

Research Briefing
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Irregular migration: A timeline of UK-French co-operation

Summary

Bilateral agreements

There is a long history of UK-French co-operation over controls at their shared borders.

This has been formalised through a series of bilateral agreements, including the Sangatte Protocol (1991) and the Treaty of Le Touquet (2003). The latter allowed for France and the UK to carry out immigration controls in each other's territories at seaports.

In the years since 2014 the UK has made various bilateral agreements with France. Most have had associated spending commitments. They include the ['Sandhurst Treaty'](#) (PDF), agreed in 2018, which committed the UK to spending €50 million to improve security and reduce illegal migration in northern French ports, among other measures.

The most recent [joint statement](#) was signed by the Home Secretary and her French counterpart on 14 November. It includes a UK commitment to provide up to €72.2 million (around £62.2 million) in 2022-23. It also confirms both parties' intention to secure a "more ambitious and comprehensive partnership". A UK-France leaders' summit is due to happen in early 2023.

Stakeholders including Border Force unions, some Members of Parliament, and asylum advocates [have criticised the latest agreement](#) for falling short of

what is needed. They have variously called for a formal returns agreement with France; powers for French officers to arrest and detain intercepted migrants; operational powers for UK officers in France; and additional safe and legal routes for asylum seekers wishing to come to the UK.

UK spending commitments 2014 to present

Published information about the amounts of money committed by the UK and paid to France for border security measures is not always clear. For example, commitments are reported in inconsistent ways (eg. in Euros or GBP or attributed to calendar or financial years). Unsourced figures have sometimes been reported in the media, and published information does not always clearly identify the spending recipient.

Since 2014, the UK has committed **slightly more than £232 million** in successive published agreements with the French government:

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

The £232 million does not represent the total amount of UK spending related to border security in northern France since 2014.

For example, answers to parliamentary questions ([here](#) and [here](#)) **detail additional payments of just under £87 million**, at least some of which appear to have been paid to the French government. They referenced the following dates and amounts:

- 2014: additional £2.7 million for security improvements at Calais.
- 2015: overall commitment under the 2015 Joint Declaration described as £45.96 million (mostly to Eurotunnel).
- 2017: £36 million to strengthen the border and maintain juxtaposed controls.
- 2019: Joint Action Plan supplemented by a further £2.25 million to support deployment of Gendarme Reservists and further strengthening of security measures.

Monitoring co-operation and funding outcomes

The impact of co-operation and funding is jointly assessed by France and the UK, including through regular strategic reviews. The Government has declined to publish details of the outcomes due to operational sensitivity concerns.

Evidence provided [to the Home Affairs Committee](#) in late October from Home Office officials showed that so far in 2022, 38,000 people have arrived in the UK via an irregular small boat crossing in 936 boats.

The French authorities have:

- Stopped 42.5% (28,000) of people attempting to cross.
- Intercepted and destroyed 53.4% (1,072) of boats.

The Home Office's Clandestine Channel Threat Commander described the French authorities' performance in 2022 as having intercepted "a lower percentage, but a much, much bigger number". Their interception rates for boats and people in 2021 were both around 50%.

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Timeline 2014 to present

2014

- **20 September 2014:** UK and France issue a [Joint Ministerial Declaration on France/UK/migration](#) detailing a "comprehensive action plan".

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

The action plan's overarching objectives are to:

- Reduce the number of irregular migrants, through joint or parallel information campaigns;
- Respond to health emergencies and protect vulnerable people, with a focus on victims of human trafficking;
- Strengthen port security to deter illegal crossings, preserve and promote economic activity in the region and address public order issues arising from the number of illegal migrants in Calais;

- Increase operational cooperation to fight against the smuggling of migrants;
 - Stem the flow of illegal migration into Europe, together with the EU and with source and transit countries
 - Ensure that all measures taken will deter illegal migrants from congregating in and around Calais.
- The UK supplemented its contribution to the Joint Intervention Fund with a further contribution of **£2.7 million** for fencing and enhancements to the secure freight zone at Calais.¹

2015

- **20 August 2015:** UK and France issue a [Joint Ministerial Declaration on UK/French co-operation on managing migratory flows in Calais](#) which sets out a “comprehensive programme of work” to address issues related to migratory flows in Calais.

The declaration specified a UK contribution of €10 million (over two years) to be spent on managing migrants in Calais including support for dedicated reception centre facilities across France to move migrants into. Subsequent PQs described the UK’s contribution as £10 million “towards the security reviews of the juxtaposed controls and moving migrants into reception centres across France.”²

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

- The Government has separately said that the total financial commitments arising from the Joint Declaration amounted to **£45.96 million**, the majority of which went to Eurotunnel.³

¹ [PQ HL8269 \[Asylum: English Channel\], answered on 2 October 2020](#); [PQ 217553 \[Human Trafficking and Immigration: France\], answered on 12 February 2019](#)

² [PQ 217553 \[Human Trafficking and Immigration: France\], answered on 12 February 2019](#)

³ [PQ HL8269 \[Asylum: English Channel\], answered on 2 October 2020](#)

2016

- **3 March 2016:** [Annex on migration](#) issued at the UK-France summit, setting out agreement on various further measures to intensify coordination in response to the migration crisis.

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

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

2017

- **20 November 2017:** UK and French Defence Ministers sign an [agreement to increase cooperation on countering illegal migration in the Channel](#). The agreement is described as building on existing maritime cooperation and ensuring that “both countries use the most modern technologies and share knowledge, to help identify suspicious activities and conduct maritime security operations.”
- **Further payment by UK to the French Government (£36 million)** to strengthen the border and maintain juxtaposed controls.⁴

2018

- **18 January 2018:** UK and France sign the [‘Sandhurst’ Treaty concerning the reinforcement of co-operation for the co-ordinated management of their shared border](#).

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

The Treaty provides a legal framework for UK-French co-operation. Commitments in the Treaty include:

- To further enhance co-operation to reduce the number of people attempting to cross the border illegally; to working together to

⁴ [PQ 217553](#) [on Human Trafficking and Immigration: France], answered 12 February 2019

reduce migratory pressure at the shared border; and to implementing a programme of mutually agreed specific measures to combat organised crime rings, fraud and illegal movements and to discourage illegal immigration through joint action in source and transit countries (Article 1).

- To facilitate access to the asylum procedures in their respective territories for people seeking protection (Article 4).
- To deploy liaison officers to facilitate operational co-operation, including in terms of transfers under the EU Dublin Regulation (Article 5).
- To establish a Joint Information and Co-ordination Centre (CCIC) with responsibilities spanning the management and prevention of threats to public order in Nord and Pas-de-Calais; acting as an operational crisis management centre in the event of acute migratory pressure; and supporting action to counter the operations of smuggling rings, human traffickers and criminal networks in Nord and Pas-de-Calais (Article 6).
- To co-operation to boost the effectiveness of the policy of removing people with no lawful basis of stay in France (Article 7).
- To implement a joint approach to managing migration and combatting illegal migratory flows in upstream countries (Article 8).

2019

- **24 January 2019:** UK and France sign a [‘joint action plan on illegal migration across the Channel in small boats’](#) to tackle small boat crossings.⁵

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

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

Actions identified in the joint action plan are:

- Co-ordinating action on land and at sea to prevent crossings.

⁵ GOV.UK, News, [‘UK and France sign action plan to tackle small boat crossings’](#), 24 January 2019

- Funding for new security equipment – a pledge of up to €7 million, of which €3.6 million is new funding.
 - Expanding a strategic communication campaign to deter migrants from trying to cross the Channel.
 - Using all lawful avenues to manage the migration process including transfers under the EU Dublin Regulation and returns to countries of origin.
- **25 January 2019:** (Then Immigration Minister) Caroline Noakes and the French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner [visit the Joint Co-ordination and Information Centre \(CCIC\)](#) in Calais.
 - **9 June 2019:** Sajid Javid [meets French counterpart](#) to speak about ongoing efforts to tackle small boat crossings.
 - **29 August 2019:** The new Home Secretary (Priti Patel) meets her French counterpart to review progress against the joint action plan agreed in January.⁶ They agree an [addendum to the joint action plan](#) to “intensify joint action to tackle small boat crossings in the Channel”.

The addendum sets an “immediate objective” “to halve the number of successful migrant crossings from the number accounted for during the summer months by the end of October, and to reduce it further by the end of December 2019, such that by Spring 2020 it has become an infrequent phenomenon.”

Further actions outlined include:

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

⁶ GOV.UK, News, ‘[Britain and France to strengthen joint action against small boats](#)’, 30 August 2022; ‘[French patrols doubled to tackle migrant crossings](#)’, 15 October 2019

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

- The Government has subsequently confirmed that the UK made **an additional payment of €2.5 million (£2.25 million)** in financial year 2019/20 “dedicated to the deployment of Gendarme Reservists and further strengthening preventative security measures”.⁷

2020

- **12 July 2020:** UK and France sign a “Declaration of Intent” to establish a Franco-British Operational Research Unit (‘Joint Intelligence Cell’), staffed by British and French officers. A [Home Office news story](#) explains more, describing its role as to “collate, centralise and analyse operational intelligence to prevent crossings from taking place and to dismantle the gangs behind them.”
- **28 November 2020:** UK and France sign a joint statement on tackling illegal migration: [UK-France joint statement: next phase of collaboration on tackling illegal migration](#).

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

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

- A “significant” increase in law enforcement deployments.
 - Rolling out new cutting-edge surveillance and detection technology.
 - Actions to support migrants into appropriate accommodation.
 - Measures to increase border security to reduce opportunities for smuggling.
- **31 December 2020:** End of Brexit transition period. [UK no longer participates in the Dublin Regulation](#) which provides a framework for transferring asylum seekers between EU Member States.

⁷ [PQ HL8269 \[Asylum: English Channel\], answered on 2 October 2020](#)

[A joint political declaration accompanying the Trade and Co-operation Agreement](#) “take(s) note” of the UK’s intention to engage in bilateral discussions with relevant Member States “on suitable practical arrangements on asylum, family reunion for unaccompanied minors or illegal migration”.

2021

- Government confirms it is having discussions with several EU Member States about bilateral agreements to facilitate the return of asylum seekers from the UK but refuses to comment on specific negotiations.⁸
- **20 July 2021:** UK and France sign a new joint statement on tackling illegal migration: [UK-France joint statement: next phase of tackling illegal migration](#).⁹

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

The package includes agreements about:

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

It also detailed plans for further collaboration, including a long-term plan for a ‘smart border’ using networked surveillance technology, and sharing covert policing expertise, capacity and capability in support of joint intelligence work to disrupt organised criminal groups. The statement also expressed the UK and France’s support for negotiating a UK-EU re-admission agreement and enhanced cooperation with near neighbours.

⁸ [PQ 171668 \[Asylum: Deportation\], answered on 26 March 2021](#)

⁹ GOV.UK, [UK-France agreement strengthens efforts to tackle illegal immigration](#), 20 July 2021

- **9 September 2021:** Confirmation that the Border Force staff may be authorised to adopt ‘pushback’ tactics to prevent boats from entering British waters in the English Channel, and a reported threat by the Home Secretary to withhold funding previously committed to France unless more Channel crossing attempts are intercepted [draw a critical response from the French government](#).
- **25 November 2021:** In the aftermath of an accident in which 27 people drowned in the English Channel, the Prime Minister (Boris Johnson) writes [a letter to President Macron proposing some further joint action to address Channel migration](#). These included securing an EU-UK “systematic returns agreement” and in the meantime, establishing a bilateral readmission agreement between the UK and France “to allow all illegal migrants who cross the Channel to be returned.”

The letter made some specific proposals to build on existing cooperation:

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

The decision to make the letter public, and the content of the UK’s proposals, are [criticised by representatives of the French government](#). Reports suggest that France favours a solution whereby British immigration officers are stationed in France to consider requests for asylum in the UK, rather than a simple readmission agreement.

France reportedly privately responds to the Prime Minister’s letter with its own proposals for a “balanced agreement” between the UK and EU.¹⁰

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

The meeting was attended by interior Ministers from France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, the European Commissioner for Home

¹⁰ BBC News, ‘[Channel migrants: France to propose deal with UK](#)’, 30 November 2021

Affairs, and representatives from Frontex (the EU's external border agency) and Europol. The related [joint statement](#) from the attendees highlighted commitments to pursue various possible structural and operational responses and acknowledged “the need for the EU to work on these issues with the UK”.

- **1 December 2021:** FRONTEX (the EU's external border agency) begins to provide a surveillance plane to fly over the French coastline.¹¹ Home Office Ministers had previously confirmed to the Home Affairs Committee that there was less scope to conduct aerial night-time surveillance operations in French airspace than on the UK side due to French privacy laws. The Government said that France was bringing new legislation to address the issue.¹²
- **20 December 2021:** [Speaking to a group of journalists](#), Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, reportedly cast doubt on the prospect of the EU agreeing a new migration-related treaty with the UK. She suggested there was a lack of political will amongst member states, referring to existing concerns about implementation of the Trade and Co-operation Agreement and Northern Ireland protocol.

2022

- **10 January 2022:** [The Guardian reports](#) that France intends to propose an EU-wide asylum and migration treaty with the UK during its presidency of the Council of the European Union (January – end June 2022).¹³ Quoting a “senior French official”, it reports that the agreement envisaged by France would provide a legal route for people to travel to the UK to claim asylum and enable the UK to return people to EU states.
- **Summer 2022:** Various media outlets report that a new UK-France deal is in the pipeline.¹⁴
- **27 September 2022:** [The Daily Mail reports](#) that France has pulled out of a “ground-breaking” deal with the UK which was “on the cusp of being signed and sealed”, following comments made by Liz Truss about whether President Macron is a friend or foe.

¹¹ French Embassy in the UK, [Migrants in the Channel: a few facts](#), 22 March 2022

¹² Home Affairs Committee, [Channel crossings, oral evidence, HC 194](#), November 2021, Q706; Q752-756

¹³ The Guardian, [‘France to push for EU-wide UK migration treaty over Channel crossings’](#), 10 January 2022

¹⁴ Eg The Telegraph, [‘Britain and France set for new £50m deal to tackle Channel migrants’](#), 7 July 2022

- **11 November 2022:** [Joint statement](#) issued by UK and French foreign ministers following talks in Paris welcomes “progress made towards a significant new UK-France agreement” and agrees to reinforce cooperation with near neighbours. They also confirm plans for a bilateral UK-France summit to be held in France in early 2023.
- **14 November 2022:** [Joint statement on enhancing co-operation against illegal migration](#), signed by the Home Secretary and her French counterpart.

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

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

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

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

- Expanding the capacity of the Joint Intelligence Cell.
- Increasing the deployment of French patrol officers by 40% in the next five months.
- Allowing UK officers to join French counterparts as embedded observers, “to increase joint understanding of the threat”, strengthen migrant debriefing and increase information sharing.
- Establishing a taskforce focused on reversing the recent rise in Albanian nationals and organised crime groups exploiting illegal migration routes.
- “More intricate operational co-operation..., supported by joint UK-France analysis teams”.

- Investment in surveillance technology, funding for detection dogs at ports and port security infrastructure.
- Investment in reception centres in the south of France “to deter migrants entering France...from moving to the Channel coast” and removal centres to support voluntary returns to countries of origin.

The statement also confirms both parties’ intention to secure a “more ambitious and comprehensive partnership”. A UK-France leaders’ summit is due to happen in early 2023.

Stakeholders including asylum advocates, Border Force unions, and some Members of Parliament [criticise the latest agreement](#) for falling short of what is needed. They variously call for a formal returns agreement with France; new powers for French officers to arrest and detain intercepted migrants; operational powers for UK officers in France; and additional safe and legal routes for asylum seekers wishing to come to the UK.

8 December 2002: [Joint statement on migration issues](#) released after a meeting of French, Belgian, German, Dutch and British interior/migration ministers (the ‘Calais Group’) in Brussels, attended by the Home Secretary.

The joint statement confirms the Group’s desire to work towards an EU-UK cooperation agreement on migration “in consistency with the Trade and Cooperation Agreement ... and without prejudice to necessary discussion on EU level.” It also expresses support for a formal working arrangement between the UK and Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, which supports EU and Schengen states manage their external borders), calling for a prompt start to discussions.¹⁵

The Group agreed to “further bolster cooperation” within the context of existing structures and agreements, strengthening law enforcement and border management cooperation and increased judicial cooperation, and greater exchange of information and intelligence. They intend to convene annual meetings.

- **14 December 2022:** [Joint statement](#) issued by the Home Secretary and her French counterpart, Gérald Darmanin, following an incident in the

¹⁵ When the UK was an EU Member State it did not have full membership of Frontex but had observer status at board meetings and could participate in Frontex operations on a case-by-case basis.

Channel earlier in the morning involving a small boat in distress, which resulted in 43 people being rescued and four confirmed fatalities.

2 Monitoring the impact of co-operation and funding agreements

The November 2022 joint Ministerial statement provided a snapshot of the impact of co-operation over the past couple of years, including stopping over 30,000 small boat crossings this year:

The UK and France have worked together to address illegal migration preventing over 23,000 small boat crossings in 2021 and over 30,000 so far this year. Alongside this we have dismantled 55 organised crime groups (OCGs) and made over 500 arrests supported by the work of the UK-France Joint Intelligence Cell, where UK and French officials collate and analyse operational intelligence to prevent crossings from taking place and to dismantle the gangs behind them.¹⁶

2.1 UK-French oversight mechanisms

The impact of UK investment under the Sandhurst Treaty (and subsequent related bilateral agreements) is jointly assessed by France and the UK “through maintaining operational and policy level contact and regular strategic reviews”. There is a joint UK-France Monitoring Committee and an agreed “results framework”.

Successive recent governments have been unwilling to publish the outcomes of the reviews on the basis that they relate to sensitive operational activity.¹⁷

2.2 Recent scrutiny: Home Affairs Committee

Home Office officials gave some additional figures during a Home Affairs Committee oral evidence session in late October 2022.¹⁸ Dan O’Mahoney, director of the Clandestine Channel Threat Command, informed the Committee that:

- 38,000 people had arrived in the UK in 936 small boats so far in 2022.

¹⁶ [UK-France joint statement: enhancing co-operation against illegal migration](#), 14 November 2022

¹⁷ [PQ 40909 \[Undocumented Migrants: English Channel\]. 6 September 2021](#)

¹⁸ Home Affairs Committee, [oral evidence, Channel crossings, HC 822](#), 26 October 2022

- The French authorities had stopped 28,000 attempts by people (this figure includes double counting of people stopped on more than one occasion) and intercepted and destroyed 1,072 boats.¹⁹

Mr O'Mahoney commented: "In terms of both migrants and boats, that is about double what the French authorities managed to achieve last year. That is really significant, and I pay tribute to them for that."²⁰

Mr O'Mahoney confirmed that this equated to:

- 42.5% of people attempting to cross being stopped.
- 53.4% of boats being intercepted and destroyed.²¹

He described the French authorities' performance in 2022 as having intercepted "a lower percentage, but a much, much bigger number".²² The interception rates for boats and people in 2021 were both around 50%.

Acknowledging gaps in French legislation are an obstacle to French officers detaining and arresting migrants attempting to make irregular crossings, Mr O'Mahoney said:

That is why it is really important that we mention the number of boats that have been intercepted and destroyed as well, which, of course, hits the organised criminal gangs in the pocket and makes it less profitable, which is an important part of our response.²³

¹⁹ Q2-3

²⁰ Q3

²¹ Q13-14

²² Q15

²³ Q17

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