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NCA Performance in Northern Ireland

Q4 2022/23 (January - March 2023)

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Introduction

About the NCA

The National Crime Agency's mission is to protect the public from serious and organised crime. The Agency will achieve this by degrading the most harmful organised crime groups and leading the wider law enforcement system to reduce the threat.

The National Strategic Assessment sets out the threat from serious and organised crime to the UK has continued to increase and has been largely resilient to the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Global networks, the UK border and current and emerging technology all play key roles as enablers of SOC offending.

Our approach is to identify and disrupt high-harm, high-impact criminals (and organised crime groups), diminishing their capability, infrastructure and influence. In particular, we target those who:

- Exploit the vulnerable through child sexual abuse and exploitation, trafficking, servitude, fraud and other forms of abuse.
- Dominate communities, and chase profits, in the criminal marketplace - through criminal reputation and/or the use of violence in the supply of drugs and firearms.
- Undermine the UK's economy, integrity, and infrastructure & institutions, through their criminality.

To counter the threat most effectively, the Agency will shift its operational focus:

- Upstream: disrupting those at the top of the criminal chain, those who enable their activities and those who launder the money they make.
- Overseas: tackling the threat at source and en route to the UK, alongside our international partners.
- Online: combatting a critical element of the modern organised criminal business model, reflecting the fact that more crime takes place online or is now enabled by technology.

The NCA's 2022/23 Performance Ambitions

The NCA's Senior Leadership Team and the NCA Board are responsible for setting annual ambitions in addition to the Home Secretary's Priorities. These are tracked in our operational and strategic governance forums. To ensure the NCA deliver exceptional services and results across the Devolved Administration during 2022-23, the main objectives are as follows:

1. Continue to achieve NCA led disruptions in Northern Ireland and Scotland to build on our achievements in 2021/22.
2. Maximise the impact of our capability deployments in support of the SOC response in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Over 2022/23 these goals will be actively pursued with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Police Scotland, and other partners, to demonstrate the NCA's commitment to build even stronger relationships with our partner agencies. The NCA will continue to actively pursue these goals for 2022/23 and support wider agency performance ambitions at the high end of high harm in the Devolved Administrations.

The NCA's Forward Look to 2023/24 Performance Ambitions

- NCA are working with PSNI and partners in Northern Ireland to ensure that NCA's new five year strategy maximises opportunities to protect the public in Northern Ireland from SOC. We are taking a geographic approach focused on threat, risk and harm within Northern Ireland to focus NCA capabilities and pull through investigative opportunities to front line use by NCA Investigations or partners.
- NCA have agreed with PSNI a process and common system for assessing the most harmful SOC offenders / groups in Northern Ireland and thence agreeing a route to task action for either agency to Lead or Support tactical activity. This is intended to degrade the threat in the areas of Drugs, Money Laundering and Fraud and offer opportunity for further opportunities for Civil Recovery and Tax action as well as Criminal Justice outcomes.
- This work is in addition to the partnership working through the Paramilitary Crime Taskforce (PCTF) that the NCA undertakes. The NCA will continue to run intensifications to review PCTF SOIs and ensure that every investigative opportunity is taken to use the full range of disruptive action both through the Criminal Justice system and Civil route.

About this report

The aim of this report is to summarise NCA performance and activities within quarter four 2022/23 (January – March 2023 inclusive) related to Northern Ireland and the resulting impact on protecting communities from serious and organised crime. This includes the work of the PCTF.

The NCA develops, deploys, and maintains a range of national capabilities and provides them to police forces and other partners. These capabilities create opportunities to identify and take action against those engaged in SOC, as well as providing specialist expertise to support broader law enforcement activity. Examples of support provided to PSNI are included within Annex B and throughout the narrative. The report also considers wider NCA activity where its global nature is likely to have had some impact in Northern Ireland. The OFFICIAL classification of this report prevents the detailed inclusion of live operational activity and tactics.

The PSNI also submit a report to the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) setting out its performance against SOC during this period. The two reports can be read in conjunction to give an overview of law enforcement activity impacting Northern Ireland. In certain instances, there may be some overlap between cases reported in the two products, reflecting the close working relationship between the two agencies.

We have responded to feedback from recent Board meetings and made NCA and PSNI reports easier to read alongside each other. The structure of the NCA report has further evolved to provide additional clarity to the reader and has included extracts from the Official version of the most National Strategic Assessment (published in 2021. The 2022 Official Sensitive version has been made available to PSNI and an Official version for public viewing will be published shortly), and other relevant documents, in order to provide greater context. We will continue to liaise with colleagues to ensure that both reports are aligned as closely as possible.

Our impact in Northern Ireland

Disruption Assessment	Apr-21 to Mar-22		R12 Total	Apr-22 to Mar-23		R12 Total	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	5	0	5	13	0	13	▲
Moderate	33	6	39	48	9	57	▲
Minor	88	19	107	42	35	77	▼
Grand Total	126	25	151	103	44	147	▼

Figure 1: NCA Disruptions with impact in Northern Ireland April 2021 to March 2023

12 Month Comparison

Figure 1 above shows that major and moderate disruptions in Northern Ireland over the last 12 months were 59% higher (26 more disruptions) than 2021/2022. The increase in major and moderate disruptions is in line with the Agency’s strategy to increase the proportion of disruptions targeting high-harm offending, and has come – as predicted - at the expense of a reduction in minor disruptions.

Quarter Comparison

Figure 2 shows the overall trend for major and moderate disruptions has significantly increased since 2019 with the highest number of major and moderate disruptions over the last three years being conducted in this financial year. In Q4, Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) remains the threat area with the highest proportion of disruptions, accounting for 45% (13) of all disruptions this quarter. This is consistent with the high volume of CSA disruptions recorded in Northern Ireland this financial year, increasing by 64% (+15) with the majority (88%) being assessed as having a major or moderate impact, targeting the high end of high harm offenders in this threat area.

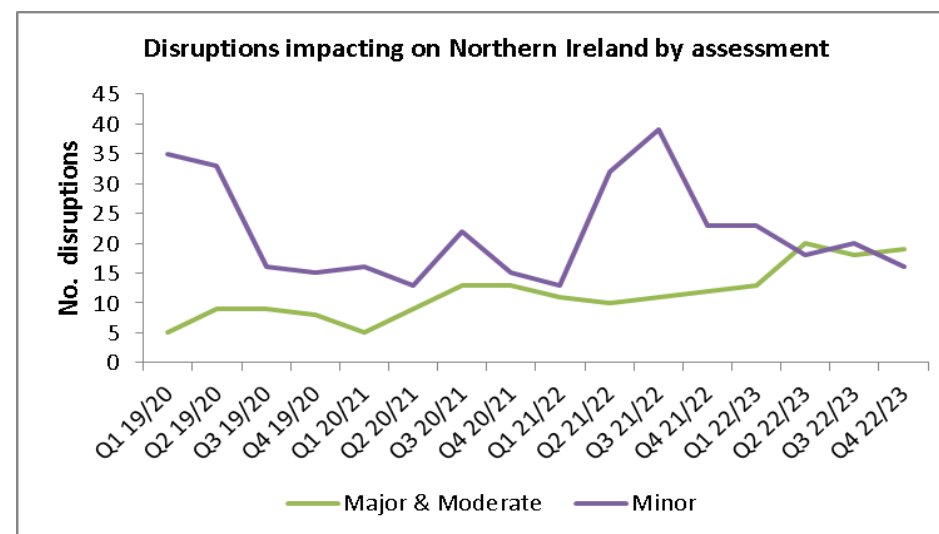


Figure 2: NCA Disruptions with impact in Northern Ireland by Assessment

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MSHT was the only other threat to see an increase in Q4 (+1), however volumes remain low at three total disruptions. Drugs (+1) and Money Laundering (+3) have also seen an increase in the number of disruptions when compared to the previous financial year.

The remainder of this report will set out examples of NCA activities which had an impact on SOC in Northern Ireland. Performance figures regarding our wider impact against SOC are contained within Annex A and updates from our specialist support services are provided in Annex B.

Those who seek to exploit the vulnerable

Child Sexual Abuse

UK Threat Picture derived from the National Strategic Assessment:

- The 2021 National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime estimates that there are between 550,000 and 850,000 UK-based individuals posing varying degrees of risk to children.
- Platforms allowing children to interact with strangers increase the risk of technology assisted grooming, which can result in both online and contact offending. While some offenders build trust with children, others elicit sexual abuse following minimal interaction, using methods including manipulation, threats and sextortion. The ability for children to be groomed online within the safety of their own homes requires vigilance from those able to intervene.

The updates below incorporate our most significant operational and partnership activities (from Q4) against Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) likely to affect Northern Ireland and/or those with a direct Northern Ireland link/impact:

Northern Ireland Impact

- In March, a subject that used social media for the grooming and blackmail of five children for indecent images was arrested, with one of the victims being located in Northern Ireland. The subject befriended the victims to obtain imagery and then threatened to share images with the victims' friends unless more were sent.
- Following months of negotiations Microsoft have agreed to accept requests from the NCA to enter Microsoft Cybertips in evidence. This has already resulted in a convicted child rapist being recalled to prison having continued to offend online using an Xbox. The wider implication is that those offenders who use Microsoft products to try and exploit children will be held accountable for their actions and we can obtain evidence much quicker for investigations across all the UK including Northern Ireland.
- Over Q4, the NCA issued 98 disseminations to PSNI with 13 arrests made, and 49 children safeguarded; and PSNI identified nine victims from indecent images of children and notified them to the NCA Victim Identification Team.
- The NCA attended the last SBNI (Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland) Online Safety Committee meeting on 28 February. Courses were presented on 'CEOP Education Ambassadors' and 'Understanding Online Child Sexual Abuse' during Q4.

Organised Immigration Crime

UK Threat Picture derived from the National Strategic Assessment

- Organised Immigration Crime (OIC) involves moving a person across borders without legal permission or documentation with the assistance of an OCG. It can also involve individuals illegally remaining in a country. The movement of migrants across the Channel using small boats steeply increased in 2020 and continues to rise.

The NCA established the Joint Intelligence Cell (JIC)/ Unité de Recherches Operationnelles (URO) with French law enforcement, which sees UK officers based in France to specifically target small boat smugglers. It is now estimated that more than 30% of all OIC investigations, arrests and prosecutions either originated from JICURO or was enhanced by JICURO intelligence.

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The updates below incorporate our most significant operational and partnership activities (from Q4) against Organised Immigration Crime (OIC) likely to affect Northern Ireland and/or those with a direct Northern Ireland link/impact:

Northern Ireland impact

- A subject from Northern Ireland was charged in connection to their involvement in trafficking and the manslaughter of 39 individuals in 2019 has been extradited to the UK from Belgium. The subject was wanted for his involvement in a criminal organisation that stole and smuggled truck, trailer and plant equipment on a large scale. The suspect stole and subsequently sold a refrigerated trailer to two men who used it to traffic the individuals to the UK. The subject was previously arrested in the UK on an extradition warrant issued by the Belgian authorities, but was subsequently discharged due to deficiencies with the request. After an extradition warrant was reissued, UKICB worked with the Crown Solicitor of Northern Ireland (CSONI) and the Belgian authorities to have the sentence transferred to the UK, to avoid another discharge and prevent the subject from escaping justice.

SOC Exploitation of the UK Border

UK Threat Picture derived from the National Strategic Assessment

- The international nature of SOC means that the ability to exploit and circumvent the UK Border is a crucial aspect of many OCG operating models.
- OCGs have shown agility and resilience in their ability to move between different forms of transport. Examples include a shift to using small boats to facilitate organised immigration crime during periods of disruption at ports rather than road networks. Some OCGs have also diversified to exploit postal services to move illicit commodities across borders, whilst others have attempted use of private air travel for criminal gain.

The updates below incorporate our most significant operational and partnership activities (from Q4) against SOC exploitation at the Border likely to affect Northern Ireland and/or those with a direct Northern Ireland link/impact

Northern Ireland Impact

- In February, two subjects were stopped outbound from Belfast airport to Montenegro. They were found to have £25,810 of undeclared currency within their luggage. Both subjects had declared £5,000 each carried in their hand luggage; however, a search of their hold luggage found £16,000 concealed inside a cooking pot and shoes. Following an interview with the subjects, the cash was seized under Proceeds of Crime Act powers and HMRC records for the subjects are being reviewed. A continued Detention Order for the cash has been granted until May 23. The NCA's investigation continues.
- In March 2023 a subject travelling to Belfast from Malaysia (via Oman and Birmingham) was detained at Belfast Airport after 15kg of Cannabis contained within four vacuum packed containers was identified within their luggage. The subject was subsequently arrested, charged and remanded into custody for 28 days in relation to drugs possession and importation offences. The NCA is progressing the case.
- Following an investigation into the importation, supply and distribution of Class C drugs, a subject was sentenced to two years imprisonment (12 months to be served on licence) in January 2023. The subject was arrested in March 2022 at Belfast International Airport after a search of his bags uncovered 32kgs of cannabis. This recovery formed part of the wider NCA prevention messaging strategy targeting drugs trafficking from North America.

Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking (MSHT)

UK Threat Picture derived from the National Strategic Assessment

- The term 'modern slavery' refers to human trafficking, slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour. The most commonly reported form of exploitation in the UK is coerced criminality, where victims are forced to commit criminal offences, with UK nationals as the most commonly identified victim group. Labour exploitation, sexual exploitation and domestic servitude are also commonly identified, but underreported.
- It is likely that at least 6,000-8,000 offenders are involved in the exploitation of people in the UK. This figure is indicative of the complexity involved in recruiting, moving, controlling, and successfully monetising the services of victims of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

The updates below incorporate our most significant operational and partnership activities (from Q4) against Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking (MSHT) likely to affect Northern Ireland and/or those with a direct Northern Ireland link/impact

Northern Ireland impact

- In January the NCA's MSHT OIC Cross Cutting & Enablers team met with a PSNI Investigation Lead Officer regarding an ongoing PSNI Operation. The NCA provided the PSNI Investigation Lead Officer specialist advice and guidance on disruption and prosecution strategies in relation to Complicit Service Providers (CSP). The PSNI in turn provided a case debrief to inform the NCA's ongoing work on a *Property as an Enabler* of MSHT project. From this debrief the NCA were able to inform an ongoing project about the use of property rentals by CSPs within the OCG business model. This learning was disseminated to the EMPACT Operational Action Short Term Accommodation project including potential new methodologies of serious organised crime usage of Airbnb and Booking.com for long term accommodation purposes.
- A deep dive on AIDANT operational activity coordinated by the NCA and conducted by national police forces to tackle the modern slavery and human trafficking threat, took place in Q4 22/23. The aim of the deep dive was to assess the impact of the operational activity, which included work with PSNI.

Those who dominate communities and chase profits in the criminal marketplace

Firearms

UK Threat Picture derived from the National Strategic Assessment

- High demand for firearms in the criminal market continues. Several investigations led to the recovery of a wide range of weapons, including automatic firearms, which disrupted supply networks linked to OCGs.
- Handguns remain the most common firearm used by criminals. Most shootings are from original lethal purpose firearms, closely followed by discharges from converted, modified and reactivated handguns. Converted models and firearms from lesser known manufacturers with fake premium brand markings have also been increasingly recovered.

The updates below incorporate our most significant operational and partnership activities (from Q4) against Firearms offending likely to affect Northern Ireland and/or those with a direct Northern Ireland link/impact:

Northern Ireland impact

- The NCA's Firearms and Explosive Network is supporting PSNI on a live case involving the referral of six seized handguns in a commercial movement between Registered Firearms Dealers in Germany & Northern Ireland.
- An operation continued in Q4, which has resulted in the seizure of over 700 weapons across the UK since 2018. The NCA has targeted the online purchase of illegal Forward-Venting Blank firing weapons, usually from other counties abroad. There have been recent legislative changes in Spain which will make it impossible for a UK based individual to purchase blank firers online from Spain and will have a significant effect on an individual's ability to purchase and receive these weapons in the UK.
- In March 2023, a subject was sentenced to 30 months in Federal Prison after he was identified as the US-Based supplier of a 9mm Sig Sauer handgun and ammunition sent via fast parcel to Northern Ireland in 2020.

Drugs

UK Threat Picture derived from the National Strategic Assessment and Home Affairs Select Committee

- Drugs trafficking is the most prominent serious organised crime threat in Northern Ireland, where 64% of OCGs being monitored by PSNI are involved in the drugs market. Cannabis is the most commonly seized drug in Northern Ireland seizures but the availability of cocaine and heroin is increasing.
- Most large-scale seizures of drugs in Northern Ireland are detected at ports and are most commonly hidden on board trailers or containers which have entered Northern Ireland from Great Britain.
- Afghanistan is the main source for heroin entering Europe. Ukraine was assessed as a strategic point in the Black Sea region for the trafficking of heroin and cocaine destined for Western European markets, including the UK. However, it is highly likely that OCGs involved in multi-commodity drugs trafficking will have been displaced to other Black Sea ports following the invasion of Ukraine.

The updates below incorporate our most significant operational and partnership activities (from Q4) against Drugs likely to affect Northern Ireland and/or those with a direct Northern Ireland link/impact:

Northern Ireland impact

- Two subjects from Antrim who were seen exchanging £20,000 in cash and one kilogram of cannabis were sentenced in February 2023 following a Paramilitary Crime Task Force operation. NCA officers, supported by colleagues from the PSNI, arrested one subject from Blanchardstown. The second subject was arrested at his home in Crumlin where a further £965 was seized as well as small quantities of cocaine and cannabis. Both subjects were charged with possession with intent to supply. They were given a 12 month sentence suspended for two years and a 26 month sentence respectively.
- On 24 February 2023, following an NCA led investigation into a criminal group suspected of importing Class A & B drugs and firearms from Spain and Portugal to Northern Ireland, a suspect was sentenced at Belfast Crown Court to 26 months for charges including possession and two counts of possession with intent to supply Class B controlled drug (Cannabis) and possession of criminal property (£20,000 cash), serving half in custody and half on probation. A second suspect had previously entered guilty pleas and received a 12 month sentence (suspended for 2 years) for each of the charges relating to the possession of drugs.

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- One of the NCA's most wanted subjects was arrested in Thailand in February. The subject fled the UK in January 2018, the evening before his trial was due to begin for importing £8m worth of amphetamine into the UK. In his absence, the subject was sentenced to eleven years in prison. The NCA Investigations team and overseas network of Liaison Officers engaged primarily with partners in Thailand alongside Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, Canada and Spain in an attempt to locate him. The subject was arrested in Bangkok by Thai Police, using an Irish passport with a different name. The court has issued an Extradition Order and the subject is due to be the third British national to be extradited from Thailand so far this year.

Undermining the UK's economy, integrity, institutions and infrastructure

Fraud

UK Threat Picture derived from the National Strategic Assessment

- The economic and social consequences of fraud affect the whole of UK society, from the public and private sectors to the individual. The cost of fraud to the UK is in the billions, and is assessed to be increasing. Between January 2020 and December 2020, Action Fraud reported £3 billion in losses impacting individuals and organisations. However, providing an accurate figure is constrained by significant underreporting, with much fraud remaining undetected or hidden.
- Over 2020 money launderers adapted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant restrictions on physical movement, new technology and regulation. Measures were adopted to bring crypto assets into the scope of UK Money Laundering Regulations to mitigate the risk of their criminal exploitation. It is highly likely that over £12 billion of criminal cash is generated annually in the UK, and a realistic possibility that the scale of money laundering impacting on the UK (including through UK corporate structures or financial institutions) is in the hundreds of billions of pounds annually.

The updates below incorporate our most significant operational and partnership activities (from Q4) against Fraud likely to affect Northern Ireland and/or those with a direct Northern Ireland link/impact:

Northern Ireland impact

- During Q4, PSNI participated in the NCA led Operation HENHOUSE. The NCA funding allowed PSNI to progress three investigations. These included:
 - The high profile investigation of a Wellbeing and Medical clinic. This resulted in the arrest and interview under caution of three subjects. A further subject attended a voluntary attendance interview. The funding specifically enabled PSNI to make significant progress in the investigation in terms of expert witnesses, business, financial, computer and telephone enquiries.
 - Two investigations into money mules laundering the proceeds of fraud. This funding enabled PSNI to facilitate the interview of twelve subjects. Of these, eight have had files sent to the Public Prosecution Service with a recommendation of prosecution; the file building of the other four is still ongoing.

Money Laundering

UK Threat Picture derived from the National Strategic Assessment

- The economic and social consequences of fraud affect the whole of UK society, from the public and private sectors to the individual. The cost of fraud to the UK is in the billions, and is assessed to be increasing. Between January 2020 and December 2020, Action Fraud reported £3 billion in losses impacting individuals and organisations. However, providing an accurate figure is constrained by significant underreporting, with much fraud remaining undetected or hidden.
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The updates below incorporate our most significant operational and partnership activities (from Q4) against Money Laundering likely to affect Northern Ireland and/or those with a direct Northern Ireland link/impact:

Northern Ireland impact

- The NCA are pursuing three Money Laundering investigations in Northern Ireland in collaboration with PSNI and HMRC. Surveillance deployments on subjects have been conducted by the NCA and tactical advice has also been provided in regards to Virtual Assets and Cryptocurrency.
- The NCA continues to utilise non-conviction based asset recovery powers by both the PCTF and the wider Agency operating within Northern Ireland, to target individuals who are engaged in drug trafficking, fraud, extortion, money laundering, excise duty evasion and tax evasion.
- In addition to the ongoing CRT investigations, the NCA Asset Denial team is also conducting four Civil Recovery and Tax investigations with links to Northern Ireland.
- In one of the investigations, two Disclosure Interviews were conducted under POCA 2002 and a further Disclosure Interview is scheduled to take place in the coming weeks.

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- In another of the investigations, where the NCA are seeking the first Unexplained Wealth Order in Northern Ireland, NCA Legal and case teams continue preparations for this contested hearing.
- The CRT team on PCTF is also concluding an exercise to review 67 subjects referred by PSNI for civil recovery opportunities. These individuals have been identified as high value targets. A small number will be subject to further investigation and financial intelligence packages will be disseminated to PSNI in respect of the remainder (i.e. those deemed not suitable for civil recovery). The primary reason for unsuitability is due to a lack of assets.
- The CRT team have recently been scoping individuals linked to the ongoing community tensions in the North Down area and this area of priority work is set to continue.

Cyber Crime

UK Threat Picture derived from the National Strategic Assessment

- The estimated cost, both direct and indirect, to UK victims ranges from the several hundreds of millions to billions of pounds per year. Despite an obligation to report data breaches to the Information Commissioner's Office, underreporting and inaccurate estimates continue to impact our ability to understand the true scale and cost of cybercrime to the UK. This is partly because of low rates of awareness, monitoring and understanding of the costs associated with cyber breaches. In some cases victims are reluctant to report because of potential reputational damage or uncertainty over what needs reporting and to which agencies.
- Ransomware continues to dominate law enforcement and media attention due to the financial, data and service losses incurred by victims. This year has been notable for the increasing use of an accompanying threat to publish stolen data by ransomware operators. Industry partners estimate that over 50% of all ransomware activity includes this additional threat.

The updates below incorporate our most significant operational and partnership activities (from Q4) against Cyber Crime related criminality likely to affect Northern Ireland and/or those with a direct Northern Ireland link/impact. Details of NCA activities against this threat cannot be fully reported at this Government Security Classification.

Northern Ireland impact

- During Q4, the NCA National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU) supported PSNI in response to one cyber incident; a ransomware attack, against a victim based in Northern Ireland. Efforts to identify the offender are ongoing at this time. The NCCU continues to provide support via upstream enquiries, sharing of information, and the provision of specialist capabilities.
- The NCA supported a FBI-led international operation to takedown the Genesis Market, an online marketplace selling stolen account credentials to criminals worldwide. The NCA coordinated the research and dissemination of a number of packages containing UK-based user details for executive action. The NCA continues to support PSNI to investigate users of the Genesis Market that are assessed to be in their jurisdiction.

ANNEX A: Our wider impact against SOC performance

Our wider impact against SOC

The NCA targets serious and organised criminals who operate across the UK and internationally. Aside from our work in Northern Ireland, the NCA continues to lead other activities which we assess will have an impact on protecting communities in Northern Ireland. Examples include removing dangerous content from the internet, shutting down distribution channels for drugs and guns, creating a hostile environment for SOC criminals to operate in, raising public awareness and driving policy changes to provide greater resilience to fraud.

The table below presents headline figures incorporating both NCA-led activity and activity in support of our Law Enforcement partners, working together to tackle SOC in communities across the UK and further afield.

Disruption Assessment	Apr-21 to Mar-22		R12 Total	Apr-22 to Mar-23		R12 Total	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	96	68	164	144	80	224	▲
Moderate	738	609	1347	685	706	1391	▲
Minor	1561	1042	2603	1256	1836	3092	▲
Grand Total	2395	1719	4114	2085	2622	4707	▲

Figure 3: Total NCA Disruptions, April 2021 to March 2023

There were 593 more NCA disruptions between April 2022 and March 2023 when compared to the preceding 12 month period. Throughout the financial year the Agency has been focusing on its strategy to deliver growth in our highest impact lead disruptions. This has been successfully implemented with a 37% growth in major or moderate ‘pursue’ disruptions led by the NCA against the highest harm criminals and groups (our P1 and P2 operations), against a target of 20% growth set out at the start of the financial year.

There were 423 disruptions led or supported by NCA’s international teams over Q4 bringing the year to date total to 2,295. Around 55% of Q4 disruptions were conducted against the Drugs (21%), CSA (12%), Border Vulnerabilities (11%) and Money Laundering (11%) threats and the agency seized over 46,000kgs of Class A drugs (heroin and cocaine), bringing the year to date total to 223,000kgs and an additional 23 firearms bringing the year to date total to 133 firearms.

The case studies below provide examples of high impact disruptions we have delivered during this reporting period:

Cyber Crime

- The US and Germany were able to successfully identify and takedown two servers for a subscription based ransom as a service (RASS) website, allowing users to deploy ransomware against victim companies. The NCA and International Partners provided substantial assistance through the joint Europol working group sharing intelligence and indicators of data compromises recovered from victims of Hive attacks. This operation contributed to establishing the infrastructure used by the attackers and to prevent similar attacks in the future. This disruption will have a significant impact on the number of users willing to use this server, therefore reducing the chances of it continuing. Damaging the branding of the strain could make it a less popular choice of RASS. It is estimated that \$130 million was denied to the group in ransom payments as part of this activity. Many more millions will have been prevented from future attacks in the take down of this infrastructure.

Child Sexual Abuse

- Following an NCA led investigation a suspect has been successfully convicted to life imprisonment, with no minimum sentence due to the high risk of the individual, for serious CSA offences targeting family members. The offender uploaded photographs and videos of their offences to the dark web to be accessed by offenders around the world. The offences span over a 15 year period with the earliest eligibility for parole being in 13 years. The operation safeguarded multiple victims from harm.

Organised Immigration Crime

- Vessels, engines, lifejackets destined for illegal small boat channel crossings were seized in Germany as a result of last year's Combined Day of Action across Europe. NCA provided a critical response in Q4 22/23, by taking control of the equipment and returning it to the UK for destruction. 80 vessels carrying 40 migrants each represent an income range between £6.4M to £16M. Taking these vessels and engines out of circulation for destruction has potentially eliminated over 3,500 migrants from engaging in high risk, illegal channel crossings. Two such vessels have sunk in the last 24 months which has resulted in excess of 30 deaths.

Non-National Control Strategy

- In February the NCA's National Investigative Capabilities (NIC) provided assistance to two high profile cases with Police Service Northern Ireland and Greater Manchester Police, which led to the charges of two subjects. The first subject is alleged to have carried out a frenzied knife attack on his pregnant ex-partner, and the second shot his male victim in the face and then poured acid into the open wound. Across these cases NIC provided a digital media specialist to disprove an alibi posted on social media, strategic and tactical advice on how to recover and process CCTV, vehicle and doorbell footage totalling over 40,000 hours, and behavioural profiling expertise to shape a likely hypothesis of the suspect's characteristics and motivations.

Firearms

- US authorities detected and seized a Glock 22 handgun and 50 rounds of ammunition destined for a UK consignee. OCP London carried out a controlled delivery package and search. Following this, three senior members of an OCG were arrested and have been remanded in custody. During the search a further three firearms were recovered and seized, in addition to one kilogram of methamphetamine and £30,000 were seized.

Drugs

- A suspect on the NCA's most wanted list was arrested on behalf of the NCA by Thai Police in February, after absconding before his trial in January 2018. The subject had been charged with conspiracy to import controlled drugs, namely 175 litres of liquid Amphetamine in the UK, and was sentenced in absence to 11 years and had been on the run since. The NCA engaged with overseas countries in an attempt to locate him and had been working with Thai law enforcement to achieve the arrest.

Money Laundering

- An Irish national was arrested by the NCA in February who is suspected of being a global facilitator for OCGs to launder their criminal proceeds mostly derived from Class A and B drugs supply. He is linked to an Irish OCG who have historically split their time between the Republic of Ireland and the UK. The subject was arrested on his return to the UK and was subsequently released on conditional bail. The NCA continue to work closely alongside the Garda Síochána as this case develops.

- ANNEX B: Supporting partners with our Specialist Capabilities**

The NCA has developed a range of niche capabilities - from advanced analysis to technical solutions - that support both our investigations and those of our partners. A snapshot of how these have impacted the SOC threat in Northern Ireland are provided below.

Support Area	Significant Q4 Updates
Major Crime Investigation Support (MCIS)	<p>The NCA’s Major Crime Investigative Support (MCIS) provided advice and support to PSNI on 15 cases, and deployed officers on 39 occasions. Cases included murder, sexual offences and non-accidental injury (NAI). Three main cases MCIS assisted with were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The shooting and attempted murder of an off duty police officer in Omagh, Northern Ireland. MSIC provided support to the investigation team in relation to a number intelligence strands and the investigation is on going. • The death of an 82 year old male in Drumore, Northern Ireland. • The murder of a 32 year old female and her unborn child at her home in Lurgan, Northern Ireland. MCIS provided significant support which resulted in the arrest and charge of a suspect who remains in custody.
UK Financial Intelligence Unit (UKFIU)	<p>UKFIU continues to conduct work that directly impacts Northern Ireland, assisting PSNI with disseminating Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) and requests for Defence Against Money Laundering (DAMLs).</p> <p>During Q4, UKFIU assisted with the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four international requests on behalf of PSNI (relating to drugs and theft). • UKFIU disseminated nine counter terrorism related SARs to PSNI. • UKFIU conducted 16 counter terrorism related search requests on behalf of PSNI. • UKFIU identified 10 SARs relating to suspected vulnerable persons, 12 relating to suspected child exploitation and five relating to suspected Human Trafficking SARs for fast-tracking to PSNI. <p>During Q4 of FY 2022/23, the SARs Exploitation officer with responsibility for Northern Ireland liaised with PSNI, Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Law Society Northern Ireland for</p>

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	matters pertaining to the exploitation of SARs data.
Child Sexual Abuse Threat Leadership	PSNI continues to be fully engaged in the strategic governance arrangements to tackle child sexual abuse (CSA), including regular submission of management information to the Online CSA Pursue Threat Board. PSNI is also engaged in the NCA chaired working group developing online CSA risk assessment tools, and the NCA chaired working group to develop prioritisation.
Anti-Kidnap & Extortion Unit (AKEU)	AKEU received thirteen requests for support from PSNI in this reporting period, and provided proactive assistance in eight kidnap investigations, and five blackmail investigations.
UK National Central Office (UKNCO) for the Suppression of Counterfeit Currency and Protected Coins	<p>Of the 16 submissions received during this period, four statements for counterfeit currency seizures (witness statement requests) submitted by the PSNI to the UKNCO were processed, analysed and expert witness statements were facilitated to support prosecutions / investigations.</p> <p>This included; two submissions in relation to Bank of England notes, one for Euro notes and one in relation to Ulster Bank £20 (paper notes).</p> <p>It has been identified that counterfeits of the Bank of England Polymer £20 continue to be seen in circulation and have been included in submissions from PSNI (Northern Ireland). These are mainly paper copies of the polymer £20 notes – ‘sold as prop notes’ for TV and film sets (but which are counterfeit).</p>
UK Protected Persons Service (UKPPS)	The NCA Central Services Unit provides, as a part of the UK Protected Persons Service (UKPPS), operational support to the PSNI Protected Persons Unit which is aligned to the UKPPS. In this quarter, the UKPPS has provided 13 days of training to six officers.
UK International Crime Bureau (UKICB)	<p>The UK International Crime Bureau (UKICB) carried out a number of high profile operations with links to Northern Ireland and/or in conjunction with colleagues in PSNI to successfully identify and target SOC individuals and international OCGs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- UKICB led intelligence efforts to locate a violent Slovakian national wanted to face charges of murder. Intelligence provided to PSNI was supplemented by their own search efforts, and

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	<p>led to the subject being located and arrested within three days of the dissemination. PSNI officers led the operation to hand over the subject to the Slovakian authorities on 17/02/2023, supported by the team in the UKICB.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- UKICB coordinated the arrest of a person, currently serving a sentence for drugs possession and trafficking in Northern Ireland, on behalf of INTERPOL colleagues in Dublin, Republic of Ireland. UKICB conducted intelligence checks and identified the current sentence, and provided copies of the warrant to PSNI and CSONI colleagues. The subject was arrested on the warrant, so that upon completion of his sentence in the UK, he will immediately face the possibility of extradition from the UK, removing the possibility of future offending which could impact the UK public.
The UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU)	<p>The UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU) assisted PSNI in three cases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• UKMPU completed passport and travel checks on a subject of interest, as well as obtaining information from overseas healthcare checks and a variety of open source enquiries on behalf of PSNI. A Force Alert was circulated to the Met and BTP.• Open source enquiries conducted following concerns around forced marriage. A location of the missing person was identified and recommendations and advice were given around completing an Interpol Enquiry Form, and continued assistance has been provided around social media checks.• Human remains were discovered by a fishing vessel in June 2020. The remains were matched to an Irish missing person through the use of I-Familia, a global database for identifying missing persons based on international DNA kinship matching.

• **ANNEX C: Performance Data by Threat Area**

Performance Data by Threat Area

Breakdown of NCA Disruptions impacting on Northern Ireland by SOC threat, September 2022- March 2023

SOC Area	Threat	Q3 2022/23				Q4 2022/23				R12 Total	R12 Total	Trend
		Major	Moderate	Minor	Total	Major	Moderate	Minor	Total	Apr 21 - Mar 22	Apr 22 - Mar 23	
Those who exploit the vulnerable	Child Sexual Abuse	0	10	0	10	1	9	3	13	27	42	▲
	Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking	0	0	2	2	0	0	3	3	26	16	▼
	Organised Immigration Crime	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	▼
Those who dominate communities and chase profits in the criminal marketplace	Drugs	1	1	4	6	0	1	0	1	11	12	▲
	Firearms	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	9	5	▼
Those who undermine the UK's economy, integrity, infrastructure and institutions	Cyber	4	1	4	9	3	1	3	7	31	25	▼
	Fraud	0	1	3	4	0	1	1	2	12	10	▼
	Money Laundering	0	0	2	2	0	0	2	2	5	8	▲