

**Research Briefing**

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# Crime in the Turks and Caicos Islands 2022

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## Summary

The Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) is a UK Overseas Territory (OT), situated in the Caribbean. It has a population of around 39,000 (2019). It has its own legislature and government. But as with other OTs the UK and UK-appointed Governor has responsibility for the safety and security of its citizens.

The TCI Governor, Nigel Dakin, has warned the Islands are [“absorbing an upswing in gang related murder that is alien to TCI but almost endemic to the region.”](#) From 3 September to 8 November 2022, [21 people have been killed](#), mainly due to gang-related violence. Internal security and policing is a reserved power of the Governor, who has faced calls to resign in response to the incidents. [He has no plans to do so and says the causes are multifaceted.](#)

The UK, US and Bahamas are among those providing support to the Territory, [including additional police officers, a Royal Navy ship and helicopter surveillance.](#) This briefing summarises the UK’s responsibility for the Territory, the background to the violence, and local and international responses.

## The Turks and Caicos in the Caribbean



Source: [Map of the Caribbean](#) by [Cacahuate](#)/image cropped. Licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

# 1 The Turks and Caicos as a UK Territory

## Constitutional relationship to the UK

The Turks and Caicos Islands are one of fourteen UK Overseas Territories (OTs).

The Territories all have historic links to the UK and with the UK and Crown Dependencies like Jersey form one undivided realm, where the King is sovereign. This means they have no separate representation internationally.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office, [The OTs](#), June 2012, p8. Sources accessed 2 and 5 December 2022 unless stated

## Powers of the UK Government and Parliament

As a matter of constitutional law, the UK Parliament also has unlimited power to legislate for the Territories, though in practice many powers and responsibilities are devolved.<sup>2</sup>

The UK Government can also legislate for the Territory through an Order in Council and send instructions to the Governor via the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (FCDO), James Cleverly.<sup>3</sup>

Orders in Council are legal instruments that have the force of law and are made by the Crown through the Privy Council.<sup>4</sup>

## Structure of the Turks and Caicos administration

As an inhabited OT, with a population of around 39,000,<sup>5</sup> the Turks and Caicos Islands has its own legislature, government, and court system, as well as a UK-appointed Governor:

- **Governor:** Nigel Dakin. Appointed July 2019.<sup>6</sup>
- **Government:** The Turks and Caicos Government is led by the Premier, Charles Washington Misick, who has held the office since February 2021.<sup>7</sup>
- **House of Assembly:** Constituted of 21 Members. The Speaker is Gordon Burton.<sup>8</sup>
- **Court system:** The Territory has a Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, and Magistrates court.

## Responsibilities of the respective Governments

The UK Government is ultimately responsible for the good governance, safety and defence of the Territories and their populations. This includes helping the Territories protect themselves from organised crime.<sup>9</sup>

The Territory's constitution reserves to the Governor powers over a range of issues, including defence, internal security, and the police.<sup>10</sup>

The Governor should consult the local Cabinet before exercising these functions, though they do not have to follow their advice. There are also

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<sup>2</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office, [The OTs](#), June 2012p16

<sup>3</sup> Gov.UK, [Governor's Office Waterloo Grand Turk](#)

<sup>4</sup> Privy Council, [Privy Council meetings and orders](#)

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, [Population, total, Turks and Caicos Islands.](#)

<sup>6</sup> The Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands, [Governor](#)

<sup>7</sup> The Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands, [Government](#)

<sup>8</sup> The Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands, [House of Assembly](#)

<sup>9</sup> Foreign & Commonwealth Office, [The OTs](#), June 2012, pp6, 8

<sup>10</sup> [Turks and Caicos Constitution Order 2011](#), Schedule 2, Part III, Section 37 (1)

exceptions to this requirement to consult, such as the Governor deeming it too urgent, too unimportant, or in the public interest not to consult.<sup>11</sup>

## Further reading on the governance of the Turks and Caicos Islands

- Commons Library, [The UK OTs and their Governors](#). The powers of the Governor are discussed on pages 30-31 (law-making) and 40-41 (reserved powers).
- Commons Library, [The separation of powers in the UK's OTs](#). The House of Assembly is discussed on pages 36 to 37, the judiciary on pages 58 to 59, and the executive (including the cabinet) on pages 62 to 65.

## 2 Crime in 2022

The UK Government considers crime in the Turks and Caicos Islands to be relatively low, and historically be related to opportunistic burglary, theft, and other robberies.<sup>12</sup>

For the most recent full year for which data is available, April 2021 to March 2022, the Commissioner of Police Trevor Botting has reported an increase in recorded crime in the Islands (a 10% rise), including a rise in serious crimes of 13% (to 355). This was above the five-year average. He said these were related to a small number of offenders.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.1 Homicide rate has been rising

The number of homicides in the Turks and Caicos has fluctuated in recent decades, with a fall since the 1990s, but there has been a marked increase in recent years.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> [Turks and Caicos Constitution Order 2011](#), Schedule 2, Part III, Section 37 (5)

<sup>12</sup> Gov.UK, [Turks and Caicos Islands: Crime](#)

<sup>13</sup> The [Turks and Caicos] Sun, [Crime on the rise](#), 20 June 2022

<sup>14</sup> World Bank, [Intentional homicides \(per 100,000\)-Turks and Caicos Islands](#)

Many of these have been linked to revenge killings and gang-related murders. According to the Turks and Caicos Weekly News, there were 13 murders in 2019, 22 in 2020, and 13 in 2021.<sup>15</sup>

There are no up-to-date figures for 2022: To 28 October 2022, there have been a reported 28 murders in the Territory.<sup>16</sup> Using a different time frame, 21 people have been killed from 3 September to 8 November 2022.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2

## Causes

The causes of crime are complex, with long-term causes including poverty, access to employment, support and services, and drugs use and trafficking.

The immediate causes of the current rise in homicide cases in the Turks and Caicos have been associated with international crime, gangs, the availability of firearms, and drug dealing and trafficking.

### International factors

The Governor has highlighted international factors including:

- The Territory’s proximity to “increasingly unstable neighbours.”
- A high number of guns and drugs across the Caribbean region.
- The ability of criminals to move easily throughout the region.<sup>18</sup>

In a speech to the House of Assembly in October, the Governor reported that some recent violence was linked to the death of a Haitian gang leader, violence in “shanty areas” (meaning unregulated informal settlements), and a predominately Jamaican gang moving into the resulting vacuum.<sup>19</sup>

The Premier has suggested some of the gangs also only have local affiliation and has drawn attention to irregular migration from Haiti.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Turks and Caicos Weekly News, [Homicide rate projected to hit record figures](#), 19 June 2020; [TCI nears end 2020 with record high number of murders](#), 11 December 2020, [Senseless murders close out 2021—but murder count almost half of 2020s](#), 7 January 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Turks and Caicos Weekly News, [TCI records 28<sup>th</sup> murder following fatal shootout](#), 28 October 2022

<sup>17</sup> The Guardian, [“Barbaric” homicides surge in Turks and Caicos amid drug-related violence](#), 8 November 2022

<sup>18</sup> FCDO, [Turks and Caicos Governor’s update on national response to gang-related violence](#), 12 October 2022

<sup>19</sup> FCDO, [Message from HE the Governor at the opening of the House of Assembly \[...\]](#), 3 October 2022

<sup>20</sup> Radio Turks and Caicos, [National security statement delivered by the Premier](#), 28 September 2022

The Jamaican Government have said that the singling out of Jamaicans is “distinctively unhelpful.”<sup>21</sup>

## Local issues in the Turks and Caicos Islands

The Governor and Premier have acknowledged local causes, including:

- Irregular settlements, which have poor access to services.<sup>22</sup>
- Issues of equity, economic growth, early intervention in schools, and assimilating new populations into the Territory.<sup>23</sup>
- A ten times growth in population projected from 1980 to 2040, giving the Islands one of the fastest growth rates in the Caribbean.<sup>24</sup>

The police force has also highlighted the “readily available” nature of illegal firearms in the community.<sup>25</sup>

## The situation for the Haitian population

While it is unclear which groups are most affected and involved in the violence, the situation of the Haitian population on the Territory is suggestive of some of the social problems the Government highlights. Haiti has been experiencing a [severe humanitarian crisis for several years](#).<sup>26</sup>

Haitians make up around a third of the population of Turks and Caicos and half are [judged to be poor or at risk of falling into poverty, with higher levels unemployment, irregular work, and low wages](#). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) says 20% of the Haitian population on the Turks and Caicos Islands have no permanent residence.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.3

## Governor rejects calls to resign

Both the Turks and Caicos Governor and Commissioner of Police have faced calls to resign. The Governor has rejected these calls. He told the House of Assembly in October [that he would not resign over the level of crime](#):

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<sup>21</sup> Caribbean National Weekly, [Kamina Johnson Smith disappointed that TCI blames Jamaicans for crime upsurge](#), 8 October 2022

<sup>22</sup> Turks and Caicos Weekly News, [Government gets tough on squatting](#), 13 May 2022

<sup>23</sup> FCDO, [Turks and Caicos Governor’s update on national response to gang-related violence](#), 12 October 2022

<sup>24</sup> As above

<sup>25</sup> Royal Turks and Caicos Police Force, [Firearms and ammunition amnesty 2022](#), undated

<sup>26</sup> UNOCHA, [Seven things to know about the humanitarian crisis in Haiti](#), 26 October 2022

<sup>27</sup> UNOCHA, [Turks and Caicos Islands](#), 20 September 2022

There are too many external factors, and too many historical reasons, that are entirely out of my control, that influence levels of crime. So the 'level of crime' is not a metric that on its own, I would resign over.

The Governor set out three situations which would result in his resignation: 1) That he could not work with the Premier on national security policy 2) His personal ability being affected (eg by health, extent of criticism) 3) An inability to secure from the UK sufficient support for the Territory.

In October, he said he had no intention to leave before March 2023.

In respect of the Commissioner, the Governor said he would not accept the Commissioner's resignation as it "would help the gangs and not the Territory."<sup>28</sup>

On 15 December, the UK Government announced that Dileeni Daniel-Selvaratnam, Governor of Anguilla, [will take over as Governor in June 2023](#).<sup>29</sup>

## Drug and gun-related violence in the Caribbean

In September 2022 Interpol and the Caribbean community undertook Operation Trigger VII. 19 countries and Territories, including the Turks and Caicos, participated. 510 people were arrested and both drugs and guns were seized. Interpol said it "highlighted the convergence of trafficking routes and the use of firearms used to control the illegal drug trade" in the region.<sup>30</sup>

Barbados, in the South-eastern Caribbean, has also experienced a spike in the number of firearm incidents in late 2022. Speaking in October, its Attorney General cited statistics showing 30 gun-related murders in 2019, 26 in 2020, and 17 in 2021. From January to 7 July 2022, there were 17 murders.<sup>31</sup>

Jamaica also has a high rate of violent crime and murder, with a rise in 2020/21. This is associated with trafficking of weapons, drugs, and money. Organised crime gangs are estimated to be responsible for 70% of murders and these are often related to inter-gang and intra-gang conflict.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> FCDO, [Message from HE the Governor at the opening of the House of Assembly \[...\]](#), 3 October 2022

<sup>29</sup> FCDO, [Change of Governor Turks and Caicos Islands](#), 15 December 2022

<sup>30</sup> Interpol, [Operation Trigger VII leads to more than 500 arrests across 19 countries](#), 13 October 2022

<sup>31</sup> Barbados Loop, [AG confirms spike in gun crime](#), 8 July 2022

<sup>32</sup> UK Home Office, [Country policy and information note: Fear of organised criminal groups, Jamaica](#), July 2022, paras 2.42-2.45

## 2.4 Concerns for tourism

The Turks and Caicos Hotel and Tourism Association has warned that rising crime may affect tourism to the Territory.<sup>33</sup> Tourism has represented a quarter of the Government's revenue (data for 2015/16) and hotels and restaurants 38% of its Gross Domestic Product (data for 2012).<sup>34</sup>

Most tourists come from the US.<sup>35</sup> The US State Department currently advises travellers to exercise "increased caution [...] due to crime."<sup>36</sup>

## 3 What has the response been?

### 3.1 Turks and Caicos Government

#### Arms amnesty

The Police held a firearms and ammunition amnesty in September and early October. No weapons or arms were surrendered in this time.<sup>37</sup> An earlier amnesty was held in February 2022.<sup>38</sup>

It has also been running operations against suspects and offenders.<sup>39</sup>

#### New legislation

In October, the House of Assembly passed 11 bills that aim to address the rise in crime, gang-related activity, and gun crime.<sup>40</sup> These include:<sup>41</sup>

- **Firearms (Amendment) Ordinance 2022.** This introduces higher penalties for the possession and use of firearms.

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<sup>33</sup> Turks and Caicos Weekly News, [Crime wave could damage TCI's reputation—Tourism association](#), 30 September 2022

<sup>34</sup> Wolfs Company, [Turks and Caicos Islands: The sustainable financing of natural resource and protected areas management](#), April 2016 (PDF), pp2-3

<sup>35</sup> Turks and Caicos Tourism, [Visitor statistics reports](#)

<sup>36</sup> US Department of State, [International travel: Turks and Caicos Islands](#), updated 5 October 2022

<sup>37</sup> Turks and Caicos Weekly News, [Failed gun amnesty](#), 28 October 2022

<sup>38</sup> Royal Turks and Caicos Police Force, [Firearms and ammunition amnesty 2022](#), undated

<sup>39</sup> For example, [The Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police force, Statement issued by Commissioner of Police](#), 16 November 2022

<sup>40</sup> The [Turks and Caicos] Sun, [\[11\] new, strong anti-crime laws passed](#), 31 October 2022.

<sup>41</sup> The full list and text can be found at The Turks and Caicos Attorney General Chambers, [2022 ordinances](#)



- **Police Force (Amendment) Ordinance 2022.** Provides for the power of “stop and search” in anticipation of, or after, violence.
- **Firearms Related Offences (Detention and Bail) (Amendment) Ordinance 2022.** This allows for the police to detain an individual without charge for up to 72 hours if they suspect that person has committed a firearms related offence.
- **Interception of Communications Ordinance 2022.** Makes provisions for the intercept of communications and communications data.
- **Anti-Gang Ordinance 2022.** Makes it an offence to coerce, encourage, entice, or aid a person to be a gang member, encourage an individual to partake in gang-related activity, or possess a bullet-proof vest, firearm, ammunition or prohibited weapon for the benefit of a gang, among other penalties and provisions.<sup>42</sup>
- **Offences Against the Person (Amendment) Ordinance 2022.** Says that an individual assaulting, resisting, threatening or wilfully obstructing a police officer is committing an offence.

Further legislation imposes penalties for those obstructing the work of officials, including investigating officers. For more details and background, see the [Premier’s National security statement](#), 28 September 2022.

## New funding

The UK-based Guardian newspaper reports the Government has allocated an additional US\$4 million to the police force and US\$2 million for CCTV.<sup>43</sup>

## Possible International agreement

In September, it was reported that the Turks and Caicos Government wishes to sign a memorandum of understanding with Jamaica and the Bahamas to address the transnational movement of guns and drugs.<sup>44</sup>

## Seeking international support

In September, Premier Misick said he had contacted the Governments of the Bahamas, Barbados, and Jamaica to request members of their police force to support efforts in the Turks and Caicos, in addition to support from the UK and US (see below).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Under the legislation, “Gang-related activity” means the planned, ongoing, continuous or repeated participation or involvement in any serious offence

<sup>43</sup> The Guardian, [“Barbaric” homicide surge in Turks and Caicos amid gun related violence](#), 8 November 2022

<sup>44</sup> TC Weekly News, [Anti-crime MOU with Jamaica and the Bahamas](#), 2 September 2022

<sup>45</sup> Caribbean Loop, [TCI seeks international help to address upsurge in crime](#), 28 September 2022

## Existing reforms and initiatives

In response to rising numbers of homicides in previous years, the Turks and Caicos had introduced new initiatives. This included:

- An increase in police numbers, and a twinning of its force with UK forces.
- Rollout of community policing and seeking an increase in information from citizens as well as from centrally gathered intelligence.<sup>46</sup>

## 3.2 United Kingdom

The UK is responsible for the safety and security of the local population.

In October, the Foreign Secretary [announced an increase in support for the Turks and Caicos in response to rising crime rates](#).<sup>47</sup> A list is below.

In addition, the previous Minister for the OTs, Jesse Norman, visited the Territory on 27 October 2022 to meet the Governor and the Police.<sup>48</sup>

In response to reports in the Guardian newspaper that the Governor, Nigel Dakin, believed [initial support offered by the UK to be inadequate](#),<sup>49</sup> the Governor has said he is content with the package and the UK is well-placed to provide medium and long term support to the Territory.<sup>50</sup>

### Military

- A Royal Fleet Auxiliary Ship, RFA Tideforce is being used as a platform for operations and has a Wildcat helicopter. This will support surveillance and security operations and remain in the area until further notice.<sup>51</sup>

### Police

- The UK agreed to a deployment of specialist police from neighbouring Caribbean islands, including the Bahamas (see below).
- There is a contingency plan for a UK specialist firearms unit, if needed.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Governor's Office Waterloo Grand Turk, [Statement by Governor Nigel Dakin CMG](#), 21 March 2022

<sup>47</sup> FCDO, [UK to step up help to combat Caribbean crimewave](#), 11 October 2022

<sup>48</sup> Turks and Caicos Weekly News, [UK Minister plays courtesy visit to RTCIPF](#), 28 October 2022

<sup>49</sup> The Guardian, [Turks and Caicos head said to question UK's alleged failure to keep residents safe](#), 13 October 2022

<sup>50</sup> The [Turks and Caicos] Sun, [Governor responds to article in Guardian newspaper](#), 17 October 2022

<sup>51</sup> Royal Navy, [Royal Navy helps suppress surge in gang violence on UK OT](#), 2 November 2022

<sup>52</sup> FCDO, [Turks and Caicos Governor's update on national response to gang related violence](#), 12 October 2022

## Capacity-building and support from UK agencies

- The UK Government has also committed a package of longer-term support to assist intelligence gathering, firearms training and border control. This includes funding a new serious organised crime team in the OT.
- The UK is procuring a permanent maritime surveillance aircraft
- The National Crime Agency is deploying staff to support the development of local intelligence-gathering teams and intercept legislation. It has both a national and international reach.
- The UK's Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) has previously supported the secondment of a Border security lead and wider customs regulation: see below, page 12 to 14, for past UK support.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.3

## Other international support

### Bahamas

The Bahamas has committed 24 specialist firearms officers, which arrived in early October. They are now on active duty.

The Governor says that the Bahamas, rather than the UK, are best placed to offer direct support:

The Bahamas have sent sufficient [support] and are the Force best placed – because of proximity, regional and cultural understanding – to immediately help.<sup>54</sup>

Further meetings took place between the Governments of the Turks and Caicos and the Bahamas in December 2022.<sup>55</sup>

### United States

The UK has arranged for the US to support maritime surveillance through a fixed-wing aircraft and Blackhawk helicopter. The Governor reports this has

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<sup>53</sup> FCDO, [UK to step up help to combat Caribbean crimewave](#), 11 October 2022

<sup>54</sup> FCDO, [Turks and Caicos Governor's update on national response to gang-related violence](#), 12 October 2022

<sup>55</sup> Magnetic Media, [Turks and Caicos national security leaders in the Bahamas](#), 6 December 2022

supported the turning round of small ships by the US Coast Guard heading to the Territory.<sup>56</sup> Miami Dade Police have also offered support.<sup>57</sup>

The local customs department is also working with US Homeland Security.<sup>58</sup>

## Cayman Islands

In September, the Governor said he requested helicopter support from the Cayman Islands (another UK OT) to provide surveillance.<sup>59</sup>

## Jamaica

The Jamaican Police says it is working with the Turks and Caicos Police to address the violence and transnational crime.<sup>60</sup> No details have been announced of an agreement, but the Governor said in October that:

Jamaica's kind offer is on the table and our Commissioner, and theirs, are involved in detailed discussions today.<sup>61</sup>

# 4

## Previous UK support

Prior to 2022, the UK Government has provided support relating to security, organised crime, and border management. A selection of examples and undertakings are included below.

## Joint communiqués

Each year, Overseas Territory Governments meet with UK Ministers to discuss issues relating to the Territories. This results in a joint communiqué setting out points of agreement and future commitments. That for 2021 [noted the intention for the UK and OTs to cooperate to strengthen border security](#):

1. The UK and Overseas Territories noted the shared responsibility for ensuring the protection of our citizens across the Territories through the work of multiple agencies. The Overseas Territories welcomed the ongoing work by the UK Government through the Conflict Security and Sustainability Fund (CSSF) Justice Programme and Border Security

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<sup>56</sup> The [Turks and Caicos] Sun, [Governor Dakin reports immediate success from UK and US air support in TCI](#), 24 October 2022

<sup>57</sup> FCDO, [Turks and Caicos Governor's update on national response to gang related violence](#), 12 October 2022

<sup>58</sup> Turks and Caicos Weekly News, [TCI working with US homeland security](#), 11 November 2022

<sup>59</sup> FCDO, [Address given by HE Nigel Dakin](#), 6 September 2022

<sup>60</sup> Barbados Loop News, [JCF in talks with TCI officials re gang violence with links to J'cans](#), 5 October 2022

<sup>61</sup> FCDO, [Turks and Caicos Governor's update on national response to gang related violence](#), 12 October 2022

Programme to help continue building, strengthening and modernising law enforcement capabilities to fight crime and keep our borders safe. We recognise the importance of taking a holistic approach to crime prevention and recognise the growing threat of cyber crime.

2. Both the UK and Overseas Territories recognised that the underlying causes of crime are often complex and reaffirmed the joint commitment to build upon cross/multi-agency working to enhance co-operation and increase capacity within the Territories. We committed to sharing best practice and lessons learned by upholding the modern partnership between the Territory Governments, Governors and UK Government on areas of security and law enforcement.<sup>62</sup>

These reiterated commitments made at the 2020 meeting.<sup>63</sup>

## Coronavirus pandemic, 2020

In June 2020, the UK Government [provided additional support](#) to counter illegal migration to the Turks and Caicos Islands:

The Ministry of Defence and the Home Office have provided in-territory support to the Turks and Caicos Islands through a security assistance team of military personnel and police liaison officers. Twenty-nine additional military personnel supported Turks and Caicos to counter illegal migration from Haiti, which risks undermining the covid-19 response.<sup>64</sup>

## Conflict, Stability and Security Fund

The [Conflict, Stability and Security Fund](#) (CSSF), referenced above, is a UK Government fund designed to support and deliver activities that tackle instability that threatens UK interests. The CSSF includes work in the OTs.

### 2019/20

In 2019/20 the CSSF worked to combat serious and organised crime in the Turks and Caicos Islands through strengthening its forensic capability to find and disrupt illicit goods being smuggled.<sup>65</sup>

Further details on the use of the [CSSF in Overseas Territories](#) in 2019/20 states that projects supported included funding for law enforcement, immigration, and maritime security.

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<sup>62</sup> FCDO, [2021 UK-OT Joint Ministerial Council 2021: Communiqué](#), 18 November 2021

<sup>63</sup> FCDO, [UK-Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council November 2020](#), 27 November 2020

<sup>64</sup> HC Deb, [30 June 2020](#), c146

<sup>65</sup> HM Government, [CCSF: annual report 2019/20](#) (PDF), p13

## 2018

The CSSF [provided assistance](#) to monitor the border, including through repairing radar to help detect boats and people trying to access the islands. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary Vessel Mounts Bay was also deployed.<sup>66</sup>

[Other support since 2018](#) has included financial support for investigations into human trafficking, assisting the Maritime Police to protect the Territory's borders, and assigning a UK security advisor on secondment to the Islands.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> HC Deb, [17 July 2019](#), c823

<sup>67</sup> PQ 12983 [[Turks and Caicos Islands: Undocumented migrants](#)], 10 February 2020

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