULTS

#### Financial Investigation Unit (FIU) 2021/2022

During 2021/2022, the Department's Financial Investigation Unit secured five Confiscation Orders to the value of £55,000, and received voluntary repayments amounting to £71,000, giving a total recovery of £126,000.

#### CASE STUDY

#### UNDECLARED SAVINGS

The FIU obtained a Confiscation Order for £15k+ against a man who failed to declare that he had savings of almost £200k whilst claiming means-tested benefits. The man claimed Jobseeker's Allowance on the basis that he was unemployed, declaring he had no capital or source of income.

## RESULTS

### CASE STUDY

#### IDENTITY THEFT

OFU carried out an investigation in relation to suspected fraudulent/hijacked identities being used to claim benefits within Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Through collaboration with the Department of Social Protection, counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, it was established that multiple claims had been made using suspected fraudulent/hijacked identities to claim benefits on both sides of the border.

OFU conducted surveillance on the locations where the benefit payments were withdrawn and established a pattern of withdrawals. CCTV footage was obtained to help identify some of the main suspects under investigation.

Due to the serious nature of the investigation, OFU contacted the PSNI outlining the investigation offences being committed and asked for assistance as an arrest operation was required.

The PSNI agreed to form a joint investigation and an arrest operation was put in place. On the day of the arrest operation OFU worked closely with the PSNI in identifying the suspects as they entered various locations to withdraw money, two arrests were made with the PSNI helping to complete the interviews under caution.

One suspect was released pending further investigations. The other suspect was charged with identity theft and making false declarations for the following benefits:

#### Overpayment amount

Pension Credit	£29,869
Employment and Support Allowance	£17,715
State Pension	£11,250
Housing Benefit	£8,001
Personal Independence Payment	£10,541
<b>Total fraudulent over payment</b>	<b>£77,375</b>

The case was heard in the Crown Court in May 2022, with the suspect receiving a three year custodial sentence of which half must be served in custody, with the remainder on licence.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

There are three methods to report benefit fraud:

- 1) Report benefit fraud online: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/report-benefit-fraud-online>
- 2) Benefit Fraud Hotline: 0800 9756 050
- 3) Write to: Benefit Security Division, The Mail Opening Unit, Limavady JBO, 9 Connell Street, Limavady, BT49 4AN

## 3.13 PROSECUTION DECISIONS

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) has a key role to play in prosecuting and disrupting the criminal activities of those involved in organised crime and to work with partners to bring organised criminals to justice.

### RESULTS

<b>RESTRAINTS:</b>	11 cases received
<b>CONFISCATIONS:</b>	20 Confiscation Orders granted totalling £891,825

#### Files Received with a complaint relating to the Relevant Offence Groups

(based on Files Received between 01/04/2021 and 31/03/2022)

Offence Group	Number of Cases	Number of Suspects
Money Laundering	261	315
Controlling Prostitution	3	4
Child Prostitution	-	-
Drugs	4,965	5,451
Drugs (excluding simple possession)	1,046	1,269
Human Trafficking	5	6

"-" refers to a count of less than 3.

#### Files Received from NIEA or HMRC

(based on Files Received between 01/04/2021 and 31/03/2022)

File Source	Number of Cases	Number of Suspects
NIEA	25	37
HMRC	12	25

See 'Offences' tab for list of offences considered for the purposes of this query.

#### Decisions Issued for offences relating to the Relevant Offence Groups

(based on Most Serious Decision Issued between 01/04/2021 and 31/03/2022)

Offence Group	Indictable Prosecution	Summary Prosecution	Diversion	No prosecution	Total
Money Laundering	205	47	3	49	<b>304</b>
Controlling Prostitution	-	0	0	4	<b>#</b>
Child Prostitution	0	0	0	4	<b>4</b>
Drugs	482	3,419	722	584	<b>5,207</b>
Drugs (excluding simple possession)	428	324	23	266	<b>1,041</b>
Human Trafficking	-	0	0	3	<b>#</b>

"-" refers to a count of less than 3.

"#" refers to a number >=3 which has been suppressed to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

#### Decisions Issued on Files from NIEA or HRMC

(based on Most Serious Decision Issued between 01/04/2021 and 31/03/2022)

File Source	Indictable Prosecution	Summary Prosecution	Diversion	No prosecution	Total
NIEA	12	30	0	9	<b>51</b>
HMRC	28	4	0	7	<b>39</b>



**ORGANISED  
CRIME**  
TASK FORCE

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# **ASSET RECOVERY SCHEMES**

(ARIS AND ARCS)



## CHAPTER 4 ASSET RECOVERY SCHEMES (ARIS AND ARCS)

One of the most common incentives to drive the activities of organised crime groups is the desire to make a profit and accumulate wealth. Law enforcement agencies respond to this by pursuing the proceeds of crime using asset recovery powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA). Under this legislation, the proceeds of crime can be recovered with criminal confiscation (this first requires a conviction), and using civil powers such as civil recovery, cash seizure and taxation powers. Removing profits that fund crime is a helpful disruption tool, breaking the cycle of criminal activity to prevent further offences occurring. Seizing the ill-gotten gains from organised crime sends out a clear message that crime does not pay.

Criminal confiscation is the most commonly used power under POCA. Confiscation proceedings can be brought following a criminal conviction involving financial gain or the laundering of criminal assets. Any criminal financial gain will be calculated during proceedings and the Court may make a confiscation order. In Northern Ireland, money surrendered to the courts under confiscation orders is allocated to the Northern Ireland Assets Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (NI ARIS Scheme).

### WHAT HAPPENS WITH CONFISCATION ORDER PAYMENTS?

Payment against Northern Ireland confiscation orders are transferred to the Department of Justice. These funds are split 50-50 on an annual basis.

50% of the total NI ARIS pot is shared between the agencies responsible for investigating, prosecuting and processing successful confiscation cases (see the table below) and is used to **invest in measures to support the further recovery of criminal assets and proceeds of crime to disrupt criminal activity and deprive criminals of their profits.**

50% is allocated to the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) to provide funding for projects often delivered in community settings, with the aim of **preventing crime or reducing the fear of crime.** ARCS funding is allocated under a grant application process managed by the Department of Justice.

The total value of criminal recovery receipts paid under confiscation orders during the 2021/22 financial year in Northern Ireland was just over £1m. This is an increase on previous years, in part due to the reduction in Covid-19 restrictions on Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS).

### ASSETS RECOVERY INCENTIVISATION SCHEME

The Table below sets out the value of confiscation order receipts returned to each law enforcement agency, the PPS and the Courts Service under the ARIS scheme in 2021/22.

Agency	ARIS Payments 2021/22
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	£132,985
HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)	£73,158
Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)	£3,924
Home Office – Immigration Enforcement	£1,252
Department for Communities (DfC)	£16,459
Public Prosecution Service (PPS)	£227,779
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS)	£50,618
Total Paid	£506,175

During 2021/22, the agencies used their incentivisation allocations for a number of purposes including:



#### PSNI

ARIS funding was used by PSNI to purchase specialist technology such as:

**E-Safe Offender Monitoring Pilot** which is an app securely installed on an offender's device(s) to monitor their online activity, including what is being input to the keyboard and what is viewed on screen.

**Drones** – with modern camera equipment to capture evidence, alongside conventional evidence gathering methods.

**Night vision and Thermal Imaging Camera** – which assists in identifying illegal cannabis factories, as well as providing assistance in the search for missing persons or those involved in a road traffic collision.

**Traffic Jam Subscription** – this is a cloud-based, purpose-built information discovery tool to detect and identify patterns in online data that assist law enforcement in focusing on the most serious forms of exploitation and to safeguard victims. The tool contains a near real-time archive of public, open web records from Adult Service Websites, including advertisements and customer reviews.



#### HMRC

In 2021/22, HMRC utilised POCA and asset recovery powers to recover over £66 million of the proceeds of crime across the UK including in Northern Ireland. This translated into ARIS funding of over £27 million (UK) to support an array of projects and additional capability. Funding was invested in specialist IT systems to support analysis of illicit finances, specialist legal support from Crown Prosecution Service partners and funding in support of international partnerships on fiscal fraud.



#### NIEA

In the reporting period, NIEA Environmental Crime Unit used monies received through ARIS to drive asset recovery activity and tackle crime through the funding of training, services and equipment.



#### DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES (DfC)

Incentivisation monies were used to part-fund the position of a Financial Intelligence Officer within the DfC unit.



#### NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY

Funding was allocated to purchase equipment and training for Immigration Enforcement and Criminal and Financial Investigation Officers, to support the ongoing efforts to target and disrupt organised immigration crime.



#### PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE

ARIS receipts contributed to staffing and operational costs to support the conduct of prosecutions and restraint and confiscation proceedings in organised crime cases.



#### NI COURTS AND TRIBUNAL SERVICE (NICTS)

The funding was used by NICTS to provide administrative support for Northern Ireland's courts and tribunals and to support an independent Judiciary.



#### Home Office Immigration Enforcement

This funding contributed to the purchase of equipment and training for Immigration Enforcement and Criminal & Financial Investigation Officers, to support ongoing efforts to target and disrupt organised immigration crime.

## ASSETS RECOVERY COMMUNITY SCHEME (ARCS)

The Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) seeks to re-invest in projects to prevent crime and/or reduce the fear of crime. Projects supported through ARCS also benefit one or more of, victims, communities and the environment.

In light of the significant impact of Covid-19, projects that needed an extended period to complete their projects from the previous three-year funding round were supported for a further six months, 15 projects in total.

As confiscation order receipts continued at lower than normal levels due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions, a six-month interim Scheme was launched. The opportunity to bid for funding was launched in August 2021 for the period October 2021 - March 2022. This interim Scheme, in the context of Covid-19 recovery, offered a grant of up to £12,000 to organisations over the six-month period - 73 projects benefited from funding (total funding was in the region of £440k).

In the reporting period, ARCS continued to fund a range of activities, including drug support projects, awareness and diversionary projects for young people, projects to prevent environmental crime and restorative justice initiatives.

Detailed examples of some of the projects funded during 2021/22 are provided, followed by a comprehensive list of all of the projects funded during the extended Scheme and the interim six-month Scheme.



Pupils taking part and gathering evidence at environmental “crime scenes”

### Ardaluin Regeneration Trust

Ardaluin’s “South Down Adventure Investigators” project was allocated ARCS funding of £11,800 for the period October 2021 - March 2022. This project had both community and environmental elements and it aimed to raise awareness and educate children on the issues of environmental crime. It worked with school age children, supported by their schools, to focus on located environmental crime in the coastal areas of Newcastle, Castlewellan, Annalong and Kilkeel.

108 pupils took part in this curriculum-based programme of experiential learning, consisting of six 3-hour sessions outside the classroom, linked to Key Stage 3 learning, relating to Protecting the Environment.

The children followed and solved clues in a crime scene scenario within the community and through investigation gained a better understanding of the issue. At the end of the project, the pupils agreed a continuing awareness-raising project to identify, challenge and address incidences of ‘low level’ damage and vandalism within the school site. They recorded examples of graffiti and damage caused to plants and trees. They followed this up through discussions with the school principal and caretaker to better understand the impact and cost for repairing the damage. They were also encouraged to propose recommendations for stopping any reoccurrences.



### Spanner in the Works

The Spanner in the Works theatre company's "No Boundaries" project was allocated ARCS funding totalling £8,000 (from October 21 - March 22) to commission four digital videos on domestic abuse with the aim of dispelling the traditionally held view that domestic abuse is only perpetrated by males against females.

Many victims of domestic abuse are often not aware that they are a victim, particularly if the abuse is psychological in nature rather than physical. By making more people aware that what they are experiencing is wrong, that it is a crime, and that support is available, they are more likely to feel confident in reporting it to the police, thereby breaking the cycle of abuse and preventing further crimes from happening.

The videos have been shared on social media to inform the public about the issue. The objective is to help tackle the stigma of domestic abuse; open debate on what goes on behind closed doors and empower victims to come forward and report to the police. The films are also being used in prison settings as a method to challenge perpetrators on their behaviour and reduce re-offending, encouraging them to re-think their actions by encouraging open discussions at workshops.

The videos can be used in schools and other settings across Northern Ireland as part of a process of engagement to inform young people about healthy relationships to prevent them from becoming victims or perpetrators of domestic abuse and coercive control in the future.



Screenshots from the "No Boundaries" videos on domestic abuse

## ARCS PROJECTS FUNDED DURING 2021/22 EXTENDED SCHEME

Organisation Name:	Title of Project:	Summary of Project	Allocation
Barnardo's	Families Matter - Beyond The Gate	To increase contact between prisoners and their families, establish relationships that are supportive and positive and increase imprisoned parents' level of awareness of children and family needs.	<b>£18,722</b>
Belfast Community Sports Development Network	Community Sports Support Hub	Establishment of a dedicated Community Sports Support Hub for inmates following release from prison.	<b>£28,961</b>
Community Restorative Justice Ireland	South & East Belfast, Community Restorative Justice Community engagement Project.	Develop a full-time presence across South and East Belfast with a focus on the communities of Short Strand, Market and Lower Ormeau.	<b>£17,031</b>
Dialogue For Diversity	Support and Encouragement for ex-Prisoners through mentoring	Mentor 30 ex-prisoners (identified pre-release) over a 3-year period to encourage and support them and refer to support agencies.	<b>£3,863</b>
Edgarstown Residents Association	'The Rising of Edgarstown'	Community relations project targeting young people. Primary school 15-20 participants & Senior Teens (Drop In) 12-18 participants aged 11-18yrs.	<b>£3,630</b>
Life Change Changes Lives	No Lost Cause	Provide an intergenerational diversionary and therapeutic community programme aiming to reduce offending by working with offenders and victims of crime. Activities include counselling for addiction, training, away days, daily lunch project & promotional video.	<b>£11,432</b>
Northern Ireland Alternatives	The PACE Project (Policing and Community Engagement	To build capacity and partnerships within local communities in the context of the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme.	<b>£7,442</b>
North West Play Resource Centre	Listen To Use (Crime Prevention Films)	Three stand-alone filmmaking projects engaging 40+ 'at risk' young people per year.	<b>£23,700</b>
Parenting NI	RESPECT Parenting Project	Multi-disciplinary support through the provision of the Parenting Helpline, Parenting Programmes and workshops.	<b>£18,784</b>
Poleglass Community Association @ Sally Gardens	Safer Communities	Short-term interventions at times of high tension and increased anti-social behaviour. Deliver 70 OCN accredited qualifications and a mentoring programme to 30 young people at risk aged 14 to 19.	<b>£1,940</b>

<b>Organisation Name:</b>	<b>Title of Project:</b>	<b>Summary of Project</b>	<b>Allocation</b>
Prison Arts Foundation (PAF)	Community Braille Service	Formally roll out a low-cost Braille printing and transcribing service, staffed by ex-offenders.	<b>£14,581</b>
Redeeming Our Communities (ROC)	ROC Community Action Groups	Capacity building in 8 communities where capacity is low - to empower residents, agencies, groups, churches and faith groups to work together towards safer, stronger communities.	<b>£10,171</b>
St. Peters Immaculata Youth Centre	TSB (Tackling Self-Harming Behaviours)	Project targeting 14-25 year olds involved or likely to be involved in crime through substance abuse in the Divis area. Small group support through drug management programmes.	<b>£6,459</b>
Top Ten Women's Drama Group	Outside In	To work with a group of young people on an anti-social behaviour project. Development of project through capturing community stories, creation of DVD resource.	<b>£2,218</b>
Vineyard Compassion	Link to Work	Supervised work placements and mentoring for NIPS and PBNI referrals - volunteering on a regular basis, positively contributing to the local community.	<b>£850</b>

## ARCS PROJECTS FUNDED DURING 2021/22 INTERIM SCHEME

Organisation Name:	Title of Project :	Summary of Project	Allocation
Ardaluin Regeneration Trust (ART)	South Down Adventure Investigators	Community/environment programme to raise awareness and educate children on the issues of environmental crime. Working with school age children in the South Down area.	<b>£11,800</b>
Artillery Youth Centre	Young men and Violence Project	Community/environmental regeneration and diversionary project aimed towards “at risk” young people in North Belfast to help improve local spaces and prevent anti-social behaviour. Training for young people.	<b>£6,980</b>
Ascertainment	Drink/Drug Driving Awareness Initiative	A Drink/Drug Driving Awareness Initiative targeting young people (16-24 year olds) to convey the risks associated with engagement in drink/drug driving via the delivery of interactive teaching sessions in schools, colleges, and training providers across Northern Ireland.	<b>£4,500</b>
Bannside Community Group		Inter-generational project, in Portadown, aimed at improving community safety, including monthly luncheon club and advice sessions on budgeting to contribute to alleviating isolation and fear.	<b>£450</b>
Bardic Educational Arts & Media	Scam Aware	To facilitate the production of scam awareness films aimed at older people and people with Alzheimers.	<b>£7,330</b>
Belfast Activity Centre	East Belfast Adventure Investigators	Community environment programme to raise awareness and educate children on the issues of environmental crime. Working with school age children in 3 schools in East Belfast.	<b>£11,800</b>
Berlin Swifts FC	Youth Engagement Community Safety Project	Football project in Shankill area, targeting boys and girls, to promote benefits of health and physical activity and aims to reduce risk of anti-social behaviour.	<b>£1,000</b>
Beyond the Battlefield	Compass	Working with ex-service people and providing information and awareness sessions to build relationships with PSNI and improve sense of belonging in communities and promote safety within the community.	<b>£1,000</b>
Bogside and Brandywell Initiative	Lane Project	Community regeneration project, in Bogside and Brandywell areas.	<b>£1,000</b>

<b>Organisation Name:</b>	<b>Title of Project :</b>	<b>Summary of Project</b>	<b>Allocation</b>
Bytes Project	Leading - nurturing young people from ASB to civic leadership	Youth engagement project. OCN qualification in youth work and youth justice system in the Ballymena/Harryville area to help prevent anti-social behaviour.	<b>£9,863</b>
Community Restorative Justice Ireland	South and East Belfast Community Restorative Justice Community Engagement	Training local community volunteers in south and east Belfast, and a street restorative programme aimed at young people.	<b>£5,000</b>
Community Sports Network	Stepping Up and Moving Forward	Project aimed at ex-offenders, offering OCN qualifications to participants in a supportive learning environment where participants can develop their skill base and self-esteem.	<b>£5,000</b>
Conservation Volunteers	TCV Men's Shed and Greens Skills Programme	Environmental based project in South Belfast including a "Men's Shed" programme for ex-offenders focusing on woodwork and horticulture skills. Provision of a youth programme targeting young people at risk of becoming involved in crime.	<b>£10,000</b>
Corpus Christi Youth Centre	Corpus Christi Community Safety project	Intensive course for young people to combat anti-social behaviour, including sessions on car crime, underage drinking and inter-generational work and OCN courses.	<b>£9,275</b>
Crisis Café CIC	Community Connections	Project based in Newry, aimed at young people (12-18 year olds) to reduce risk taking behaviours and anti-social behaviour by developing connections with the community and improving mental health.	<b>£3,000</b>
Dialogue for Diversity	Support and Encouragement for ex-Prisoners through mentoring	Project aimed at ex-prisoners, providing mentoring and support and advice on employment, housing and re-integration into communities and help to improve self-esteem.	<b>£2,949</b>
Dreamscheme	Safe Space to Thrive	Project in Belfast, aimed at improving inter-generational relations and providing youth diversionary activities.	<b>£3,500</b>
Dromintee GAC	Respect, Choices and Consequences	Project (in Jonesboro and Dromintee) to deliver substance abuse workshops to encourage young people to make better life choices to help prevent anti-social behaviour.	<b>£3,500</b>
Edgarstown Residents Association	We're All In Programme	Support for school age children and young people to help improve their mental health and discourage anti-social behaviour.	<b>£2,000</b>

<b>Organisation Name:</b>	<b>Title of Project :</b>	<b>Summary of Project</b>	<b>Allocation</b>
Enagh Youth Forum	Positive Pursuits	Project aimed at young people (aged 12-16) to help prevent anti-social behaviour by encouraging participation in community clean-ups and training.	<b>£6,475</b>
Falls Community Council	Community Safety Programme	Community safety project in the Falls area of Belfast, including community workshops, football camps and youth diversionary activities.	<b>£6,000</b>
Flourish NI	Empowerment to Freedom	A project to empower survivors of modern slavery and help reduce vulnerability.	<b>£10,150</b>
Forward South Partnership	Respect for our Holyland Community (Respect)	A community safety project in South Belfast to provide information about staying safe at night for different nationalities in variety of languages. Project also includes workshops on sexual harassment and burglary to help improve community safety.	<b>£10,792</b>
Glen Community Church	Community arts (youth engagement)	Project in the Newtownards area targeting young people from two areas, to build better relationships and safe spaces.	<b>£4,700</b>
Grace Women's Development Ltd	Safer Communities Project	Project, in North Belfast, including guided walks to help participants feel more socially connected and safer in the area. Encouraging respect for others living in the community.	<b>£3,000</b>
Hammer Youth Club	Youth Engagement Programme	Project aimed at young people to prevent anti-social behaviour in the Lower Shankill area. Social action sessions for local residents and community organisations and personal development group work and diversionary activities for young people.	<b>£3,500</b>
Headliners (UK) NI	Safe Spaces	Project in the north west, aimed at young people at risk of social exclusion. Sessions on crime in the wider world and how crime makes people feel.	<b>£11,650</b>
Healthy Kidz CIC	Talent Camp Programme	Project working in schools (primary and secondary), in the Lurgan area, on health and wellbeing, particularly targeting East Timor boys and girls. Promoting good relations and physical activity.	<b>£5,000</b>
Invisible Traffick NI	Modern Day Slavery Short Films	Production of modern slavery/human trafficking awareness videos to distribute to schools. Young people to write scripts.	<b>£11,250</b>

<b>Organisation Name:</b>	<b>Title of Project :</b>	<b>Summary of Project</b>	<b>Allocation</b>
Irish FA Foundation	Stay Onside - Football Against Violent Extremism	Project targeting marginalised young people (male and female) through medium of football to engage/upskill participants to deter them from offending and becoming involved in paramilitarism. Diversionary project to improve employability through the provision of skills. Working in an urban (East Belfast) and a rural (Loughgall) area.	<b>£9,000</b>
J29 Project	Get Away	Workshops for children and young people to build confidence and helping prevent those “at risk” of taking part in harmful or anti-social behaviour. Raising aspirations of participants by providing them with a wider perspective.	<b>£3,000</b>
Kilcooley Community Forum	Community Safety	Delivery of community safety workshops and a community plan in the Kilcooley (Bangor area), targeting disengaged people and helping to improve employability opportunities.	<b>£2,000</b>
Killyleagh Community Association	Our Town - A music project	Project in Killyleagh incorporating music therapy for at risk young people in order to tackle anti-social behaviour.	<b>£5,145</b>
Ledley Hall Boys and Girls Club Trust	Working Together for Better Outcomes	Inter-generational project in East Belfast including youth intervention to prevent anti-social behaviour and getting involved in paramilitarism. Awareness sessions on drugs and alcohol. Focus on relationships with local PSNI Teams and improving personal safety of young women.	<b>£2,675</b>
Ligoniel Improvement Association	Ligoniel’s Lifelong Learning Programme	Crime prevention sessions in Ligoniel (including in schools) with range of participants/residents. Providing advice on online safety, anti-bullying, inter-generational engagement, and environmental issues.	<b>£6,149</b>
Lisburn BMX Club	Community Revitalisation and Outreach	Project targeting young people in West Belfast by providing safe cycling advice, as well as encouraging physical activity - leading to improved mental health and transferable coaching skills.	<b>£1,500</b>
Lisburn YMCA	Xtreme Scheme	A youth intervention project aimed at risk young people, in the Lisburn area - interventions support young people to be resilient and find healthy alternatives to drugs and anti-social behaviour.	<b>£11,300</b>

Organisation Name:	Title of Project :	Summary of Project	Allocation
Love Life Counselling NI CIC	Education and Prevention of Crime in the Community	Lurgan-based project to support victims and those at risk of re-offending including a positive mental health programme for 16-39 year olds and group sessions on personal safety.	<b>£4,500</b>
Lyric Theatre	Stories from the Youth Justice System	Documentary (based on the Black Out play of young people in youth justice system/ custody) to make it more up-to-date, including interviews with victims of crime and to make it available online.	<b>£10,750</b>
Men's Action Network	Connections	Counselling sessions aimed at ex-offenders to help prevent re-offending focussed on safety and wellbeing.	<b>£6,000</b>
Mens Advisory Project	Help and Support for parents experiencing child to parent violence and abuse	NI-wide project to highlight inter-familial (child to adult abuse) abuse as a crime. Support and safety information for parents facing this crime.	<b>£4,000</b>
Methodist Prison Chaplaincy and Prison Arts Foundation	Women Prisoner Support Programme	Arts and skills programme aimed at female prisoners to help reduce re-offending by persistent offenders from across NI.	<b>£6,000</b>
Migrant Help	Wellbeing activities for victims of MSHT	To promote a safe community by providing vulnerable clients, who are victims of modern slavery, access to activities in the community where they can engage in activities beneficial to their physical and mental health.	<b>£2,000</b>
Monkstown Boxing Club	STREET Project (Strategy to Reach, Empower and Educate Teenagers)	Project aimed at "at risk" young people in the Monkstown area. Participants provided with counselling and mentoring to prevent them getting involved in paramilitarism, drug and alcohol abuse and to encourage engagement in positive lifestyle courses aimed at improving life skills and employability.	<b>£6,500</b>
MUSE	Breaking the Cycle	Project targeting people coming to the end of a custodial sentence in Magilligan Prison. Therapeutic interventions in prison and further sessions on release; offer of counselling and support to family members.	<b>£6,000</b>

Organisation Name:	Title of Project :	Summary of Project	Allocation
Newcastle Community Outreach	Newcastle Community Outreach Programme	Volunteer training for street outreach, to engage directly with 'hard to reach' young people in the Newcastle area. Young people supported and encouraged to reduce anti-social behaviour and improve employability opportunities.	<b>£2,000</b>
Nexus	Bystander Training delivery	Training in youth and community groups across NI for people who may witness an attack. Support to intervene before a crime is committed.	<b>£6,525</b>
NIACRO	Women & Offending Behaviour accredited qualification	Create an accredited qualification for other agencies by engaging female offenders to develop the qualification and deliver it as a pilot.	<b>£11,000</b>
Northern Ireland Alternatives	HYPER (Helping Young People & Police Engage Restoratively)	A restorative justice initiative to enhance relationships between young people and police. Includes open dialogue sessions with PSNI officers and community clean ups.	<b>£10,000</b>
Northern Ireland Muslim Family Association	Shoulder to Shoulder Engagement Programme	A multi-cultural project in South Belfast to improve social engagement between the local community and Muslim community.	<b>£2,000</b>
Oasis Caring In Action	Good Morning Oasis South and East Belfast	Project of visits to the homes of vulnerable people in South and East Belfast to provide them with home security devices.	<b>£9,750</b>
On Street Community Youth	Galliagh Youth Empowerment Project 2021	A street-based project working with young people, at night and at weekends in the Galliagh area. Aim to mentor and divert from anti-social behaviour leading to improved community safety.	<b>£10,000</b>
Parenting NI	Walking on Eggshells	Project to prevent child/parent violence delivered across NI. Aims to help parents who live in fear of violence or extreme manipulative behaviours from their children by helping them confront violence, deal with underlying aggression issues, and encourage behaviour change.	<b>£8,968</b>
Portadown 2000	Portadown Youth Diversionary Project	A diversionary programme in Portadown area for young people (10-14 year olds) including kids' mindfulness and parent support workshops. Provide activities to divert young people from potential anti-social behaviour and/or crime.	<b>£6,000</b>

<b>Organisation Name:</b>	<b>Title of Project :</b>	<b>Summary of Project</b>	<b>Allocation</b>
Portadown Wellness Centre	Empowering Our Community	A youth and adult project in Portadown area providing classes to learn skills (manufacture wooden products and gardening skills). Provides diversionary opportunities for participants and skills to improve their confidence and enhance the environment.	<b>£7,000</b>
Prison Arts Foundation	Engaging with their City	A diversionary project aimed at ex-offenders, providing creative workshops and art therapy to help them re-engage with their communities.	<b>£3,485</b>
Rainbow Child and Family Centre	Empowered Youth	A youth intervention and diversionary project in the Galliagh area, offering OCN training. It includes inter-generational workshops to build positive relationships and help reduce fear and teach respect.	<b>£4,000</b>
Redeeming Our Communities (ROC)	ROC - Community Participation Programme	Project to provide a ROC “conversation” event in the Greater Belfast area. A “conversation” is for a community identified as exhibiting low community capacity and limited community infrastructure. Aim is to identify a Community Action Group to address the issues identified.	<b>£11,994</b>
Saints Youth Centre	Loving Your Self & Knowing Your Neighbour	An early intervention youth project in West Belfast with hands-on learning to enhance the environment through community clean ups.	<b>£6,840</b>
Sir Hans Sloane Centre	A street art wall for young unengaged youth	Art project aimed at young people, in the Killyleagh area, to provide participants with skills and experience to improve the environment. Project also incorporates drug misuse talks.	<b>£3,500</b>
SOS NI	SOS Response Team	Training for volunteers who provide services during the night time economy at weekends (and afternoon weekday services) and at other key events.	<b>£9,000</b>
Spanner in the Works Theatre Company	No Boundaries	To develop 4 videos to raise awareness of domestic abuse, to educate young people and the wider public on what domestic abuse is and challenge stereotypes. Resource pack for youth clubs, women’s groups and vulnerable groups to assist with discussions on domestic abuse.	<b>£8,000</b>

<b>Organisation Name:</b>	<b>Title of Project :</b>	<b>Summary of Project</b>	<b>Allocation</b>
St Columbs Park Reconciliation Trust	Growing Community in Nature	Range of community programmes to bring together families and change perceptions about parks and safety issues. Environmental and inter-generational elements to the project.	<b>£5,000</b>
St Peters Immaculata Youth Centre	Introducing the Green Environment	Project in the Falls area of West Belfast to provide crime and victim awareness sessions as well as health and well-being workshops to help divert young people from anti-social behaviour and improve their mental health.	<b>£6,000</b>
Start360	Changing Course	Belfast based project offering Youth Work training. Improve learners own attitudes and contribute to improved employment opportunities.	<b>£7,500</b>
The Right Key (CIC)	The Right Key Counselling and Creative Therapies Programme	Counselling and creative therapy for people serving community sentences, probationers and ex-prisoners.	<b>£8,988</b>
The Y Zone	Youth-Hut Initiative	Project working with young people in the Portadown area who are deemed "at risk". Provide citizenship and intervention initiatives to prevent anti-social behaviour.	<b>£4,500</b>
Three Ways Community Association	Standing Together	Deliver community awareness activities in the Newry area to divert young people from anti-social behaviour. Provision of home security packs to local residents.	<b>£1,800</b>
Turnaround Project	Big Loop Bikes	Work in prisons to improve employment opportunities for offenders.	<b>£6,000</b>
Ulster Council GAA	Ulster GAA "Consent" Campaign	Awareness campaign to reduce sexual offending across NI, promoted by a local ambassador. Aim to ensure that people become more aware of consent.	<b>£12,000</b>
Vineyard Compassion	Mentoring of offenders in Link Logs	Work in prisons, mentoring offenders and providing upskilling through wood manufacturing processes.	<b>£6,000</b>
West Winds Development Association	Youth Engagement (football coaching)	Football-based project in Newtownards area (targeting Y7 - Y10 children), in partnership with other groups, community church and primary school. Aims to bring local young people together to build relationships and raise self-esteem.	<b>£500</b>

Organisation Name:	Title of Project :	Summary of Project	Allocation
Women's Aid Armagh Down	Safe at Home	Provision of home security cameras for people who have suffered domestic abuse in the local area.	<b>£3,000</b>



**ORGANISED  
CRIME**  
TASK FORCE

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# OCTF PUBLIC OUTREACH



## CHAPTER 5 OCTF PUBLIC OUTREACH

A key priority for partners on the OCTF is to make Northern Ireland a hostile environment for organised criminals by understanding the threats and emerging organised crime trends in order to predict actions required and facilitate proactive responses.

To help raise awareness of the threat from and impact of organised criminality, it is critical that across a range of partners every effort is made to inform the public about organised crime trends and make them aware of the work of OCTF. The Task Force remains focused on issues affecting people and communities and promotes awareness raising through stakeholder groups, public outreach opportunities and other events.

### OCTF AT BALMORAL SHOW IN 2021

The OCTF joined with the Rural and Business Crime Partnerships at the Balmoral Show in September 2021. The event provided the opportunity for the Department of Justice, law enforcement agencies and other partners to engage directly with the public to raise awareness of the range of criminal activity, which threatens lives and livelihoods in Northern Ireland. A specific crime type was highlighted on each of the four days and representatives from PSNI, Border Force, Trading Standards, and HMRC as well as Department of Justice officials were on hand to help discuss how individuals, communities and businesses can better protect themselves against crime.

OCTF partners engaged with the public to raise awareness on key community safety messages and promote effective crime prevention techniques, for example, encouraging trailer and farm machinery marking to help protect property and assets, and to report suspicious activity to the PSNI. As well direct engagement, a range of OCTF branded promotional goods were distributed alongside relevant information leaflets and helpline numbers.



OCTF partner agencies (DOJ, PSNI and Border Force) represented at the Balmoral Show



Ministers of Justice and Health and PSNI representative attend Operation Pangea's media event, showing the illicit pharmaceutical seized during the week of action

## OPERATION PANGEA

Operation Pangea is a global, INTERPOL coordinated operation to disrupt the illicit online supply of medicines. The OCTF Drugs Sub Group oversees the Northern Ireland contribution to the operation.

Operation Pangea XIV took place in a week of action from 18 - 25 May 2021 and involved many countries, acting together to safeguard public health. The INTERPOL coordinated actions aimed to disrupt the illicit online supply of medicines as well as raise awareness of the significant health risks associated with buying medicines, counterfeit and illicit pharmaceuticals and medical devices on the Internet.

The Northern Ireland element of the operation involved the coordinated efforts of a number of agencies including the PSNI, Border Force and medicines enforcement officers, who remain committed to combatting this serious problem.

Among the drugs recovered in Northern Ireland were diazepam, pregabalin, methadone, modafinil and prescription painkillers. During follow-up searches seven people were arrested in connection with the seizures leading to further investigations.

A media event took place in June 2021 where the Justice Minister, Health Minister, and PSNI used the opportunity to highlight the disruptive outcome of the operation. The joint announcement of the success of the operation highlighted the benefits of working together locally and globally and reinforced messages to the public about the significant risk to health of buying and taking medications bought online.



Minister of Justice launches the 2020/21 OCTF Annual Report at the PSNI's Cyber Crime Centre

## LAUNCH OF THE OCTF ANNUAL REPORT AND THREAT ASSESSMENT 2020/21

The Organised Crime Task Force Annual Report and Threat Assessment 2020/21 was published on 9 February 2022. The Minister of Justice highlighted the publication of the report during a visit to the PSNI Cyber Crime Centre. A press release and social media coverage promoted the launch of the report as part of the Minister's visit to the Centre.

As well as highlighting OCTF successes, the annual report is a useful way to provide advice and guidance to the public about the practical steps they can take to protect themselves from organised crime and to mitigate the harm caused to businesses and communities.

## FINANCIAL INVESTIGATOR WORKSHOPS

Financial Investigator Workshops were held for approximately 100 Accredited Financial Investigators from various law enforcement agencies, including PSNI, HMRC, NCA, NIEA, the Department for Communities, the PPS, and NICTS.

Trainers from the Proceeds of Crime Centre in the NCA provided guidance on the use of new asset recovery powers introduced by the Criminal Finances Act 2017 (CFA 2017) commenced in Northern Ireland in June 2021.

The workshops provided an insight into the new provisions and lessons learned from cases in England and Wales. The aim was to build capacity among Financial Investigators across a wide range of law enforcement agencies following the introduction of new legislation in Northern Ireland and to provide an opportunity to network and share best practice.

## APPENDIX 1: OCTF PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

- Allied Irish Bank
  - An Garda Síochána
  - Anti-Counterfeiting Group
  - Back Four
  - Bank of Ireland
  - Belfast City Council
  - Border Force
  - Brand Solutions
  - Centre for Secure Information Technologies, QUB
  - CiSP
  - Citi Bank
  - Charity Commission NI
  - Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
  - Community Pharmacy NI
  - Confederation of British Industry
  - Criminal Assets Bureau
  - Cyberrisk
  - Cybit
  - Danske Bank
  - Deloitte
  - Department for Communities
  - Department for the Economy
  - Department of Education
  - Department of Finance
  - Department of Health
  - Department of Justice
  - Diageo
  - Federation Against Copyright Theft (FACT)
  - Federation of Small Businesses NI
  - Firmenich
  - Foods Standards Agency
  - Forensic Science Agency NI
  - Fujitsu
  - G4S
  - Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA)
  - Get Safe Online
  - Health and Safety Executive NI
  - HM Revenue and Customs
  - Home Office (Immigration Enforcement and UK Visas and Immigration)
  - Imperial Tobacco
  - Intellectual Property Office
  - Invest NI
  - Japan Tobacco International
  - Law Society
  - Migrant Help
  - National Crime Agency
  - National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC)
  - Natwest Bank
  - NI Chamber of Commerce
  - NI Courts and Tribunal Service
  - NI Cyber Cluster
  - NI Cyber Security Centre
  - NI Environment Agency (DAERA)
  - NI Policing Board
  - NI Prison Service
  - NICVA
  - Philip Morris International
  - PSNI
  - Post Office Limited
  - Price Waterhouse Coopers
  - Probation Board NI
  - Public Health Agency
  - Public Prosecution Service NI
  - Queen's University Belfast
  - REACT UK
  - Retailers Against Crime
  - Retail NI
  - Revenue Commissioners
  - RMS Group Services
  - Royal Bank of Scotland
  - Royal Mail
  - Safer Cash
  - Security Industry Authority
  - Sky
  - Strategic Planning and Performance Group
  - Supergroup
  - TMA
  - Trading Standards Service
  - UK Human Trafficking Centre
  - Ulster Bank
  - Ulster University
  - Women's Aid
- (Contacts with others not listed when appropriate)

## APPENDIX 2: NI EXECUTIVE PROGRAMME ON PARAMILITARISM AND ORGANISED CRIME (EPPOC)

### PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Recent data from the NI Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC) suggests that paramilitarism directly affects between 15 and 30% of the population in Northern Ireland. The EPPOC Programme (the Programme) is an ambitious, innovative cross-Departmental and multi-disciplinary initiative designed to address this complex problem and to create **safer communities, resilient to paramilitarism, criminality and coercive control**.

The Programme has operated since 2016 and is funded jointly by the NI Executive and UK Government. Phase 1, which ran to March 2021, focused on delivering 38 wide-ranging commitments in the original Executive Action Plan on paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime.<sup>7</sup> A comprehensive review of the Programme took place in 2020, leading to a new phase of the Programme (Phase 2) that started in April 2021. The Programme is currently funded until 2024.

In the financial year 2021-22, the Programme invested approximately £16.1 million across a number of projects. Through a mix of innovative local expertise and internationally recognised methods, projects are helping people at risk of paramilitary exploitation through early, preventative interventions, as well as providing bespoke support and signposting for people already suffering harm. The Programme operates throughout Northern Ireland and projects vary in scale, focus, location, target group and methodology depending on assessed need. Projects must offer some form of 'additionality'.

Projects are delivered through a network of 7 NI Civil Service (NICS) Departments, 22 statutory agencies, over 50 public sector and 180 community/voluntary sector organisations. Programme funding is ring-fenced<sup>8</sup>. Cross-Executive governance and scrutiny structures allow oversight from project level through to strategic level (overseen by the Head of the Civil Service). The Programme is also scrutinised externally by the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC), created under the Fresh Start Agreement to monitor progress on tackling paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland.

Phase 2 of the Programme requires individual projects to work together to deliver shared and measurable medium and long-term objectives. This approach is explained more fully below. Individual project outcomes are important but so, too, are outcomes that increase collaboration and shared understanding among delivery partners. These relationships and insights should help to ensure that the positive impact of the projects extends beyond the lifecycle of Phase 2 and that any gaps or duplication in service provision are identified and addressed.

Some projects have been operating for a number of years; others are pilots or 'proof of concept' initiatives. The projects cover a wide spectrum – ranging from early years family support to the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community. Projects tend to fall into one of three categories:

**Primary interventions:** projects designed to prevent harm before it occurs. These are generally broad-based – a typical example is the WRAP Project: a wrap-around, flexible education service for children and young people facing significant challenges in four geographical areas.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ircommission.org/sites/irc/files/media-files/executive-action-plan-for-tackling-paramilitary%20activity.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> For Phase 2 (2021-24), the Executive has committed £8m per year. The UK Government has committed c£5m per year plus £10m over three years, ring-fenced (from NDNA funds) for the Executive Office-led Communities in Transition projects. NI Executive Funding has yet to be finalised for 24/25. The UK Government has indicated that it will provide £5m.

This initiative focusses on educational under attainment and, in particular, on the impact of socio-economic deprivation on children and young people's outcomes. Influencing community attitudes to education and raising aspirations is key to reducing educational underachievement, which, in turn, helps to address the prevalence and impact of paramilitary activity and organised crime.

**Secondary Interventions:** projects that deal with harm immediately – as it is happening – and which help to stabilise the situation and prevent it worsening. These projects apply to a smaller group of people. An example is the Mid and East Antrim Youth Support Hub: this project involves the creation of a multi-agency youth stream of the Mid and East Antrim Support Hub to support young people (up to 25 years) who are at risk of being involved with, influenced by, or exploited by paramilitary gangs.

**Tertiary Interventions:** projects designed to minimise the long-term impact of paramilitarism and organised crime and prevent further victimisation. These are the most narrowly focused and bespoke types of intervention. Examples include the Aspire project: an important initiative targeting marginalised men who are most susceptible to paramilitary / criminal influence and, therefore, most at risk of becoming involved in paramilitary or criminal activity. The project helps them to develop coping mechanisms and increase their resilience.

Project investment is an important way of addressing the complex issue of paramilitarism but wider factors are also critical to success. The Programme has identified six strategic enablers as follows:

**Leadership** – demonstrating clear political leadership;

**Partnerships & Alignment** – consciously aligning with other strategies ;

**Communications** – communicating that violence is preventable and not inevitable and 'what works';

**Locality working** – maximising the use of existing resources in particular areas and drawing on local expertise and connections;

**Research & Best Practice** – harnessing data/evidence to understand the problem and to develop solutions that work and provide a sound basis for investment; and

**Governance** – involving cross-sectoral structures that ensure the programme has an impact after the lifecycle of funding.

At its core, through two workstreams (encompassing 'harm in the here and now' and 'early, preventative interventions'), its primary, secondary and tertiary-based interventions, and its six strategic enablers, the Programme has adopted a 'public health' approach to violence reduction.<sup>9</sup> The Programme exhibits many of the characteristics of violence reduction units that are working across the UK and internationally.<sup>10</sup> Although the Programme draws on national and international best practice, its approach is bespoke to NI and reflects the high levels of trauma within communities as well as the complex social, economic and political context. A system-wide approach like this makes it easier to identify gaps and duplication when it comes to interventions and ensures a more effective use of public funds.

<sup>9</sup> Executive programme for tackling paramilitary activity and organised crime | Northern Ireland Executive

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.svru.co.uk/public-health-approach/>

### Benefits data

The emerging Programme data and evidence gathered in 2021-22 confirms the findings of other studies that point to significant levels of trauma in communities where paramilitary activity is prevalent, and among those who are receiving or seeking support from the Programme. For that reason, the Programme is seeking to be trauma informed in all that it does; this means giving due consideration to the impact that trauma has on victims of paramilitarism, as well as those who help and support them.

Throughout 2021, data at project, programme and population level has been gathered to help with understanding the Programme's impact. This data is currently being considered but initial analysis provides a sense of the scale of the support provided at project level during **2021/22**. Some examples are set out below.

- Over 7,000 people were assisted through 4 place-based projects to support young people and their families in education.
  - 3,282 young people were supported through youth work based diversionary or wider support projects, including 425 at acute risk and 244 young people diverted from involvement in bonfires.
  - 491 young men who were vulnerable to paramilitary involvement or harm were supported through social work and community mentoring.
  - 18 young people at acute risk of paramilitary harm, or who were under threat from paramilitaries, were supported by a multi-agency project in one geographical area.
  - 354 victims of paramilitary violence were supported. This includes 21 children referred by the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) to statutory services; as well as 128 young people supported in one hospital emergency department, and 205 through a project to support those under threat. (It is anticipated that an additional 75 victims of paramilitary style attacks will be provided with bespoke support in 2022/23).
  - 254 women were supported to develop their skills in community leadership and 117 women in the criminal justice system to develop their life and social skills and help them reduce their vulnerability to paramilitary exploitation.
- Hundreds of young people were supported through community projects and sport; these are currently finalising their evaluations.
  - Hundreds of people were supported through community projects to increase community resilience; these projects will be reporting over the summer of 2022.

Projects are also capturing information on the scale of the issue and the level and type of assessed need. For example:

- At a population level, Programme data suggests that between 15 and 30% of the population in Northern Ireland live in an area which experiences paramilitary fear and intimidation. There is a slightly higher proportion of young people who report that paramilitaries create fear and intimidation in their area than adults.
- Projects are reporting levels of exposure to paramilitary violence among participants that is higher than the population level trends would suggest we should expect. This could be that a participant has been the victim of such violence, has witnessed violence, or has a family member who is the victim.
- The level of trauma and adversity amongst the participants on projects under the Programme is higher than would be expected in the general population.
- Some projects are also evidencing large numbers of participants with probable Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) because of exposure to paramilitary violence.
- Projects are working with individuals with highly complex needs, including mental health issues, addiction issues, experience of trauma, and poor family, community, and peer support.
- Paramilitary activity and violence is concentrated in specific localities across Northern Ireland.
- There is a downward trend (seen in multiple data sources) in the number of intimidations and in the types of paramilitary activity that cause the highest harm, including murder and violent assaults and shootings.
- The Engage project, has seen a reduction in the levels of probable PTSD among participants, and a reduction in the risk taking behaviours of young people, including those intending or expecting to be involved in violence, from 43% to 3%. The project supports young people using youth work methodologies run by the Education Authority. It promotes life and social skills development for participants, as well as positive change in their aspirations for their own lives and for their community and peer groups. It also promotes improvement in the mental health of participants.
- There has been an increase in the ability of Aspire clients to live a crime free life. Aspire is a project, run by the Probation Board Aspire in conjunction with its Community and Voluntary Sector partners, to support young men between 16 and 30 at risk of paramilitary involvement. The project promotes life and social skills development, as well as substance misuse/wellbeing. Clients find improvements in their mental health, wellbeing, drugs, alcohol, use of time and offending behaviours.
- The Developing Women in the Community project has seen improvements in self-efficacy and the locus of control, as well as a reduction in anxiety, depression, and probable PTSD.
- There have been significant developments in learning and best practice in relation to support for people at risk.

While the long-term population level measures have not changed significantly, projects are delivering outcomes that will have positive impacts on individuals and communities and will reduce the ability of paramilitary groups to cause harm in the long term. For example:

Of course, the Programme alone cannot solve what is a highly complex problem. Much of Phase 2 activity will be focused on sharing best practice; demonstrating the importance of understanding and proactively addressing paramilitarism beyond the Programme; and understanding 'what works' and scaling up that activity beyond the Programme.

**How do I find out more about the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime?**

To find out more about the Programme, please visit:

<https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/articles/executive-programme-tackling-paramilitary-activity-and-organised-crime-0>

For information about the Programme's public awareness campaigns, please visit:

[www.endingtheharm.com](http://www.endingtheharm.com)

To follow us on Twitter visit:

[www.twitter.com/endingtheharm](http://www.twitter.com/endingtheharm)



## APPENDIX 3: USEFUL CONTACTS

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Organised Crime Task Force

[www.octf.gov.uk](http://www.octf.gov.uk)

PSNI

[www.psnipolice.uk](http://www.psnipolice.uk)

CrimeStoppers Northern Ireland

[www.crimestoppers-uk.org/in-your-area/northern-ireland](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org/in-your-area/northern-ireland)

Border Force

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/border-force](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/border-force)

Department for Communities

[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)

Department of Justice

[www.justice-ni.gov.uk](http://www.justice-ni.gov.uk)

HM Revenue and Customs

[www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)

Immigration Enforcement

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/immigration-enforcement](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/immigration-enforcement) [www.gov.uk/report-immigration-crime](http://www.gov.uk/report-immigration-crime)

National Crime Agency

[www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk](http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk)

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

PCSPs (Policing and Community Safety Partnerships)

<https://www.pcsp.org>

Trading Standards Service

[www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/consumer-affairs/trading-standards-service](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/consumer-affairs/trading-standards-service)

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