



Amber ALERT

Illegal Migration Across Coaches

Date: April 2025

Reference: 0763 OIC

This Amber Alert is issued by the United Kingdom's National Crime Agency (NCA). It is based on assessed intelligence and warns of dangers and threats from serious organised criminality. It is devised with the aim of bringing about preventative or remedial action.

We recommend you use this Alert to complement existing knowledge and support ongoing improvements to your business processes and procedures.

This information is for your immediate attention.



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Overview

Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) use high risk methods to smuggle migrants into the UK. An unprecedented number of illegal migrants seek a better life or are coerced into believing a better life awaits them in the UK. OCGs exploit this belief and will go to extreme lengths to facilitate these migrants for their own financial gain, often without regard for their safety or wellbeing.

OCGs primarily use small boats and HGVs to facilitate illegal migration. However, they also exploit coaches as a method for migrants to enter and leave the UK.

Purpose

OCGs involved in immigration crime are exploiting the coach industry which often leads to companies experiencing; reputational damage, delays in route time, increased costs due to delays and not to mention possible penalties for migrants being found on the coach.

Law enforcement aims to assist you in preventing harm to your company, the industry, as well as potential injury or loss of life among migrants, and maximise border protection. We seek to provide bespoke guidance to inform you of the actions that can be taken to protect your industry, prevent such incidents, report information, and understand the risks involved in illicit activity.

Organised Immigration Crime (OIC)

OIC involves facilitating illegal entry into the UK or ongoing presence without legal authorisation. It is carried out by OCGs engaged in activities such as illicit finance, counterfeiting, forgery, and providing fraudulent travel documents. This may also include the procurement and modification of vehicles for these purposes. OIC is an offence against the state rather than an individual.

OIC is fuelled by humanitarian crises, political and legal developments within the UK and other countries, and economic migrants wanting to come to the UK for a better life.

Dangers of OIC

- OIC is a serious threat to the UK, causing significant harm and in some cases fatalities.
- Entering the UK illegally prevents law enforcement from conducting security checks, leaving us unaware of the entrants' identities or the risks they pose, such as terrorism.
- OIC generates money for criminal groups, funding additional crime like drugs, firearms, terrorism and money laundering.
- Smuggling methods are dangerous and traumatic, regardless of the means of transport and cause fatalities as well as physical and emotional trauma.
- Migrants without legal permission to work can be exploited, forced into modern slavery, or driven to crime for survival.

Opportunist migrants

Opportunist migrants entering the UK often act independently or in small groups usually linked by nationality and typically from poor backgrounds instead of paying OCGs for facilitation. Unable to afford fees charged by OCGs, they exploit weaknesses in border controls by hiding in vehicles such as HGVs, vans, tourist vehicles which also includes coaches. These individuals take considerable risks to avoid detection, often relying on dangerous methods that put their lives at risk.

OCGs exploiting migrants

Migrants with no immigration status are open to exploitation by the criminal gangs. Many migrants, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, take on significant debts to cover transport, visas, accommodation, or other costs associated with migration.

Debt is a common feature in both regular and irregular migration, and while the size of a debt alone cannot determine whether modern slavery and human trafficking offences have occurred, debt can have a profound impact on a migrant's choices. Criminals often leverage debt as a form of control, manipulating migrants

by dictating where they work, where they live, and charging extortionate living costs. In some cases, victims' debts are perpetually inflated, leaving them trapped. Offenders may use deception, coercion, or force to pressure migrants into agreeing to or accepting these debts. To learn more about modern slavery click on [NCA - Modern slavery and human trafficking](#)

Migrants travelling outbound

Most migrants are known for their efforts to get into the UK. However, some are arriving illegally via air and then travelling to other European countries. A number of these events have involved the use of coaches and so require coach operators to be more attentive when travelling outbound and take particular care around the baggage compartment before setting off, when stopping at service stations, and at ports within the UK.

High risk areas

The below have been highlighted as key areas where coaches are most susceptible to OIC exploitation and opportunist migrants.

- Service stations: near borders and ports are known to be higher-risk areas. Whenever possible, these service stations should be avoided to minimise the risk. If stopping is necessary, drivers should remain vigilant, ensure all access points to the coach are secure, and carry out thorough checks before resuming the journey.
- On ferries: Migrants often attempt to move between vehicles while on ferries and may hide in the luggage compartment of coaches. Drivers should be particularly vigilant during ferry crossings, ensuring that luggage compartments are securely locked when not in use. Before disembarking the ferry, drivers should carry out thorough checks of the entire vehicle to ensure no unauthorised individuals have entered.
- School/college trips: School trips, with large groups of children running around and making noise near the coach, can unintentionally create a distraction that OCGs or opportunist migrants might exploit. This activity can provide cover for

individuals attempting to access the luggage compartment unnoticed. Drivers should be particularly vigilant during these times, ensuring that the luggage compartment remains securely locked whenever not in use. Regular checks should be carried out, especially before departure, to ensure no unauthorised individuals have entered the area.

Is there a risk to life?

Although there have been no reported fatalities involving coaches, the potential risk remains high. Possible methods used by opportunist migrants, such as grabbing onto axles, attaching themselves to chassis or underside, hiding in luggage compartments, or occupying natural voids in the vehicle, pose significant dangers. These methods could have catastrophic consequences in the event of a collision, as well as risk of suffocation, starvation, dehydration and hypothermia.

Complicit driver/staff

While there hasn't been any evidence of complicit drivers involved in OIC in the coach industry, it remains a potential risk that companies should address proactively. It is important for companies to remain vigilant and look out for signs that could indicate collusion. These may include unexplained route deviations, frequent stops at high-risk areas such as border service stations, reluctance to report suspicious activity, or discrepancies in passenger records. Drivers who appear unusually nervous or secretive about their journeys may also warrant closer attention as well as unexplained financial gain or sudden lifestyle changes.

To reduce this risk, companies should conduct regular background checks, monitor journey patterns, and provide clear reporting channels for staff to raise concerns. Tackling this issue effectively is essential to protect the organisation's integrity, ensure compliance with the law, and maintain public trust.

Training staff

Drivers and frontline staff are often the first to notice suspicious activity. Without proper training, these situations may go unnoticed, putting the organisation at risk. That's why it's important to ensure staff are equipped with the right knowledge to:

- Recognise OIC.
- Learn how to carry out checks of the vehicle.
- Know how to log incidents.
- Know how to report incidents to local law enforcement.

You may also consider engaging with the Civil Enforcement Penalties Team for accreditation, which provides valuable support and ensures compliance with legal requirements to save yourself from £10,000 fine for every migrant being found on your vehicle.

Further details about the scheme, including how to apply for accreditation:

[Clandestine entrant civil penalty scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/illegal-immigration-civil-penalty-scheme) / [Civil penalty accreditation scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/civil-penalty-accreditation-scheme)

Checks to carryout/reporting

The driver's reference sheet (Appendix 1) explains the checks drivers should carry out, as well as what they need to do if they find a migrant on board, including how to report it and stay safe. Drivers are recommended to familiarise themselves with these processes and to keep a hard copy with them on the coach.

How to report OIC

If you have information regarding suspicious activity around the use of coaches or any risks detailed in this alert, please follow your organisations reporting procedure (if one exists). You can also call 101 to report any incidents, in an emergency please call 999.

Drivers reference sheet – Appendix 1

What is Organised Immigration Crime (OIC)?

OIC involves facilitating illegal entry into the UK or ongoing presence without legal authorisation. It is carried out by organised crime groups (OCGs) engaged in activities such as illicit finance, counterfeiting, forgery, and providing fraudulent travel documents. This may also include the procurement and modification of vehicles for these purposes. OIC is an offence against the state rather than an individual.

Dangers of OIC

- OIC is a significant threat to the UK, causing harm and fatalities.
- Illegal entry bypasses security checks, leaving law enforcement unaware of entrants' identities or potential threats like terrorism.
- OIC funds organised crime, driving activities like drug trafficking, firearms smuggling, and terrorism.
- Smuggling methods are highly dangerous, often leading to severe trauma and loss of life.

Impact on the Coach Industry

OCGs exploit the coach industry, using it for illegal immigration. This causes reputational damage, costly delays, and significant penalties if migrants are found on board.

Hot spots



Service Stations: High-risk areas near borders and ports. Avoid when possible, remain vigilant, secure all access points, and perform thorough checks before resuming travel.



Ferries: Migrants may move between vehicles or hide in luggage compartments. Keep compartments locked, stay alert during crossings, and conduct checks before disembarking.



School/College Trips: Distractions from large groups can be exploited. Ensure luggage compartments are locked and perform regular checks, especially before departure, to prevent unauthorised access.

Checks to carry out

1. Pre-departure checks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Inspect the engine inspection door, undercarriage and axles for any signs of tampering or someone holding on.- Check luggage compartments and ensure locks are secure.- Check all the emergency exits and roof hatches are secured properly.
2. Boarding procedures
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Check all passengers have valid tickets and identification- Keep an eye out for unusually heavy suitcases in case a migrant has been concealed in one- Be vigilant for any suspicious behaviour or individuals loitering around the boarding area.
3. During stops
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Carry out the pre-departure checks- Monitor for any unusual activity or individuals lingering around the coach.- Check that all passengers re-board the coach after stops and ensure no unauthorised persons are boarding.
4. Post-journey inspections
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- carry out an inspection of the undercarriage and luggage compartments for any discarded documents, sim card wrapping, phone numbers, addresses, etc.- Report any signs of tampering or suspicious activity to management

What to do if you suspect there is a migrant in your coach

- Remain calm and avoid confrontation
- Notify the relevant authority in a safe manner (999 or 112 out of UK)
- Avoid questioning the migrant or making assumptions, instead remaining respectful and supportive.
- Cooperate with law enforcement and provide all the necessary details

Data Protection Act

The NCA reminds you of your legal obligations in respect of the management of this information, including under the Data Protection Act 2018

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1. Processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner;
2. Collected for a specified, explicit and legitimate purpose and not further processed in a manner that's incompatible with these purposes;
3. Adequate, relevant and limited to what's necessary in relation to the purpose for which they are processed;
4. Accurate and where necessary kept up to date;
5. Kept in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purpose for which the personal data are processed;
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NCA Alerts Team – Recognising that the UK's private sector is often the victim of serious organised crime and is engaged in its own efforts to prevent, deter and frustrate criminal activity, the NCA seeks to forge new relationships with business and commerce that will be to our mutual benefit – and to the criminals' cost. By issuing Alerts that warn of criminal dangers and threats, NCA seeks to arm the private sector and overseas businesses with information and advice it can use to protect itself and the public. For further information about this NCA Alert, please contact the NCA Alerts team by email alerts@nca.gov.uk. For more information about the National Crime Agency go to www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk.

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- a) the prevention or detection of crime,*
- b) the apprehension or prosecution of offenders, or*
- c) the assessment or collection of a tax or duty or an imposition of a similar nature,*

to the extent that the application of those provisions of the GDPR would be likely to prejudice any of the matters mentioned in paragraphs (a) to (c).
(DPA 2018, Schedule 2, Part 1).

Any Section 7(1) information should be submitted to alerts@nca.gov.uk.

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