WHAT IS ORGANISED IMMIGRATION CRIME?

The UK Government is aware that organised immigration crime exists in migrant camps, with people smugglers using them as recruiting grounds. You may not directly encounter organised immigration crime, however it is a real risk and understanding the basics will help you to keep yourself, refugees and migrants safe.

What is organised immigration crime?
People smuggling is part of organised immigration crime, which also includes other illegal actions such as the facilitation of fraudulent travel documents.

What is the difference between people smuggling and human trafficking?
People smuggling is transporting a person, usually across a country border, without legal permission or documentation. The law assumes the permission of the person being smuggled, therefore they will be complicit in the act. People smuggling is a crime against the state.

Human trafficking is transporting a person without their permission or valid or authentic documentation, with the intention of exploiting them by force, fraud or intimidation. People who are trafficked are usually not complicit in this activity. Human trafficking is a crime against the person.

How does organised immigration crime affect migrants?
Migrants are easy victims for organised criminal groups who exploit their desperation by offering services in exchange for money, labour or sexual acts. The services they offer are extremely dangerous, illegal and unlikely to be successful.

Criminal groups are involved in people smuggling in several different ways, including producing and supplying false travel documentation and smuggling people to Europe and the UK.
Smugglers exploit migrants for large sums of money. They are not concerned with their welfare and will push them towards dangerous situations with no regard for their comfort, safety or survival.

**Why is the UK a popular destination?**
The UK has a reputation for being inclusive. It is also a challenging and therefore more expensive route, so smugglers are likely to heavily promote the UK without regard for other countries a migrant may prefer to travel to.

**How does organised immigration crime operate?**
Organised immigration crime groups may comprise loose networks of independent facilitators of differing nationalities, or be coordinated and relatively large. However, individuals involved in people smuggling may not always be part of a network. Their smuggling activity may be an extension of their legitimate business (eg lorry driver/fisher/money service business/hotelier). Criminals might also work with each other to provide different services along a migrant’s journey.

A migrant may be approached by an ‘Agent’ working for a criminal smuggling group at any point in their journey. Migrants may also approach smugglers themselves if they feel there is no alternative.

Organised immigration crime can occur in a number of ways, eg through corruption, false documentation, money transfer services, accommodation provision, social media, the internet and associations within camps.

Smugglers often advertise their services to migrants on social media, creating pages which look like legitimate travel agents offering trips and tours.

**What are the risks for refugees and migrants?**
People who undertake irregular migration may do so without fully realising the stark realities:

- A migrant may be smuggled through many countries on the way to Europe. Each country contains hazards and risks, as well as its own border force, which means migrants continually risk capture, detention and deportation along the way.
- Modes of travel are often unsafe and overcrowded.
- Traffickers and smugglers take money and do not deliver on their promises. They may appear to befriend migrants and act in their interests, but are only interested in gaining a paying customer and their information is unreliable.
- Selling people into slavery to pay their debts or to earn money for the next leg of the journey is common.

Smugglers exist, and if you encounter any while volunteering you should share your concerns with a long-term volunteer or named person from a known organisation.

If you have reason to believe that someone is a smuggler or trafficker, it could be dangerous to intervene. Instead, report your concerns to the police.

For more information on smuggling, please read the [What do I need to know about UK asylum and irregular migration?](#) and [How to help refugees and migrants avoid harm from organised immigration crime](#) factsheets.

[Human Rights Watch](#) have also compiled some useful questions and answers on this topic.

In addition, [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) offer further information on human trafficking and smuggling.