

ISSUE 3 - 2023

# **the Investigator**

ESSENTIAL LEARNING FOR TODAY'S INVESTIGATORS



**Inside  
Crypto Conviction  
Operation Sotaria  
Spotlight on Smuggling  
NCA Strategic Assessment**

# 9th National Analyst's Annual Conference

## 23-24 April 2024

### Kassam Stadium Oxford UK



Welcome to the latest issue of our new look magazine that aims to highlight latest thinking and best practice in the world of criminal investigation.

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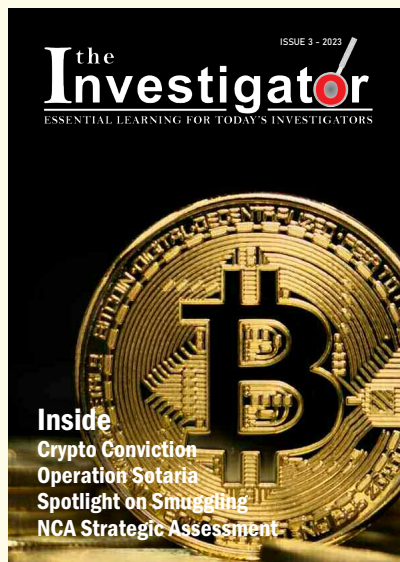
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# CONTENTS

## ISSUE 3 - 2023

**5 Operation Sotaria:** New approach to investigating and prosecuting rape and sexual offences rolled out to police forces in England and Wales

**8 Victim Voice:** Vulnerable fraud victims are now going to receive specialist advice and support following the roll out of special units across the UK by Action Fraud.

**11 Spotlight on Smuggling:** The market for migrant smuggling services is reaching alarming new heights and requires urgent action according to a new report by Europol.

**14 Crypto Conviction:** Investigators from the Tarian Regional Economic Crime Unit and their colleagues from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) used special civil powers to recover more than £750,000 of cryptocurrency.

**17 NCA Strategic Assessment:** The National Crime Agency has published its National Strategic Assessment for 2023 which highlights key threats and challenges in the investigation of serious and organised crime.

**19 Operation Nasil:** Interpol has undertaken a two-year global operation to bring to justice criminals operating networks of child sexual abuse websites designed to generate profits from advertising.

**22 Covid Conmen:** Covid Conmen: a pair of fraudsters have been jailed for cashing in on the covid pandemic by selling hundreds of illegal testing kits.

**25 Right Care, Right Person:** The College of Policing has created an innovative toolkit to support forces when responding to mental health incidents to ensure they provide the vulnerable with care and support.

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# Operation Soteria

## **New approach to investigating and prosecuting rape and sexual offences rolled out to police forces in England and Wales.**

Police and prosecutors have teamed up with leading academics to devise what they have described as 'transformative new approach' to rape investigations and prosecutions. The new approach puts victims' rights and needs at its centre.

Working closely with 19 pilot forces, leading academics have developed two new National Operating Models, one for the investigation of rape and one for the prosecution of rape, and all police forces and CPS Areas in England and Wales have committed to implementing them.

### **Transformative**

This means that all 43 territorial police forces across England and Wales and the 14 Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Areas will begin

implementing a transformative new approach to rape investigations and prosecutions, improving support for victims and putting the focus on the suspect.

Known as Operation Soteria, and piloted in 19 police forces and nine CPS Areas already, the programme brings together police forces and prosecutors with academics to use evidence and insight to change the way rape and sexual offences are dealt with.

The National Police Chief's Council revealed that there are early signs of improvements in the police forces already participating in the Operation Soteria programme. These early successes include the fact that:

- All five pathfinder forces have seen an increase in the number of cases being referred to the CPS – more than doubling in West Midlands Police and Durham.
- The number of cases that are being prosecuted by the CPS from Avon and Somerset have more than tripled.
- All pathfinder forces have seen a reduction in the average days taken for a charge outcome to be assigned – with South Wales seeing a reduction of almost 300 days in the latest quarter.



Chief Constable Sarah Crew

**Challenging**

National Police Chiefs’ Council Lead for Rape and Adult Sexual Offences, Chief Constable Sarah Crew acknowledged that ‘rape is one of the most complex and challenging crimes the criminal justice system deals with.’

She described the roll out of the National Operating Model as a ‘huge step forward in how we investigate crime and the experience victims receive.’

‘While we know there is more to do, the national operating model will see all forces adopt new processes, guidance and training to enable more victims to get the justice they so deserve,’ she said.

‘In order to improve trust and confidence, we have to show victims we are making significant changes and getting results. Operation Soteria offers this.’

Chief Constable Crew said that: ‘we have opened up our doors to academics and to scrutiny. This has not always been a comfortable process. However, it’s an essential step towards achieving our goal of comprehensive and transformational change.’

**Trained**

The NPCC confirmed that in order to improve the response to rape, 2,000 extra police investigators will be specially trained in rape and sexual offences by April 2024. It will also be compulsory for new recruits to undertake rape and sexual offences training, which will also be rolled out to all existing first responders.

Police and prosecutors will have access to better tools to improve their decision-making processes –

such as a step-by-step guide for frontline investigators on conducting suspect focused investigations, and toolkits to ensure victims’ needs and rights are central to all investigations.

**Funding**

This will be backed by over £8 million in dedicated Home Office funding to continue to support police forces to improve their response to rape and the service they provide to victims, as well as to establish a Joint Home Office and NPCC Unit to oversee implementation of the National Operating Model.

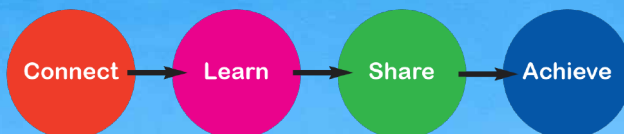
The Home Secretary has commissioned His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to carry out a thematic inspection on forces’ implementation of the Soteria Model, and who will produce a report with findings in due course.

To view the Soteria Pathfinder forces click [HERE](#)

Force	Number of cases referred to CPS	Number of cases prosecuted by CPS	Average days taken for a charge outcome to be assigned
Avon and Somerset	120	150	120
West Midlands	150	180	150
West Yorkshire	180	200	180
North Yorkshire	200	220	200
Northumbria	220	240	220
Nottinghamshire	240	260	240
South Wales	260	280	260
South West	280	300	280
East of England	300	320	300
London	320	340	320
Merseyside	340	360	340
Greater Manchester	360	380	360
Humberside	380	400	380
Cheshire	400	420	400
Derbyshire	420	440	420
Leicestershire	440	460	440
Lincolnshire	460	480	460
Northamptonshire	480	500	480
Warwickshire	500	520	500
Staffordshire	520	540	520
Shropshire	540	560	540
Herefordshire	560	580	560
Gloucestershire	580	600	580
Wiltshire	600	620	600
Devon	620	640	620
Devon and Cornwall	640	660	640
East of England	660	680	660
London	680	700	680
Merseyside	700	720	700
Greater Manchester	720	740	720
Humberside	740	760	740
Cheshire	760	780	760
Derbyshire	780	800	780
Leicestershire	800	820	800
Lincolnshire	820	840	820
Northamptonshire	840	860	840
Warwickshire	860	880	860
Staffordshire	880	900	880
Shropshire	900	920	900
Herefordshire	920	940	920
Gloucestershire	940	960	940
Wiltshire	960	980	960
Devon	980	1000	980
Devon and Cornwall	1000	1020	1000

# 8th National Analyst's Annual Conference

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# Victim Voice

## **Vulnerable victims of fraud are now going to receive specialist advice and support following the roll out of special units across the UK by Action Fraud.**

A national unit which supports vulnerable victims of fraud has been rolled out to all 43 police forces in England and Wales.

The Action Fraud National Economic Crime Victim Care Unit (NECVCU) supports victims of fraud and cybercrime and provides them with bespoke and specialist advice which enables them to better protect themselves from falling victim again in the future. Since its inception, it has engaged with 349,322 victims and prevented an estimated £2,882,616 being lost to fraud

### **Victims**

The unit, which is run by the City of London Police (CoLP) as the national lead force for fraud, has engaged with and supported 113,356 victims of fraud and cyber crime in the last financial year (April 2022 – March 2023).

Assistant Commissioner Pete O’Doherty, from the City of London Police, said that ‘victims of fraud and cybercrime are at the very heart of the work that we do as national lead force for fraud and the NECVCU is an invaluable service which provides

specialist advice and support to victims when they are often at their most vulnerable.’

‘The unit has supported and empowered thousands of victims to recover from their experience with fraud and cybercrime. Without support from the NECVCU, many victims would likely have fallen victim again.’ He explained.

We are delighted that thanks to additional investment, the unit has now been rolled out to all forces across England and Wales. The unit will continue to work tirelessly to support victims and the NECVCU should be incredibly proud of everything it has achieved this year.’

### **Advocates**

The Action Fraud NECVCU aims to make victims of fraud feel safer and more confident, following contact from specially trained advocates, and also helps them to cope and recover from their experience of fraud.

The unit also aims to significantly reduce the likelihood of repeat victimisation, by providing





Assistant Commissioner  
Pete O'Doherty

prevention advice and support.

Through Home Office funding, the Action Fraud NECVCU has engaged with and supported 349,322 victims since 2018 (as of 25 July 2023) – with only 152 people being recorded as repeat victims of fraud and cybercrime.

The unit has also prevented 181 people becoming repeat victims, preventing an estimated £2,882,616 being lost to fraud. Since January 2021, the Action Fraud NECVCU has supported 108 victims to recover £2,965,062.

### Campaign

Security Minister Tom Tugendhat said that ‘fighting fraud is at the heart of our campaign to fight crime. The National Economic Crime Victim Care Unit delivers on our pioneering Fraud Strategy,’

‘Fraud doesn’t just lead to financial loss, it can destroy confidence and lead to severe stress. That’s why it’s so important that victims get the best possible care and support,’ he said.

The unit supports all 43 police forces with the level one service, with 38 of those forces signed up to the level two service.

The level one service provides appropriate support to less complex cases where there is no indication of vulnerability identified within the report. The level one team provides protect and crime prevention advice, as well as signposting to local support services.

### Contact

A referral pathway is also in place, so where vulnerability is identified following initial contact with the victim, the victim care team is able to pass these cases to level two service providers.

The level two service handles more complex and difficult cases, where an indication of vulnerability has been identified within the report. Reports are

thoroughly reviewed by a dedicated team and passed to a team of victim care reviewers.

This team will then contact victims to further assess their vulnerability and work with them to not only provide protect and crime prevention advice, but also link in with existing services, such as the NHS and social services, and help the victim to cope and recover from the fraud.

### Consequences

Pauline Smith, Director of Action Fraud, said that ‘we understand that falling victim to fraud or cybercrime can have devastating consequences on victims, and not just financially.’

‘It can affect people’s mental health, confidence, relationships with family and friends and cause them to feel ashamed or embarrassed, she said.

‘I am incredibly proud of the excellent service the NECVCU provides to victims across the country and the feedback from victims really does highlight the importance of reporting to Action Fraud.’



Security Minister  
Tom Tugendhat

James Thomson, Chair of the City of London Police Authority Board described fraud as a ‘malicious crime that targets all of us.’

‘Fraudsters do not discriminate and therefore it is important that those that are most vulnerable are identified, supported, and empowered.

‘The National Economic Crime Victim Care Unit is an important function in making sure that people do not become victims again and with the aim being to make them feel safer.’





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with Caroline Haughey, OBE, KC, 3 October 2023

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# Spotlight on Smuggling

## The market for migrant smuggling services is reaching alarming new heights and requires urgent action according to a new report by Europol.

A new report by Europol entitled 'Criminal Networks in Migrant Smuggling' describes it as a 'dynamic criminal activity that affects the EU's internal security.'

It says that the market for migrant smuggling services to and within the EU is reaching new heights, fuelled by emerging and deepening crises, most notably economic recessions, environmental emergencies caused by climate change, as well as conflicts and demographic pressure in many origin countries.

The perception of the EU as a comparatively more stable region, coupled with steady labour demands in EU destination countries, additionally sustains the market for smuggling services says the report.

### Agile

It describes migrant smuggling networks as 'agile adapting quickly to changes in irregular migration dynamics to replace the word migration's dynamics and evolving law enforcement activities.' The report found that criminal networks diversify

routes, prices and modes of transport based on the demand for facilitation services, logistical needs and the emergence of new migratory hubs. Intensified law enforcement controls also prompt criminal networks to shift to alternative routes and modi operandi.

The migrant smuggling business model is characterised by cooperation, which may be ad hoc or permanent says the report.

### Smuggling

Criminal networks often cooperate with each other on various legs of the smuggling routes. Some large and multi-location criminal networks are able to provide facilitation services across the entire journey. Some collaborations between networks are based on a crime-as-a-service business model, with criminals offering document fraud or the provision of nautical equipment, for example.

The report found that the criminal process of migrant smuggling comprises recruitment and transportation of irregular migrants as core

activities. Criminal networks may offer additional services to their clients, including accommodation at various stages during the journey, or the provision of fraudulent documents.

### **Remotely**

It said that criminal networks can be complex and consist of various roles, including leaders, middlemen and low-level facilitators. The leaders of smuggling networks are able to run smuggling activities remotely and display high managerial skills, whereas middlemen can be involved in several actions, such as recruiting irregular migrants and overseeing logistical and financial arrangements. Low-level facilitators are mainly involved in the transportation of irregular migrants and can on occasion work on a crime-as-a-service basis.

The report found that criminal networks rely on several tools to facilitate migrant smuggling. Digital solutions are used at every stage to advertise routes and prices, communicate with irregular migrants and produce fraudulent documents. Corruption and legal business structures are employed to carry out smuggling activities.

### **Violence**

Violence, threats thereof and reckless behaviour on the part of migrant smugglers are directed against law enforcement authorities, competing criminal actors and irregular migrants, often resulting in fatal incidents.

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### **Networks**

The report said that smuggling networks vary in size and are based on a business model that sees criminals cooperate on an ad hoc or, when needed,

a more permanent basis. Smaller networks work at local or regional level, often relying on the activities of loosely connected individuals. In many cases, these individual criminals provide their services to multiple smuggling networks.

Larger criminal networks typically operate at international level and are involved in complex smuggling operations. These criminal networks usually have the expertise to cover facilitation services along the whole journey. A key characteristic of criminal networks is their agility and adaptability in response to changing dynamics in irregular migration, law enforcement responses and developments in the wider external environment.



### **Demand**

Notably, criminal networks diversify smuggling routes and prices based on demand. Smuggling fees and services fluctuate according to factors such as the safety of the smuggling methods, the difficulty of border crossing, the length of the journey, the country of destination and the wealth of irregular migrants, among others. While the largest proportion of irregular migrants are smuggled to the EU on overcrowded boats and vehicles, criminal networks offer safer means of transportation, including by air, for those able to pay higher fees.

Migrant smuggling criminal networks are able to rapidly (re)locate smuggling activities close to new migratory hubs, while criminal networks active in other crime areas are able to swiftly set up migrant smuggling services with the incentive of high

profits. Smuggling routes are rearranged following heightened law enforcement activities and changes in visa and asylum policies.

The report found that criminal networks in migrant smuggling are known to have a higher degree of success in their smuggling activities are able to attract irregular migrants and, in turn, to demand higher fees.

### Reviews

Indeed, irregular migrants usually contact smugglers based on recommendations and positive reviews made by previous clients. Other factors that increase the attractiveness of criminal networks are the linguistic and ethnic ties shared between smugglers and irregular migrants. Once the recruitment is finalised, the core activity of migrant smuggling – the transportation of the irregular migrants – takes place.

It said that criminal networks active in document fraud mostly operate from the main hubs for irregular migration, where fraudulent documents are produced in print shops and often traded online.

### Response

The report said the issue remained a priority for Europol and that it's Europol's European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) is at the heart of its response. The EMSC supports national law enforcement authorities of EU Member States and Europol's partner countries in their fight against migrant smuggling by providing dedicated operational analytical support.

The EMSC has specific instruments to support Member States' investigations focusing on each step of the migrant smuggling process. The Joint Liaison Task Force Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings brings together Member States and Europol partners to strengthen cooperation amongst all authorities involved. EMPACT operations and dedicated Operational Task Forces (OTFs) streamline the efforts of Member States and operational partners in identifying and investigating High Value Targets.

The Joint Operational Team Mare supports investigations on criminal networks facilitating migrant smuggling by sea.

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10 October 2023

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# Crypto Conviction

Investigators from the Tarian Regional Economic Crime Unit and their colleagues from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) used special powers to recover more than £750,000 of cryptocurrency.

The High Court Civil Recovery Order (CRO) was used to recover the virtual currency from a hacker who was found to have committed blackmail to obtain the money.

Investigators were acting on intelligence to execute search warrants at the family home. They discovered a black book containing twelve 'recovery seeds' that was subsequently seized.

## Digital

This enabled investigators to re-construct a digital wallet which contained a large amount of cryptocurrency. Two further recovery seeds were located, leading to police seizing a further smaller amount of cryptocurrency from another digital wallet.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) confirmed that it had started a civil recovery investigation, as the evidence showed that the cryptocurrency was obtained prior to and in connection with the original hacking offences and applied for a non-conviction-based property freezing order to preserve the assets for recovery.

## Forfeited

The CPS confirmed that the hacker consented to a Civil Recovery Order (CRO) being made which meant that he forfeited all the cryptocurrency with more than

£750,000 being paid to public funds.

Adrian Foster, Head of CPS Proceeds of Crime Division, which sits within the Serious Economic and Organised Crime International Directorate (SEOCID) explained that the CPS is committed to using civil powers when criminal proceedings are not brought as part of its pledge to 'deprive criminals of their ill-gotten gains.'

'This criminal thought that he had managed to hide his crypto but, working with law enforcement, we were able to locate, seize and recovery this tainted property so that he could not benefit from his illicit wealth on release from prison,' said Mr Foster.

## Recovery

The proceeds of crime can be recovered in civil proceedings in the High Court against property which can be shown to be the proceeds of crime. Civil Recovery can be used when it is not possible to obtain a conviction or a conviction is obtained but a confiscation order is not made or the public interest will be better served by using civil recovery rather than by seeking a confiscation order. This will include where suspects have gone abroad to escape an investigation or the offending has taken place overseas so cannot be prosecuted in UK courts.

## About Civil Recovery Orders

Civil Recovery Orders were introduced under the

# Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) essentials for investigators online workshop: 19 October 2023



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Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. They are an alternative option to bringing criminal proceedings against individuals suspected of being involved in unlawful activity.

The aim of Civil Recovery Orders is to reach an outcome where the property and/or assets in question are seized, not the individual (despite any suspected criminal guilt). Proceedings can now be undertaken even if an individual has been found not guilty of an offence(s) during criminal proceedings.



The High Court must determine whether the property is recoverable and can be seized by investigating agencies under Part Five of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

It is the responsibility of investigating agencies to prove on the civil law standard of proof the balances of probabilities, that the assets in question are the proceeds of crime and should be seized.

These investigating agencies may include the Serious Fraud Office, National Crime Agency, Financial Conduct Authority, Crown Prosecution Service and HM Revenue and Customs.

# Investigating Crimes on the Dark Web (Introduction) Online Workshop



**15 November 2023**

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# NCA Strategic Assessment

**T**he National Crime Agency has published its annual National Strategic Assessment which highlights key threats and challenges in the investigation of serious and organised crime.

This year's National Crime Agency Strategic Threat Assessment reveals that the threat to the UK from serious and organised crime continues to evolve and worryingly, in several areas, to grow.

Launching the report, Director General Graeme Biggar revealed that 'Its impact can be seen in communities across the UK.'

He said that 'families are ruined by drugs – by addiction, and the violence and crime it drives; young lives cut short by overdoses and gun crime, and appalling deaths at the hands of people smugglers who do not care if the migrants they are transporting live or die; childhoods scarred by sexual abuse and constant re-victimisation as images and videos are shared by offenders online; people having their life savings stolen from them through online fraud or cyber attacks.'

## Resilient

He revealed that organised crime groups responsible for this threat have proved resilient in the face of both a changing environment and successful law enforcement operations.

He highlighted the following concerns with regards to organised crime groups.

- They have exploited international conflict, instability and poverty – adapting to the war in Ukraine which

disrupted established supply chains; and capitalising on the increasing number of migrants seeking to reach the UK.

- They have exploited the cost of living crisis, which has put more people at risk of crime either as a victim or perpetrator.

- They have exploited the advances in technology. Technology that allows criminals to scale their activities more easily; allows them to operate against people in the UK from anywhere in the world; and helps them do so anonymously, be it selling drugs and guns on the darkweb, communicating on encrypted apps, or laundering money through cryptocurrency.

Mr Biggar described online crime as 'our new frontline.'

He worryingly revealed that the biggest group of offenders in the UK are those that abuse children. But even excluding them, the NCA knows of 59,000 individuals that are involved in serious and organised crime impacting the UK.

The NCA assessed that £12 billion in criminal cash is generated in the UK every year, and that in total more than £100 billion of the proceeds of British and (largely) global crime is laundered through the UK or UK corporate structures each year.

Mr Biggar highlighted the key threats that the 2023 report covers.

### **The key threats are:**

#### **Organised Immigration Crime**

The threat that saw the biggest increase last year. As has been widely reported, 2022 saw a near doubling of the arrivals by small boats to over 45,000 migrants. There were two reasons for this: a growing demand from migrants to come to the UK; and a change in the criminal business model to meet that demand, using bigger, flimsier, single-use boats, and packing even more people on to them.

#### **Illegal Drug Use**

This is still the main driver of serious and organised crime, and is linked to firearms, serious violence, modern slavery, burglary and robbery, and money laundering. Global drug production remained high in 2022, although there has been a reduction in poppy production in Afghanistan in the last few months. Drug seizures, within the UK, at the border, and overseas, are at historic highs, but supply has proved resilient, reflecting the profits to be made.

#### **Firearms**

The use of firearms is often linked to the drug market and takes place between urban street gangs. Deaths from firearms are near an all-time low for the UK, with 26 last year – one of the lowest rates in the world. Most of the victims are other criminals, but innocent people can be shot in the cross fire, or in cases of mistaken identity.

#### **Child sexual abuse**

The NCA estimates that there are between 680 to 830,000 adults in the UK (1.3 – 1.6 per cent of the adult population) that pose some degree of sexual risk to children.

These are extraordinary figures: roughly ten times the prison population. They partly reflect a better understanding of a threat that has historically been under-estimated, and partly a real increase caused by the radicalising effect of the internet, where the widespread availability of videos and images of children being abused and raped, and groups sharing and discussing the images, has normalised such behaviours.

The NCA has also begun to see hyper realistic images and videos entirely created through Artificial Intelligence. The use of AI for child sexual abuse will make it harder for us to identify real children who need protecting, and further normalise abuse.

#### **Fraud**

Fraud now accounts for more than 40 per cent of

crime. In 2022 three quarters of adults in the UK were targeted for fraud either by phone, in person, or online. While the volume of fraud fell from the peaks of the pandemic, losses by individuals and businesses remained high and indeed rose last year.

The internet has enabled fraud to be undertaken at scale, anonymously, and from overseas. The NCA assesses that 75 per cent of fraud is partially or fully committed from overseas. Generative AI is also being used to make frauds more believable, through the use of ever better deep fake videos and Chat GPT to write more compelling phishing emails.

#### **Ransomware**

The NCA says that some of the most sophisticated online crime takes the form of ransomware. The biggest threat continues to come from Russian language cyber crime groups, who are tolerated by, and sometimes linked to, the Russian state.

The threat has evolved in two ways. First, as the tools to conduct ransomware are offered out from the main groups to affiliates, in a model the NCA refers to as 'ransomware as a service'. And secondly, by a shift from encrypting a company's systems to the more simple task of exfiltrating and threatening to publish their data.

#### **The NCA response**

The NCA, focuses its own operational efforts where they will have the most impact. Over the past year, its focus has been on:

- Upstream, to disrupt those at the top of the criminal chain, those who enable their activities and those who launder the money they make, targeting the links in the criminal chain that are hardest to replace
- Overseas, to tackle the threat at source and en route to the UK, alongside the NCA's international partners, and reflecting the fact that almost all serious and organised crime has a significant international nexus
- Online, to combat a critical element of the modern organised crime business model, reflecting the fact that more crime takes place online or is enabled by technology.

Mr Biggar revealed that last year the NCA made over 4,700 disruptions: actions that reduce or remove a crime threat. This is its most ever, and equates to more than a dozen disruptions each and every day.

He said the NCA would not be complacent and that they needed to rise to the challenge.

'We need to be as innovative, adaptable and technologically driven as the criminals we pursue. I am confident we will,' he said.



# Operation Narsil

**Interpol has undertaken a two-year global operation to bring to justice criminals operating networks of child sexual abuse websites designed to generate profits from advertising.**

Operation Narsil is a ground breaking operation involving 195 police forces who have been targeting the finance mechanisms used by the website administrators of child sex abuse website to conduct their online advertising campaigns.

Over two years, INTERPOL member countries worked together using INTERPOL's Worst of List (IWOL), sharing targeted intelligence, pinpointing suspects and coordinating arrests of the people managing the websites.

Created in 2010, IWOL contains a watchlist of websites containing extreme child abuse material. The General Secretariat headquarters works with law enforcement in all regions so that national Internet service providers close down these websites.

‘Operation Narsil sends a strong message to the criminals making money from these websites that INTERPOL, and its alliance of police forces in 195 member countries, know where they are, what they are doing, and how to find them,’ said Jürgen Stock, INTERPOL Secretary General.

## **Re-victimisation**

He said that ‘every time a person clicks on these images, they are effectively entering a crime scene. Identifying and removing these websites reduces the availability and potential normalisation of

online child abuse material, and, most importantly, reduces the re-victimisation of the children abused.’

In one case, a brother and sister, both in their early thirties, were arrested as a result of IWOL digital clues and intelligence provided by the global police community pointing investigators to the suspects in Argentina.

Investigations by Argentina’s Victim Identification Office in the Anti Cyber Crimes against Minors Division and the Specialised Cybercrime Prosecution Unit (UFECI), working with Federal Courts in Mendoza Province, led to the identification and arrest of the two suspects.

## **Websites**

Fourteen electronic devices were seized from their home as well as cash and credit cards. The siblings are thought to have created, maintained and financially benefitted for more than a decade from websites featuring child sexual abuse material and associated advertising campaigns.

‘Given the technological complexities of this case and the degree to which the criminal activity went undetected, these arrests highlight the importance of police cooperation across regional, national, and international borders,’ said the Head of Argentina’s Federal Police, Juan Carlos Hernandez, who also

serves as delegate for the Americas on INTERPOL's Executive Committee.

He said that 'with synchronized arrests across continents, this operation confronted global networks that profit from child abuse images and videos. INTERPOL is a strong global network of officers fully committed to putting an end to the online abuse of children, and we applaud the action and incredible results countries have achieved in Operation Narsil.'

materials depicting the sexual violation of minors. Authorities searched the suspects' homes, seizing computer equipment containing specialised software for creating and administrating websites, and removable hard drives containing child sexual abuse material.

### **Possession**

With the support of US Homeland Security Investigations, Thai police arrested a 45-year-old Thai national for the possession and online



### **Forum**

Working with the Prosecutor's Office, Bulgarian law enforcement identified and arrested a 34-year-old man who made his living operating an online forum that facilitated the sharing of child sexual abuse materials.

Bulgarian Police closed the online forum he had been running since 2020 and which is thought to have facilitated access to thousands of media files depicting serious child sexual abuse material.

Following the arrest, investigations are ongoing to identify forum users.

In one case during the Russian leg of Operation Narsil, police authorities arrested two 24-year-old citizens for the production and online circulation of

distribution of child sexual abuse material. His arrest came after police executed a search warrant at his residence, uncovering large amounts of child sexual abuse material and financial transaction records associated with online distribution of the abuse photos.

Narsil is one of the first INTERPOL operations to focus on identifying, locating and arresting the people receiving advertising revenues from website visitors interested in viewing the site's child sexual abuse content.

INTERPOL has been monitoring websites disseminating child sexual abuse imagery for more than 13 years and, in collaboration with law enforcement partners across the world, has seized more than 20,000 domains.

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# Covid Conmen:

a pair of fraudsters have been jailed for cashing in on the covid pandemic by selling hundreds of illegal testing kits.

National Crime Agency Investigators have uncovered an audacious scam by two men who were selling potentially millions of uncertified coronavirus testing kits to medical professionals and the public during the covid pandemic.

The men, Ron Huss-Smickler, 41, and Steven Beckford, 39, from Birmingham and London, began selling home coronavirus testing kits in March 2020 – the early stages of the pandemic and at the point when testing kits were not readily available.

The tests, marketed as ‘15 Minute Rapid Home Self-Testing Kits’ and priced at £39.95, were advertised on their website [www.becoronasafe.com](http://www.becoronasafe.com) and sold on the dark web. They had originated in China.

## Crisis

Conversations showed that as early as January 2020, the two men discussed how they could make money off of the back of the emerging health crisis, with one telling the other that facemasks seemed a good opportunity, “albeit capitalising on tragedy”.

Officers also recovered documentation from seized digital devices showing their intent to purchase over ten million kits, and details of their plans to sell to the NHS, care homes and foreign governments.

Both Huss-Smickler and Beckford were arrested in June

2020, after the NCA and a US Homeland Security officer were able to buy their products on a dark web marketplace. The kits were illegal in the UK as they were uncertified.

## Illegally

Messages between the men showed that they had knowledge of medical regulations and knew about coronavirus legislation, to the extent that they understood they were acting illegally and took steps to cover their activity.

Although willing to sell to consumers throughout, at one point they discussed marketing their products only to businesses to bypass scrutiny, with Beckford stating: “...We have to get in and get out and make as much money as possible.”

The defendants modified the test kits to enable them to be taken at home and created their own instruction manual, which included information from a completely different manufacturer and Chinese data that they didn’t understand.

They also created their own step by step guide and video on how to take the tests.

## Profit

Discussions showed that they were expecting to earn up to £150,000 a month and wanted to increase their

pricing to £50 a kit at one point, for no other reason than maximising profit.

At one stage the men applied for Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) from the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency, using fake certification and falsely claiming that they only intended to sell to medics.

Despite being turned down by the MHRA they continued to operate, with records indicating that they changed their company name to avoid detection and prevent further blockages from payment platforms.

When a GP purchased a number of tests, the men believed they could sell more widely to the NHS, prompting Beckford to state: "Good news Team! We have just closed a deal with an NHS GP Practice for testing kits! So now we can officially say 'We provide Medical Supplies to the NHS'

They continued to scout for further business from other medical providers and even left business cards in locations across the London underground.

#### **Packets**

NCA investigators were able to trace the test kits back to addresses in London and Crewe, and eventually matched the men's fingerprints with those found on the inside of the test packets. Evidence indicated that the pair had sold 654 kits and taken orders for over 700 before being arrested.

Ron Huss-Smickler was jailed for 18 months and is disqualified from being a director of a company for 10 years. Steven Beckford received a four month sentence suspended for two years and must complete 100 hours of unpaid community work. He also cannot direct a company for five years.

#### **Scarce**

Ty Surgeon, NCA Branch Commander Midlands, Wales and West region, said: 'these men were organised criminals who preyed upon people's fears, at the very early stages of the coronavirus pandemic when there was uncertainty and resources were scarce.

'They knew that their venture was exploitative and illegal, but still sought every possible opportunity to profit from the unrest and panic that was sweeping the UK at the time.

'This is by no means the only incident of fraud and opportunistic criminal activity seen during the coronavirus pandemic. Together with partners, both here and abroad, we will continue to investigate and hold those responsible to account.'

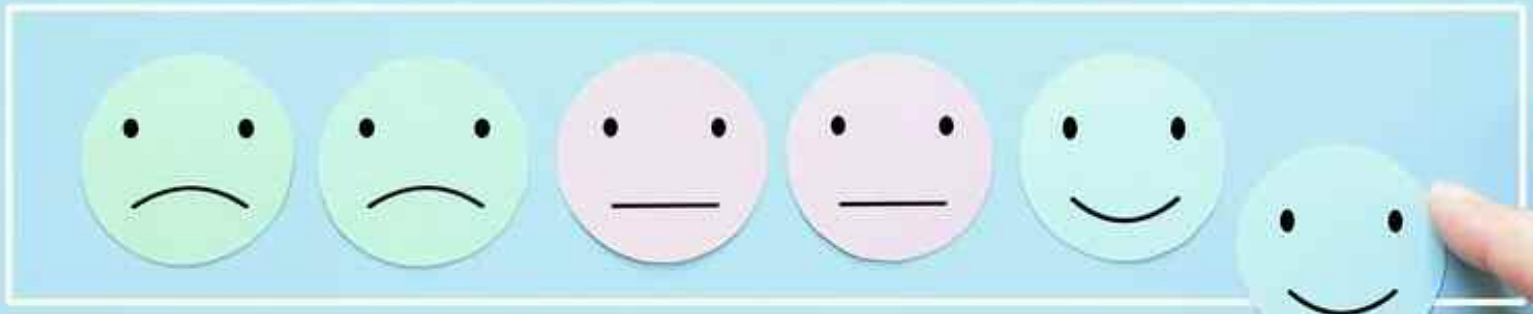
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# Right Care, Right Person

The College of Policing has created an innovative toolkit to support forces when responding to mental health incidents to ensure they provide the vulnerable with care and support.

The Right Care, Right Person toolkit has been created to support police forces when responding to mental health incidents. The toolkit follows a national partnership agreement on using the Right Care Right Person (RCRP) approach as a new way to deal with health incidents.

RCRP involves the police working with partner agencies to identify the most appropriate agency to give vulnerable people the care and support they need. Consistent

The College of Policing said that its RCRP toolkit was developed with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and supports forces in England and Wales to implement RCRP successfully and consistently alongside local partner agencies.

#### It includes guidance on:

- understanding current demand in terms of mental health incidents
- evaluating the impact of RCRP
- communications plan considerations
- the roles and responsibilities of the senior responsible officer (SRO) when implementing RCRP

The College of Policing said that the toolkit will continue to develop over the coming months with

further guidance on operational considerations, training requirements, and local policy development.

#### Refer

It says that while some mental health incidents do require police attendance, there are a significant number that involve no safety risk or crime. The new approach will mean police can focus on attending health incidents where there's a significant safety risk or crime being committed, and refer others to the appropriate partner agency, according to the College of Policing. Estimates show that implementing the principles of RCRP could save around one million police officer hours each year.

The RCRP approach is based on a model developed by Humberside Police in 2021. It has also been implemented by other forces, including Lancashire Police, South Yorkshire Police and North Yorkshire Police.

#### Balance

The College of Policing said that the public want police catching criminals and protecting them from harm. Attending mental health calls is not always appropriate and these changes will strike a better balance so that the public receives the service they want.



It explained that police are not trained mental health professionals and the new toolkit will triage incoming calls to police so that the public receives the best response. The toolkit is unique in policing and will offer support and guidance to call handlers when managing mental health, concerns for welfare and missing persons.



Chief Constable Andy Marsh

It said that this is a change for policing across England and Wales and the College of Policing will be supporting forces as they focus their efforts on keeping their neighbourhoods safe.

### Expertise

Chief Constable Andy Marsh, College of Policing CEO said: 'We know there are thousands of incidents each year in which police officers are not best placed to provide the specialist expertise and support people need.'

'We are now able to put a number on the many hours officers spend waiting with patients in hospital, attending incidents where someone really needed an ambulance or doing welfare checks for individuals under the care of a health agency.'

Chief Constable Marsh said that he wanted to 'reassure our communities that the police will always be here to protect you and will always attend incidents where there is a threat to life'

'This is not about us stepping away from mental health incidents, it is about ensuring the most vulnerable people receive the appropriate care which we are not always best placed to provide.'

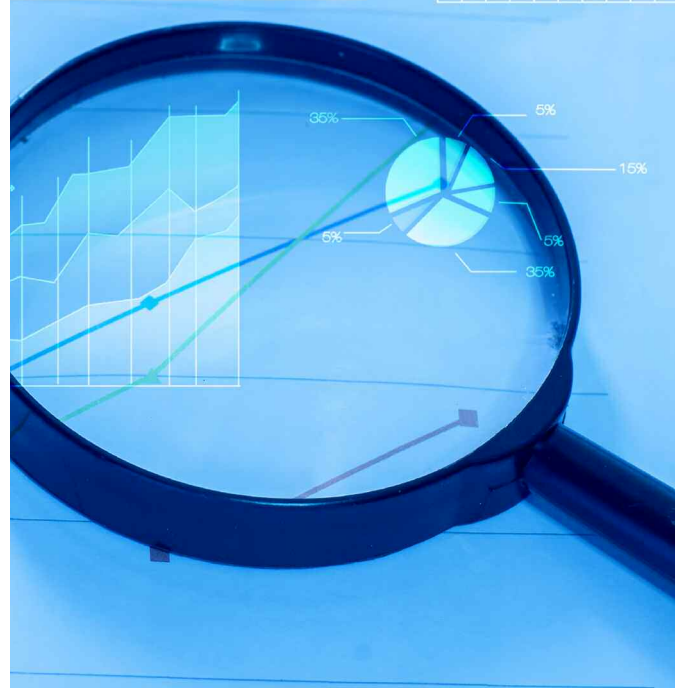
There's also evidence that in some instances, police attendance could have a negative impact on the individual, making them feel criminalised when what they need is specialist help.'

### Partners

Chief Constable Marsh said that making Right Care Right Person a success 'relies on close working with our partners in health and social care and we are grateful for their support in both the national partnership agreement and local implementation.'

'We all want to achieve the same goal of ensuring people receive the care and expertise they need from the right agency,' he said.

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