

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Policing and security in Northern Ireland, HC 1341

Wednesday 11 March 2026

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Tonia Antoniazzi (Chair); Claire Hanna; Simon Hoare; Mike Kane; Alicia Kearns; Mr Paul Kohler; Katrina Murray; Gavin Robinson; Robin Swann.

Questions 170-254

Witnesses

[I](#): Gemma Davies, Associate Professor of Law at Durham University.

[II](#): Rob Jones, Director General Operations, National Crime Agency, Miles Bonfield, Deputy Director for Economic Crime and Devolved Administrations, National Crime Agency, and Gordon Summers, Head of ICE and ROM North, Home Office.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- Gemma Davies (Associate Professor of Criminal law at Durham University [[PSNI0009](#)])
- The National Crime Agency (NCA) [[PSNI0027](#)]

Examination of witness

Witness: Gemma Davies.

Q170 Chair: Welcome to the Northern Ireland Select Affairs Committee. This is our inquiry into policing and security in Northern Ireland. Welcome to Gemma Davies, associate professor of law at Durham University. Gemma, how do you assess the current level of cross-border collaboration between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána?

Gemma Davies: I assess it as being strong and resilient. Our work has revealed long-term and deep co-operation between both sides. That was largely supported through the Brexit process and, to a certain extent, Brexit was able to shine a light on cross-border co-operation, providing some impetus to improve structures that were already there. Co-operation is good, but that does not mean that leaving the European Union did not mean that we lost access to certain co-operation mechanisms. If something is not legally permissible, it cannot occur between either side, if that makes sense; if we lose the ability to share certain types of information, that cannot be overcome by good bilateral co-operation.

Q171 Chair: Are there areas you have highlighted where the relationship could be improved further, and how?

Gemma Davies: In terms of the structures we have in place—you will be able to hear in the next session from those who probably have much more detailed operational understanding—the Joint Agency Task Force and the cross-border policing strategy allow for co-ordination in areas that are of importance to both. Where there could be improvements—and where I think it is important for the Committee to recognise that there could be improvements—is, first, between the UK and the European Union in relation to what was lost as a result of leaving the European Union.

Secondly, there are opportunities that perhaps have not been explored in bilateral co-operation between the UK and Ireland, but have been explored with other countries. Thirdly, in relation to enhancing structures that are already there, thing we have suggested in the past is consideration of a permanent joint UK-Ireland co-ordination centre, for example, to provide a more physical hub. It would make sure that co-operation truly could be joint and not just co-ordinated.

Finally, there is trying to close any gaps in alerts—making sure that both sides have access to real-time alerts on persons, vehicles, firearms and data sharing for things like watchlists, criminal records and those who are on sex offender registers. That sort of information sharing is vital. No matter what structure you have, if you are not able to share that information in as real time as possible, that presents risks.

Very finally, I would say that maintaining data protection and human rights is really important moving forward. The provisions of the trade and co-operation agreement really demonstrate that data protection and

human rights are not just niceties, but preconditions of being able to continue the level of co-operation that we have. That would cause significant difficulties in the future, if there were to be changes.

Q172 Katrina Murray: Thank you very much for coming along today, Gemma. To what extent is cross-border co-operation on policing and justice between the UK and Ireland continuing to function effectively under the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement?

Gemma Davies: In many ways, the trade and co-operation agreement provided a good basis for co-operation. Many of the things that were most important were able to be retained, but there were some significant differences. I will give you a few of those. One was the loss of what was called the Schengen information system. A lot of work was done on how important that was, because it allowed the receiving of data in real time. By the time Ireland joined SIS II, the UK was leaving, so we have never really had the opportunity to explore what that could have enabled between the UK and Ireland.

Of course, the UK has put in some mitigations. We are using Interpol's I-24/7 database, but inevitably there are still consequences for how quickly data is shared between the two, and importantly for the way in which arrest warrants are circulated between EU member states and the UK.

Q173 Katrina Murray: Could you elaborate a bit on how well those arrest warrants and arrangements are working in practice?

Gemma Davies: In practice, it depends on how well the individual EU member state has chosen to make allowances for changes in the relationship. Between the UK and Ireland, I understand that it has worked well, because of the close relationships and the opportunity to meet frequently.

But it means that, if a European arrest warrant is circulated to all EU member states—it is possible for there to be a TCA arrest warrant, but that will now only happen if there is a known connection to the UK—Northern Ireland would not know that it was circulated unless that state had also chosen to put an alert on I-24/7.

Q174 Katrina Murray: Does that provide noticeable delays in issuing or being able to act on warrants, compared to the European arrest warrant system?

Gemma Davies: It can do. It is clear from the interviews we have conducted that post-Brexit mitigations are more time-consuming and require more steps. A red notice—an Interpol I-24/7 notice—does not have an arrest warrant attached to it, so it requires police to act quickly to share the arrest warrant, which would allow for the arrest of an individual if they have been located.

Q175 Katrina Murray: Finally from me, are there any other aspects of policing co-operation on the island of Ireland that you have found from your research to have been impacted by new post-Brexit arrangements?

Gemma Davies: The alert capacity is probably the primary issue.

Q176 **Mr Kohler:** Thank you for coming today. What effect has Brexit had on the common travel area? What challenges is the divergence emerging after Brexit bringing to the common travel area?

Gemma Davies: The challenge from a cross-border policing perspective is obviously that the common travel area can be abused, but that has always been the case to a certain extent. It is not that Brexit has necessarily exacerbated that problem, but that it has created some additional ones.

The Joint Agency Task Force has tried to ramp up its co-ordination, particularly in relation to immigration, human trafficking and some other areas, for example. But, inevitably, the common travel area requires greater co-operation between the UK and Ireland than between the UK and other states. The trade and co-operation agreement does not reflect that, in the sense that it is about co-operation between the UK and all EU member states.

That is why we would say that a UK-Ireland security agreement could allow closer collaboration between the UK and Ireland, within the parameters of what would be permissible in EU law, to consider additional measures. Some things that have been recommended are hot pursuit, and establishing a clear legal authority for joint investigations that allows more streamlined sharing of evidence and intelligence, for example. Those are ways to ameliorate the issues that can arise because of the common travel area.

Q177 **Mr Kohler:** I should know the answer to this, but I don't: with freedom of movement, what were the challenges before Brexit, and how have they been exacerbated after Brexit?

Gemma Davies: In relation to excise fraud, for example, if there are differences between pricing on either side, that can lead to crime. If there are differences in currency, for example, there are ways in which that might be able to facilitate crime. Again, with organised immigration crime, if there are differences between immigration policies, that could mean that there is a greater incentive to try to use the common travel area in that way.

Q178 **Mr Kohler:** I see that. I can understand it with financial crimes. With regard to immigration crime, what was the issue before Brexit, or has it only been after Brexit?

Gemma Davies: That is probably an area that, post Brexit, has arisen as a result of a divergence between immigration policies.

Q179 **Mr Kohler:** How is the co-ordination between the Garda, the PSNI and the National Crime Agency functioning at the moment?

Gemma Davies: It would be best to speak to those who are operationally on the ground to know—

Mr Kohler: What do you think?



Gemma Davies: From what I have been able to see, there is evidence that there are successful joint investigations—every year we see evidence of those. From my perspective, I see evidence of strong co-operation. None the less, it is important from a political perspective to understand what the structures are that sit behind that, how they can be strengthened and what the risks to those are if data protection rules were to change, for example.

Q180 **Mr Kohler:** From my work on the Home Affairs Select Committee, we have seen that the people smuggling gangs are very adept at changing tactics and exploiting areas of weakness. Are they exploiting the common travel area much at this stage?

Gemma Davies: There is evidence that that is the case. We see that in the prosecutions and the joint operations that have taken place. There is evidence that there are organised criminal gangs that exploit the common travel area.

Q181 **Mr Kohler:** Does the response seem good enough?

Gemma Davies: Whether the response is good enough can be difficult to say from an academic perspective, because I am not aware of what may or may not be going on that is not in the public domain. I am reliant on what is in the public domain, or what I am told during interviews and roundtables. What I am told is that there is a high degree of will to be able to work together to deal with all-island threats. However, that is difficult and expensive. There are things that we could do through closer bilateral co-operation that could allow for better sharing of evidence and intelligence, such as ensuring that the legal frameworks are in place to address those threats effectively.

Q182 **Mr Kohler:** My last question is probably an impossible one. It is easy to say how many undocumented migrants are coming across the channel. Are there any figures at all on how many are coming via the CTA, or is that utterly impossible, for obvious reasons?

Gemma Davies: To a certain extent there probably is an element of that being difficult. If there is a way of being able to capture that data, I am not aware of that being made publicly available. That means that it is difficult to assess; the only real way to do it would be to look at prosecution numbers, I suspect. That is not a perfect indication, because more prosecutions could reflect the fact that there is more crime, but it could also reflect better ways of being able to detect and prosecute crime. It is not perfect, but it is one way in which you can assess.

Q183 **Mr Kohler:** Although, those who wanted to seek asylum would have to make a claim, so that is one way of assessing it. Are there figures on that?

Gemma Davies: The Home Office may have figures. What is not clear to me is the figures about where that asylum was claimed, and where that individual is said to have arrived in the UK from.

Q184 **Mr Kohler:** If they are in Northern Ireland claiming asylum, is it not obvious where they have come from?

Gemma Davies: Well, it is likely if they have claimed asylum in Northern Ireland. But I am not aware that figures are split in that way.

Mr Kohler: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q185 **Alicia Kearns:** You mentioned that there is strong co-operation, but also that you think there need to be more formalised structures—either a joint co-ordination hub or more timely alert sharing. Are you aware, through your interviews or your roundtables, or from the public domain anywhere, of any failures or collapses of cases or investigations because there are not such structures?

Gemma Davies: I am not aware of any operations that have collapsed or prosecutions that have not been able to go through. If those things are in the public domain, it is usually because they are successful. They usually enter the public domain because there is a prosecution.

Q186 **Alicia Kearns:** Forgive me, but you spend your time having private conversations, roundtables and discussions with serving and former police officers, so to come to the conclusion that there needs to be a joint co-ordination hub, there must be an issue or a problem that is not being delivered on. Therefore, you presumably have police officers saying to you, “We had to stop a pursuit,” or, “We weren’t able to get the intelligence information we needed, so an investigation collapsed.” If they get into prosecution, they are all happy and dandy. Is it the stage beforehand where you are suggesting there is a problem.

Gemma Davies: Yes. We have had those conversations. The work we have done over the last few years—the most recent data and interviews we have—was for the Scottish Parliament. We interviewed Scottish stakeholders—Scottish police officers. We have not conducted interviews for Northern Ireland, specifically, in the last few years. That is happening over the next few months because the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission have started a new project, which I am leading, and that will look at that exact issue.

Q187 **Alicia Kearns:** So the recommendation for a UK-Ireland joint co-ordination hub is based on evidence from Scotland rather than from Northern Ireland?

Gemma Davies: It was based on interviews and stakeholder events that we had earlier on, leading up to and immediately after Brexit, where it was suggested that a better ability to co-ordinate would facilitate more real-time assistance and better joint co-ordination. It comes from that earlier research between 2018 and 2021.

Q188 **Alicia Kearns:** As things were initially settling down?

Gemma Davies: As things were settling down.

Q189 **Alicia Kearns:** It would be really helpful to get your assessment, because things have bedded down quite significantly since then. Obviously, the pandemic had a significant impact in many ways on the ability to police.

Can I pick up on the question of judging the nature, and the emerging



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trends, of what you are seeing across the border? You mentioned not being able to judge the volume, but what are you seeing in terms of people smuggling, for example? Is it children for sexual exploitation? Is it slave labour? Is it economic and illegal migrants? What is the nature of what we are seeing?

Gemma Davies: The smuggling of human beings primarily seems to fall within sexual exploitation or labour exploitation. For example, there have been arrests in relation to individuals working in relation to those two.

Q190 **Alicia Kearns:** Are those primarily Irish nationals, or are they people being trafficked from elsewhere into Ireland as an easy way to get them into the UK?

Gemma Davies: My understanding is that they are from outside Ireland.

Q191 **Alicia Kearns:** You mentioned that drugs are common across the area. What type of drugs does your research show are involved? Is it cocaine? Is it Captagon? What sort of thing are we seeing?

Gemma Davies: In the research we have done, synthetic drugs have been mentioned but, again, I do not have any recent data to show whether that is a full picture.

Q192 **Chair:** You suggested earlier that there could be a new bilateral UK-Ireland security agreement. You have spoken about evidence and intelligence, but what would that cover? What would it look like, ideally?

Gemma Davies: It is an opportunity to, for example, develop more all-island strategic threat and risk assessments. That has been mentioned by both sides. The idea of having co-located centres has been growing, and has been on the agenda in the Republic of Ireland. It has been recommended that the Department of Justice in Ireland establish a national crime centre that delivers co-located collaboration among all agencies. That would mirror the Scottish crime campus, which brings together all the different agencies physically. That has real benefits, both for cross-border co-operation and in terms of dealing with, for example, serious organised crime, which requires that kind of work. That allows those opportunities.

The types of things that could be considered in a security agreement would be, for example, looking at mutual legal assistance. At the moment, the relationship between the UK and Ireland has, as with all EU states, fallen back. We no longer have access to European investigation orders and have fallen back on MLA, which happens through a 1950s convention, so it is outdated and not as quick. Those are examples of where bilateral agreements can strengthen co-ordination in the sharing of evidence and looking at the legal basis of what can be shared during, for example, joint investigations.

We have talked about other things such as real-time access to data on things like persons, vehicles and firearms, which the UK currently uses I-24/7 to access. As we have talked about, having very clear legal rules about how and when data on things like watchlists, criminal records and

sex offenders can be shared enables police to react and have confidence in the legal framework that is behind them, in order to co-ordinate effectively.

Chair: That is really useful, Gemma.

Q193 **Simon Hoare:** Forgive me if I misheard you, but I think you said in an answer to an earlier question that granular data is not available to totalise the asylum claims made by people in Northern Ireland. Did I hear you correctly?

Gemma Davies: I said that I was not aware. I have not looked and I am not aware of whether there is individual data for Northern Ireland. If there was, it would be right that it would be a good, but not conclusive, indication of the number of individuals who have claimed asylum after moving through the CTA.

Q194 **Simon Hoare:** Given the nature and detail of your work, would I be right to suspect that if those statistics were collated and available in the public sphere, you would have seen them, noticed them and come across them?

Gemma Davies: I would have thought so, but I am not aware of that data, nor have I looked. I can look up whether that is available after the session and follow up in writing.

Chair: That would be really helpful.

Simon Hoare: That would be helpful, because we are trying to assess the scale. If the Government are successful on, for example, channel crossings, but a new route then opens up, it would be helpful for us to be able to compare some baselines and assess whether it is evolving at all. That would be enormously helpful to try to advance a better understanding and approach.

Chair: I completely agree, so if you find those statistics, Gemma, that would be helpful.

Simon Hoare: It might be that we write to the Home Secretary in any event to ask whether that is done.

Q195 **Chair:** That is a very good idea.

Given that the UK Government digital ID scheme is no longer going to be mandatory, are there any outstanding issues or concerns around the interaction of the IDs, the CTA, the rights of Irish citizens in the UK and the people of Northern Ireland? Is that a red flag for you?

Gemma Davies: I have not looked at that issue particularly, but it is an important aspect of the CTA that the policing of it does not result in any diminution of rights. That has caused difficulty and legal challenges, and we have seen that in other areas—for example, in relation to human trafficking. When changes were made through the Illegal Migration Bill to how the protections for victims of human trafficking could be accessed, that was an example of a legal challenge that would demonstrate where

there could be a difference in the diminution of rights. That is important in this area when we are looking at different ways to tackle certain types of crime.

Q196 Robin Swann: To follow up on Simon's point, I think the Irish Government put out figures on the numbers of asylum claims that they said had come via the UK to Northern Ireland and to the Republic of Ireland. It will be strange if the Irish Government have some way of capturing that data but we don't.

Gemma Davies: I was not aware of that, but I will make a note of it. I will look into both those issues and respond.

Chair: Thank you very much for your time, Gemma. We will pause the session for the next panel to come in. Thank you; that was great—brilliant.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rob Jones, Miles Bonfield and Gordon Summers.

Chair: Welcome to the continuation of the session. On our second witness panel we have Rob Jones, director general of operations at the National Crime Agency; Miles Bonfield, deputy director for economic crime and devolved Administrations at the National Crime Agency; and Gordon Summers, head of immigration compliance and enforcement and reporting and offender management north at the Home Office. Welcome, everybody, to our session on policing and security in Northern Ireland. Gavin Robinson has the first question.

Q197 Gavin Robinson: Good morning, gentlemen. Mr Summers, you will have heard some of the exchanges about the porous nature of the border in Northern Ireland and the challenges that that presents to you and Home Office colleagues. We are aware of a facility in Belfast. Those of us who travel from Northern Ireland to London on a weekly basis are aware of your removal operations, because we often sit beside many of your colleagues who are removing people from Northern Ireland for onward transport through the rest of the United Kingdom. Can you give us a sense of your role and remit in Northern Ireland, and of your relationship with the Police Service of Northern Ireland?

Gordon Summers: Me personally, or Immigration Enforcement in general?

Gavin Robinson: Well, you say "personally"; I assume you are here representing the Home Office. Let's go for a collective view first, and then if there is anything you want to add personally, we can certainly hear it.

Gordon Summers: I am the head of immigration enforcement operations in the north of the UK. That is basically north of Oxford and, obviously and most pertinently, in Northern Ireland. Immigration Enforcement is quite a small presence in Northern Ireland. We have only 57 operational officers there, so it is not a massive number of people. As you have heard, we are

basically based in Drumkeen House in Galwally. We operate primarily at Belfast docks and the two airports.

The biggest operation we have ongoing is Operation Gull, which is quite a well-known operation. The emphasis of that operation is detecting and disrupting foreign national offenders who are travelling to GB, primarily having arrived in the Republic of Ireland. We are also looking for people who have been trafficked—the victims of trafficking—and the perpetrators of trafficking. We do that basically by means of behavioural detection. Who are we are interested in? Are they behaving strangely? Can they not account for their presence in the UK and in Belfast? Have they got a credible story for why they are there?

We have a good relationship with the Police Service of Northern Ireland. We totally recognise that it is a unique policing environment in Northern Ireland, and we attempt to tailor our operations to reflect that. We operate with the Police Service of Northern Ireland on a daily basis, basically. We have a high level of co-operation, particularly when dealing with organised crime, people trafficking and things like that. We notify the police about ongoing operations in Northern Ireland. It is not just about Operation Gull—please stop me if you have heard enough, Mr Robinson.

Q198 Gavin Robinson: Do you think our border controls are too lax?

Gordon Summers: No. The border between the UK and Ireland has existed for 100 years. There are 110 million people that cross the border every year. That is a part of what makes living in—

Q199 Gavin Robinson: I will give you an example as a Member of Parliament. Claire Hanna and I, both representing Belfast constituencies, spend a lot of time working with and supporting the Belfast Central Mission, which supports individuals who are subject to immigration controls. One famous example was of a lady—I will not name her, but I could—who was detained. She was taken to Larne PSNI station, where there is an immigration holding centre, and deported from there to Yarl's Wood and Glasgow. She was then removed, under the Dublin agreement at the time, to the country from which she entered the United Kingdom, which just happened to be Dublin. She got on a blue bus and came back to Belfast. On three occasions she did this cycle of Belfast, detained, Larne, Yarl's Wood, Dublin, blue bus, Belfast, detained—it goes on and on. So when I ask whether you think border controls are lax, how does your answer fit with that experience?

Gordon Summers: That is an individual case. In the round, we do a lot. We have a lot more positive outcomes than that one. We do identify foreign national offenders, people we are interested in and people-smuggling gangs, and they are dealt with and moved back to their home country, or they receive custodial sentences for whatever offences they have committed. I am not going to pretend that the arrangements are perfect, but that is the nature of freedom of movement.

Q200 Gavin Robinson: Thank you. Gentlemen, I do not know who wishes to speak for the NCA. Mr Jones, you are the main man in the middle.

Rob Jones: I will start.

Gavin Robinson: Can you set out your agency's role and remit within Northern Ireland, and particularly your relationship with the Police Service of Northern Ireland?

Rob Jones: We have been operating on the island of Ireland since 2016. The NCA began in 2013. We operate under a general agreement where we work in partnership with PSNI. To summarise the way we operate, we have a range of capabilities that sit within the NCA, which we can bring to bear on serious organised crime. We will support PSNI in relation to the provision of some of that capability. We will also do joint operations. We are part of the paramilitary taskforce and part of the joint inter-agency taskforce with AGS and PSNI. We also commit to running our own operations, using those capabilities, across the full range of threats. We have had some—

Q201 **Gavin Robinson:** Let me stop you there, because I want to pursue what you said. You have been operating on the island of Ireland as one unit. I know you are with PSNI in Northern Ireland, which is a part of the United Kingdom. I also know that you have something in the region of 170 international liaison officers—I assume they are not in Northern Ireland—in 70 countries outside of the United Kingdom. Can you break that down a little? You say you have been operating on the island of Ireland, so you have been operating within the United Kingdom and in the Republic of Ireland. Tell us the difference between those two operations.

Rob Jones: The operation that we run with PSNI is in collaboration with PSNI, recognising the operational environment. The operation that we run through our liaison officers is an international bilateral collaboration in relation to international law enforcement. We have a presence in Dublin, where we have a liaison officer who is able to work through those channels as well.

Q202 **Gavin Robinson:** Are those two different things?

Rob Jones: They are two different things, but they come together as one effort to work jointly to tackle serious organised crime—everything from drugs to cyber-crime to child abuse and illicit finance. That has resulted in things like £2.2 million being seized, which is the proceeds of crime in cash, and it has resulted in us growing carefully, slowly and thoughtfully, with PSNI, our approach to tackling SOC.

Q203 **Gavin Robinson:** I have some figures here from 2024-25, which are the most recently published figures I could find. According to them, there were 140 disruptions in Northern Ireland over a six-month period, compared with 37 in the period before, so that is an increase. The high-impact disruptions decreased from 11 to 6. If we take the £2.2 million and break it down by those 6, you are talking about a couple of hundred thousand pounds on average per operation.

I want to ask you about the assumption that the NCA is constrained in Northern Ireland because we have many more criminal entities operating at a smaller level. Yes, there is contamination and relationships with the



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Kinahan crime gang, the “Monk” and all the rest of the international drug dealers who are based in or originate from the south, and others. Do you feel constrained? Do you feel that the NCA has to operate at a lower level in Northern Ireland? Are you not tackling the big boys? From a UK perspective, are there powers that you can avail of in Great Britain that you cannot avail of in Northern Ireland?

Rob Jones: I have a couple of points. First, to clarify, the seizure figures of £2.2 million and £1.2 million cover two operations, so that is operating at the highest level of serious organised crime. It is not spread between loads of separate episodes, so they are quite significant.

In relation to whether we feel constrained, no, we don't. In the partnership with the PSNI and AGS, there is no constraint on our ability to work jointly against the high levels of criminality.

On your point about take-on criteria and whether we can tackle the big boys—as you describe them—I do not recognise that at all. Actually, we are pragmatic in the way that we task and prioritise work, because we do not want to just say that we will only do very high-value targets. It is about the quantities and harm involved—sometimes, smaller quantities of drugs or money could lead to an acute level of harm. So we are pragmatic about that and we would take that work on where, ordinarily, we may not in England and Wales, because organised crime just works differently. We range from people who are high-harm but who may not be that sophisticated, through to international and transnational cocaine traffickers.

Q204 **Gavin Robinson:** As an elected representative for 16 years, I can tell you that the big boys in my area—the paramilitaries in my area—who were big when I started in elected in life are still big today, unencumbered by any threats, contamination or interruption from the National Crime Agency. My constituents often ask why that is, but I will leave that hanging.

The figures suggest that 28% of your work relates to illicit finance, 16% to drugs, 13% to fraud and 11% to sexual abuse. Does that feel about right this year?

Rob Jones: It does, but those figures are based on an ongoing assessment of the threats, harms and risks. We have to operate against a number of threats, including organised immigration crime, cyber-crime and other online threats. At any given time, that can change—it is not a fixed percentage.

Q205 **Gavin Robinson:** I visited your team that is embedded with the Paramilitary Crime Task Force, and I have spoken with them, and shared my frustrations at times, too. There are question marks over the continuation of the taskforce to tackle paramilitarism. What damage do you think it would cause if the NCA was no longer routinely engaged in criminal operations against these people?

Rob Jones: We are keen that the collaboration we have worked hard to build over the years endures. I cannot quantify the impact of something



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like that happening, but law enforcement works when it is co-located, when you can share information and when you understand each other. That is even more important when we work in the areas you describe. I see it as very positive and hope it endures.

Q206 Robin Swann: Rob, the NCA went operational in 2013, and has been operational in Northern Ireland since 2016. I was in the Assembly and I remember those debates and discussions about allowing that authorisation. That was by agreement between the NCA director general and the Northern Ireland Minister of Justice. Is there an opportunity for a future Minister of Justice in Northern Ireland to start to amend that memorandum of understanding or partnership that you talked about, or actually withdraw it? It is an agreement with the Minister of Justice, rather than with PSNI or any other security service in Northern Ireland.

Rob Jones: That is a technical legal question, which I will be happy to come back and respond to. I do not know the answer to the legal point. Since the agreement and the MOU were signed, the way that we have operated is that we have built year-on-year on the collaboration with PSNI. We are in a very different place from where we started, as you will remember, and the challenges that we had to get moving in that operational environment were well rehearsed. I think it is a much more resilient relationship. I hope it would not be damaged by any change to an MOU, but I would be more than happy to come back to you on the strict legal position in relation to that agreement.

Q207 Robin Swann: Is the MOU in that operational environment still with the Department of Justice or is it with PSNI in partnership with its policing plan?

Rob Jones: The general authority is the justice agreement, but we have a collaboration agreement with PSNI.

Q208 Mike Kane: Thank you, gentlemen. Rob, can you describe the nature of your relationship with the PSNI when it comes to the Paramilitary Crime Task Force?

Rob Jones: It is strong, it is collaborative and it works very well in terms of our ability to bring something different to the problem. We are not a very big organisation—we do not provide mutual aid—so what we try to bring to the serious organised crime problem is specialisms and an attack vector that will disrupt organised crime, making sure that we are doing something different.

There is no point in us duplicating what PSNI can do, so we try to add to what they can do to have the biggest impact. That is why we have things like our international network, our joint international crime centre, our ability to work on illicit finance and our ability to prevent drugs upstream from making their way across borders. Those are the types of things that we are engaging very closely with PSNI on.

Q209 Mike Kane: The UK Government gave £8 million a year in 2025 for a programme that went to 2030, but Northern Ireland's Executive

programme ends this time next year. For you, what does that interregnum look like?

Rob Jones: We do not know yet. Those conversations will develop. We are committed to maintaining an operational response and the partnerships that we have built. The progress has been hard fought over many years to build the trust and confidence to operate, so we are keen to maintain that. We will work with officials across Government to make sure that that happens.

Q210 **Mike Kane:** What would you like to see?

Rob Jones: I would like to see it continue.

Q211 **Mike Kane:** Do you have any initial response to Fleur Ravensbergen's scoping report that was commissioned by the British and Irish Governments about the disbandment of paramilitaries?

Rob Jones: I have not got anything to add to that.

Q212 **Claire Hanna:** This is probably a question for Rob and Miles. Do the NCA have a view on the recently commissioned scoping exercise by the UK and Irish Governments into paramilitary group transition?

Miles Bonfield: I do not think we would take a view on that. Our job, as given by Parliament, is to fight organised crime in whatever form that takes, whether that is paramilitaries on ceasefire, or high-end, high-sophistication criminals. We attack organised crime.

Q213 **Claire Hanna:** Given the role of groups like the UVF, UDA, CIRA and the INLA in organised crime, particularly in drug supply, would you assess their activity as primarily political or primarily criminal? Therefore, do you think that a political agreement is likely to have an impact on their criminal activity and bring it to an end?

Rob Jones: We see serious organised crime, and we see people executing crimes for profit. That is what we see. There are other elements of the capability that deal with politically motivated crime and terrorism. We are tackling the SOC threat. Of course, we will see some people cross over who have tradecraft and abilities because of other interests they have, but our resources are targeted at people who are in organised crime to make money.

Q214 **Claire Hanna:** Do you or other law enforcement agencies have the necessary tools, powers, legislation and political cover to go after the ill-gotten gains of those linked to paramilitary organisations, or are other tools or legislation required?

Rob Jones: We have the powers and the tools. We are operationally independent and driven by the current intelligence picture, and we prioritise without fear or favour, based on threat, harm and risk. There is nothing holding us back from pursuing the types of individuals in communities that were described earlier.

Q215 **Claire Hanna:** Our Committee's papers indicate that you are currently



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investigating around £1.5 million of assets linked to crime and paramilitary groups. If you became aware of a company, for example a bookshop, that appeared to have £200,000 of assets or more but no discernible commercial activity—no premises, no staff, no online trading premises, no documented transactions—and with documented links to individuals with paramilitary convictions, would you investigate that?

Rob Jones: If all those things were true and the evidence was there, we would absolutely discuss that with PSNI and would be interested.

Q216 Claire Hanna: Is a shop called Green Cross (Art and Bookshop) Ltd on your radar? Based on that information, which has been widely available in the media, would the NCA investigate it?

Rob Jones: Obviously I cannot comment on specific cases, named individuals or companies that may or may not be subject to investigation. That would be unhelpful.

Q217 Claire Hanna: Can you think of a reason why a company like that, with no discernible trading footprint and those assets, which have been widely reported in the media, has not been investigated by law enforcement agencies?

Rob Jones: I cannot comment on specific cases, except to reassure you that if there is intelligence and evidence, we will speak to our partners in relation to that and take appropriate action with them.

Q218 Chair: I am going to move on to something very recent. The new national police service announced in the Government's recent White Paper is going to take over the National Crime Agency as the lead on organised crime in England and Wales. How might that operate in relation to your current responsibilities in Northern Ireland?

Rob Jones: What we have at the moment is a White Paper that has been published. There is much more detailed design and policy work to be done. We are working closely with the Home Office on that. The detail around exactly what the implications will be will come, and we will ensure that all the learning and all the progress we have made with PSNI is brought to bear in that process.

Q219 Chair: Will the PSNI be part of that conversation and that planning?

Rob Jones: Absolutely; I would expect them to be. I would also say that one of the characteristics of the NCA is its ability to be flexible and operate against all the threats in any location. We would not want to come back from that. We are keen to build on the successes and what we have built over many years, and so is everybody involved in police reform. The idea is to make this better and to build on the success and good work of the NCA to date. With all that in mind, those conversations will play out and the detail will come, but be reassured that we will play into that everything we know about the operating environment and the progress we have made.

Q220 Robin Swann: A significant expectation of the common travel area via



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the land border being used for the purposes of both irregular migration and criminal activity has been reported. Has the scale or nature of that changed in recent years?

Rob Jones: Gordon may want to come in on what we have seen in terms of CTA abuse for OIC. An earlier witness talked about their view of that. We have not seen a big spike in CTA abuse very recently. We are alive to it, and we have a multi-agency team working on that to make sure we can bring together all the intelligence that we have. We work closely with Immigration Enforcement, PSNI and Border Force.

Our awareness of organised crime has developed. Our awareness of the scale of cash-based money laundering—and those seizures that I talked about, where people are collecting cash from the proceeds of crime—has grown. It is clear that there are people involved in that cash-based money laundering system are swapping cash for cryptocurrency and reconciling the proceeds of crime, who are operating, and we are getting to grips with them, which is why we have been seizing those large amounts of cash. We have made significant progress there.

In relation to drugs, we have also seen quite significant seizures, particularly of cocaine. That worries us because we see the movement of cocaine, the increase in purity, the reduction in price and the increase in deaths, which you will also have seen locally. We are targeting that through our international liaison network and our intelligence assets to make sure we can prevent it. We have also had a very large seizure of cocaine recently—over 160 kilos—so we see it and we are bearing down on it.

On the significance of the CTA in those movements, I will defer to Gordon on organised immigration crime. In relation to commodities, those routes have always been there, and there have always been attempts to exploit them over many years. The answer is an intelligence-led response, which goes to everything we have said earlier about collaboration with AGS and PSNI.

Gordon Summers: Similar to what Rob said, our awareness has increased over the last five years or so as we have put more focus on the CTA. We are definitely encountering, detecting and prosecuting more people-smuggling groups operating through Northern Ireland.

We had a big job two years ago; there was quite a sophisticated Bolivian group passing people through Dublin and on to GB. Last year there was a Romanian group exploiting people in the Belfast area, primarily in car washes, paying £2 an hour, and they were being trafficked in through Dublin.

It is a bit of both. We are becoming a lot more aware of the tactics of these groups coming in to GB, but there is also more awareness of some of the—for want of a better phrase—gaps in our armoury among OCGs and opportunists who want to gain entry to GB and the UK. It is a bit of both. Does that answer your question?

Q221 Robin Swann: It does, Gordon, but I suppose it raises another. You mentioned the gaps that others are becoming aware of, and you are obviously aware of those gaps as well. What actions are you and law enforcement taking to close those gaps at speed?

Gordon Summers: We are looking very closely at using new technology and data sharing with the Irish. Just as an example, we trialled live facial recognition at Holyhead in November and again last week. We are introducing new measures for direct travel from Ireland to the UK. We are extending the authority to travel scheme—which is basically “no-fly”—to all services during the course of this year.

We are also working increasingly closely with our partners—not just the NCA, but very closely with the Irish authorities as well. We already have a close partnership on data and intelligence sharing with them, and that will be expanded over the next few years.

Q222 Robin Swann: Facial recognition did get some coverage, because it was very much a trial in Holyhead. Is there an intention to roll that out in other ports or airports across GB, Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland? What is your plan?

Gordon Summers: For the Republic of Ireland, it is obviously an issue for them. We chose England and Wales because the use of live facial recognition there is already well established. Scotland and Northern Ireland are a different matter, and we would have to think very carefully about how that would be deployed, because the policing and legislative landscape in Northern Ireland is slightly different. We would probably allow PSNI to take a view on that first, which is the approach we have taken in England and Wales. The police used it first, and we basically piggybacked on their usage.

Q223 Robin Swann: Are you in conversations with the PSNI about the usage of it?

Gordon Summers: No. As I said, it is still a trial in England and Wales. It has advanced and it is definitely a technology that will be useful, but I want to clarify that when we are using live facial recognition, we are looking solely for foreign national offenders who are trying to get back into the UK. There is no one else at the moment who is being watchlisted for attention.

Q224 Robin Swann: Rob, you used the phrase “multi-agency teams” when you were talking about commodities. Does that include the Irish Government as well? I am sure you are aware of some recent media coverage where drug smugglers were saying, “Look, don’t enter British waters; stay in Irish waters when you want to land.” It was cocaine at that stage as well. Do you work across other agencies in the Irish Republic to shut down those routes?

Rob Jones: Yes, we do. We work very closely with them. We have the joint interagency taskforce, which is a formal route for collaboration, and we have strong bilateral collaboration on a case-by-case basis. We are obviously in Europol, we host the Interpol bureau, and we have the joint

international crime centre. All of those come together to support the effort in terms of drugs being targeted towards the region.

Q225 Robin Swann: One final point: you spoke about money laundering on either side of the border. Following up on Ms Hanna's question, does the agency have a fiscal limit where you investigate or you do not? Is there a trigger point?

Rob Jones: No. Obviously we want to be as effective and as disruptive as we can. We will go after the most significant groups but, as I said earlier, if something is identified as particularly harmful, we will be pragmatic about a decision to be disruptive and target it. We would not want to waste resources on lower-level criminality, if we had good intelligence about high-level criminality in bigger numbers. To be clear, if there is harm that we see linked to smaller transactions, that might well be something that we would target to be disruptive as well.

Gordon Summers: I will just add that there are things that the NCA are not interested in that our criminal and financial investigation team would take on. Obviously, the NCA are looking at the top end; we maybe look at things that are a bit smaller in scale. Just talking about cash, we will adopt cash jobs, as will Border Force, for the criminal and financial investigation teams, that perhaps the NCA is not interested in.

Q226 Alicia Kearns: Rob, you said there has been no spike in CTA abuse and obviously these long-term routes. In terms of cross-border criminality, what percentage would you say is paramilitary versus organised crime groups—or is it just too blurred for you to segregate significantly?

Rob Jones: It would be too blurred to take a precise view on that. As we touched on earlier, these are people who are seeking profit from their activities, and there are crossovers. Where we see those crossovers, we work with the PSNI on them. The actual delineation between somebody's criminality from one day to the next is not that precise.

Q227 Alicia Kearns: In terms of the ethnicity or descent of the organised crime groups, if we take paramilitary techniques we try and remove them, is there a certain percentage of organised crime groups operating across the border who are, for example, of a completely descent—not Irish, UK or English?

Rob Jones: We do encounter foreign nationals that are involved in organised crime, but I think it would be fair to say there is not a demographic that dominates the serious organised crime scene.

Miles Bonfield: Organised crime groups tend to be homogeneous in terms of—

Alicia Kearns: Within themselves.

Miles Bonfield: Exactly. We tend to approach it from two areas: first, the risk and harm they are doing to society, and secondly, their capabilities. What additionality do we bring to it, as opposed to the PSNI or Home Office Immigration Enforcement? That is our approach.

Q228 Alicia Kearns: Going back to the conversation about nature, actors and trends. We have heard that there has been no particular spike, so volume is not particularly relevant. Gordon and Rob, in terms of people smuggling, would you agree with the evidence that we heard earlier that we are seeing people being trafficked mainly for sexual benefit and also for economic benefit?

Gordon Summers: In our experience, it is more economic than sexual. In past experience—as a quick caveat, I am not absolutely up to date on this—the people who are subject to sexual exploitation can travel directly to the UK, so it is mainly commercial exploitation.

Q229 Alicia Kearns: Where are those routes coming from: outside Ireland or within Ireland? Where are people being smuggled from to Ireland? What are the main source countries?

Gordon Summers: It is both Ireland and GB. It is not necessarily just Ireland; it is also England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Alicia Kearns: I know what GB means. Where are the people who are being trafficked across the CTA coming from before they come to Ireland, or where are they coming from within Ireland?

Gordon Summers: Primarily eastern Europe and the Balkans.

Q230 Alicia Kearns: Thank you. Rob, looking at drugs specifically, you mentioned cocaine with increased purity. Where is that coming from upstream? Does Ireland have a very specific passageway and routes that we are seeing that are different? What are the other drugs that we are also seeing?

Rob Jones: That cocaine is produced in and smuggled from South America.

Q231 Alicia Kearns: Is it always Colombia? Is it Venezuela? Where is it from?

Rob Jones: It is primarily Colombia. Colombia dominates production and supply, but there is supply from other countries in the region. The general maritime route has always been into Ireland. There have been big seizures on vessels: the one on the MV Matthew is a good example. That is a big threat that we monitor very closely, and that is bulk cocaine. We have also seen that in HGVs—we had an HGV seizure at Belfast port, which was the 185 kilos that I spoke about earlier—but the big multi-tonne shipments are generally maritime or container traffic.

We do see other drugs featuring, including cannabis. We have seen an increase in the detection of cannabis couriers by Border Force. That is something we are wrestling with in England and Wales as well, with hundreds of couriers being detected with consignments of cannabis, and we have seen the same happening in Ireland.

There is also the abuse of prescription drugs and the abuse of pills. There has been a national effort in relation to things like nitazenes and synthetic opioids. We have not seen an over-representation in relation to the market



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penetration from those drugs, but what we are prioritising, from an NCA perspective, is preventing those drugs from getting into the supply chain, because they are so harmful.

Q232 Alicia Kearns: Are you seeing much of a pattern with fentanyl and Captagon?

Rob Jones: "Synthetic opioids" is probably the best way to talk about fentanyl and derivatives of fentanyl, and we have not seen what we saw in the US. They get a very high priority in the NCA. Of synthetic opioids and the other synthetics that are high-harm, we mostly see nitazenes; that is what we have been working hard with policing partners on. Captagon? No, and I hope not.

Q233 Alicia Kearns: Me, too. Miles, let us turn to the economics of illegal vapes and illegal tobacco. You may also want to touch on firearms and money laundering, given your previous experience. What are we seeing there, in terms of nature, actors and trends?

Miles Bonfield: I want to comment on the question about drugs, because I was responsible for the investigative effort in Scotland and Northern Ireland. We are seeing higher risk in relation to nitazenes in Scotland compared with the rest of the UK. In Northern Ireland, we have seen an increase in risk with cocaine, in particular. That is a real concern for us.

In terms of trends in economic crime, it is the cross-border money laundering piece. If crime groups in Northern Ireland wish to do criminal business in Europe, they need euros. Likewise, they need to get rid of cash, and that goes the other way for European crime groups that may wish to do business in Northern Ireland or GB. The trend in the movement of cash across the CTA and across Europe is a real concern for us.

The issues you talked about with high street criminality, particularly vape shops, illegal trading and so on, are the same in Northern Ireland as across the UK. The NCA have made efforts to bring partners together, including trading standards, HMRC and policing and Immigration Enforcement. The PSNI have been and will continue to be full partners in Operation Machine.

Q234 Alicia Kearns: Most of the tobacco and vape shops within England seem to be run by Kurdish gangs or Turkish gangs. I presume that that is not the same in Northern Ireland, or are you starting to see that creep in?

Miles Bonfield: We are at the edge of serious organised crime here, so we probably need to talk to colleagues in HMRC and trading standards in that respect. Organised crime in Northern Ireland tends to be homogeneous. We are seeing Kurdish gangs represented in Northern Ireland as they are in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Q235 Alicia Kearns: We have just heard evidence that there is strong co-operation, but that more structures were needed. Are investigations collapsing or being frustrated because of a lack of structures? Do you have real-time alerts across the borders? Do you therefore need—I think the recommendations were for this—a UK-Ireland joint co-ordination hub or



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some form of security agreement to do your work better?

Rob Jones: We do not have investigations collapsing or not starting because of the type of problem that you describe. We described before the processes, post exit, as being clunkier than when we had access to SIS II. We have put in a series of mitigation measures to make that as good as it can be, but a frictionless system for information exchange is what any law enforcement professional would want. The more progress we make on information exchange the better, as with real-time alerts and the ability to exchange information across borders. I welcome progress in all those areas. We have mitigated it through Interpol and a number of other processes that we run, which are not as slick.

Alicia Kearns: So you do need a structure?

Rob Jones: No, I think it is the iterative development of what we have, not a radical transformational change. It is improvement to build on what we have already.

Q236 **Claire Hanna:** I think we have largely covered some of the issues around data collection. On extraction, we have heard submissions to the Committee about the lack of data collection and about immigration actions that appear to be not intelligence-led, but rather based on visual evidence—the colour of people's skin. Are you confident that you have adequate data in place to address that?

Rob Jones: From an organised crime perspective, yes. In terms of border control, I turn to Gordon.

Gordon Summers: It is illegal to profile people on the basis of their skin.

Q237 **Claire Hanna:** Are you confident that that is not what is happening, and that when interventions are made, they are intelligence-led?

Gordon Summers: Yes, I am. Immigration officers' instructions are that they have to detect people they suspect of being illegal entrants based on their behaviour, not on the colour of their skin. That is completely prohibited: it is against the law under the Equality Act 2010, and it is a disciplinary offence as well.

We have a high level of assurance—different levels of assurance. Officers have to record every interaction that they have with a member of the public. It is noted in their electronic notebook, which is assured and reviewed by their managers on a daily basis. Above that, we have an internal assurance process that regularly looks at officers' notebooks and operations and all that sort of stuff. I have to personally sign off on all operations. That is one of the stipulations.

Sorry if I am dragging this on, but our officers are trained specifically in equality impact assessments. That forms a core part of every operational order. It is called an assistant director's book, and it states what each operation should look like and what is involved.

At the top end, we have been challenged in court, and we have been examined by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland on these matters. Our actions have been found to be lawful and proportionate.

Q238 Simon Hoare: Predecessor Committees were assured by then Ministers and representatives of law enforcement, from both sides of the Irish border, that policing and law enforcement post Brexit would be, by definition, different in methodology, but equal in robustness and outcomes. In a yes or no answer, has that help/prediction been borne out? That is, are people in Northern Ireland as safe today as they were in 2018-19, let's say?

Rob Jones: It is hard work, but yes. The disruptive impact and the disruptions have gone up. This is a 24/7 business, and it is hard to maintain that, but yes.

Q239 Mr Kohler: Good morning, gentlemen. It is good to see you again, Rob—another Committee, the same issue: irregular migration. I would like to pick up on an issue that I started exploring with Professor Davies earlier. You and I spent many hours talking about the channel and various attempts to stop irregular migration. To what extent are people smugglers exploiting the common travel area at this stage?

Rob Jones: The dominant method is still to attempt crossings in the English channel. That is still the dominant method for illegal entry, but abuse of the CTA, inadequately documented migrants, air routes and a range of more complex ways of getting to the UK are still there. As we work to suppress the small boats issue, we are looking to collect intelligence to make sure that if displacement happens and we see it, we are ahead and waiting. What we are not yet seeing—Gordon, please come in if you disagree—is a big displacement or increase in movements with those other methods.

Facilitators use a range of different methods, and they will use all of them. They will try to pursue the path of least resistance. That is why we are keeping pressure on all those areas. The CTA is really important to us, and we put a lot of intelligent effort into it to make sure that that problem is not the next to flare up. That is what we are trying to do across all the different modes of entry with colleagues in Immigration Enforcement and Border Force.

Q240 Mr Kohler: I asked Professor Davies whether we have figures on how many claim asylum in Northern Ireland. Does the Home Office collect that data?

Rob Jones: Those would be Home Office figures. We do not have those.

Gordon Summers: This is quite problematic—I was going to pick up on it at the end. It is difficult to disaggregate from our overall figures, because we are more interested in why someone has claimed asylum than in where they claimed asylum, but we have local records. The main place where people claim asylum in Northern Ireland is Drumkeen House. We have



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local records, though there is a massive caveat with that. I am happy to share them; I do not have them with me, but I will share them later.

Q241 **Mr Kohler:** Surely anyone who claims asylum in Northern Ireland has come from the south. Isn't that right? They would not come across to Dover and all the way up to Northern Ireland to claim asylum, would they?

Gordon Summers: I would say that the vast majority have come from Ireland.

Mr Kohler: So I would have thought that that must be a pretty good figure.

Gordon Summers *indicated assent.*

Q242 **Mr Kohler:** Okay. Presumably, the CTA being the CTA, once they get to Ireland we have no real means of stopping an undocumented migrant claiming asylum in the north. Our defence is Ireland's defence. Is that right?

Gordon Summers: That is why we work closely with the Irish border force to put measures in place and support it.

Q243 **Mr Kohler:** Yes, but it is not really a Northern Ireland border. It is Ireland's border with the rest—

Gordon Summers: Yes, that's right. That is the nature of the common travel area. If you are in the common travel area, you are in the common travel area.

Q244 **Mr Kohler:** And Ireland is quite good at that, is it? They say that most of their asylum seekers come from the north. They say that 87% come from the north. That would seem to suggest that their defence outside of the north is quite robust. Is that your view?

Gordon Summers: We work really closely with them. They say that the majority of their asylum seekers come from the UK.

Mr Kohler: There is a tone of scepticism in your voice.

Gordon Summers: Well, I heard some of the evidence earlier about data sharing. There is a programme going on at the moment where we will improve our data sharing with the Irish. We have not locked down where the majority of their asylum claims come from.

Q245 **Mr Kohler:** For those coming from the north to the south—we don't know how many it is; let's say 87%—do we know anything about them? Are they forum shoppers? Are they people whose asylum claims failed in the UK and are now moving on to Ireland, or do we not know anything about that?

Gordon Summers: We have liaison officers who work with the Department of Justice. We share information both ways. There is a real mix between people who have been granted a visa for the UK, people who have claimed asylum in the UK, and people we have no record of whatsoever.

Q246 **Mr Kohler:** Are there any figures on that mix?

Gordon Summers: You would need to ask the Irish. We will have records of who we have conducted checks on and what the outcome was. I am not convinced that we would necessarily want to share that, but we will have records.

Q247 **Mr Kohler:** If we actually solve the channel, are you confident that the smugglers will not simply move into this new route?

Rob Jones: That is the point that I made earlier. We are alive to that. You do not want to contest illegal migration in the English channel; you want to contest it at ports and airports, because that is where your control measures are and where it is safer to contest it, and that is what we have done for years. Before covid—before the conditions that created small boats—we contested illegal migration at ports and airports. That is where we choose to fight it. That is what we want to do, and that is what we will be ready to do in the future.

Q248 **Mr Kohler:** You cannot do that with the common travel area, though, can you?

Rob Jones: Well, we have managed the common travel area for many, many years through the partnerships that we have. For many years, the dominant method of illegal entry was by vehicle, either through the channel tunnel or through roll-on, roll-off traffic. That was it, and that was topped up by inadequately documented migrants with more complex routes. The CTA is part of that, and it is by maintaining pressure and having an awareness on all those that you contain it.

Q249 **Mr Kohler:** Yes, but the CTA by its very nature is not something you could protect as you could a port or an airport.

Rob Jones: It is different.

Mr Kohler: It's another version of the channel, is it not?

Rob Jones: No.

Mr Kohler: It's easier.

Rob Jones: No.

Mr Kohler: A damn sight easier, actually.

Gordon Summers: That is why we are working with the Irish. Can I just add a couple of things to what Rob has said? He has covered it brilliantly, but there are two other issues as well. It is a lot harder to get from France to Ireland than it is to get from France to Kent.

Mr Kohler: And that is where our defence is, presumably—it's exactly that.

Gordon Summers: It is a lot more expensive, so what we tend to see is people who have fallen into the grips of people smugglers who are passing through, because to get on an aircraft to get to Dublin you need a false



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passport or a facilitator—all that sort of stuff. So, that is built in. Or, if you go by the traditional route, for want of a better phrase, that Rob mentioned, in the back of a lorry to Rosslare, predominantly from Cherbourg, that is a long way, and in the past there have only been four or five ferries a week, as opposed to 20 ferries a day or whatever it is, crossing the channel.

Q250 **Mr Kohler:** So, to go back to my original point, all our defence is really Ireland's defence. Once they get to Ireland, it is almost impossible.

Miles Bonfield: May I offer a view? I would say that our defence is like concentric circles. Our defence is upstream in source countries, for example through our efforts in Iraq with the Kurdish authorities there, and our efforts with Irish colleagues, together with policing and immigration and NCA colleagues in Europe, in countries such as Italy, France and Bulgaria. Then it is at the border in Ireland, and then through the—I would say—rather sophisticated arrangements that we have to control the common travel area, through regular multi-agency exercises and intensifications between An Garda Síochána, PSNI, Immigration Enforcement, Border Force and National Crime Agency, both within Northern Ireland and on that eastern coast.

Q251 **Mr Kohler:** But that last level of defence isn't one, surely, because all anyone needs to do is walk across the border and claim asylum. You cannot defend against that, surely.

Miles Bonfield: In that concentric circle that is Northern Ireland, it is about sharing intelligence around groups. It is about the threat, about having a shared awareness of the groups that are facilitating smuggling and the routes they are using, and about attacking those routes together in whatever way we can, between An Garda Síochána, the PSNI, Immigration Enforcement, Border Force and us. That happens on regular intensifications, both in Northern Ireland and on the east coast of GB.

Q252 **Alicia Kearns:** Rob, you will be aware that there is a crisis of male violence in Northern Ireland. I am interested in the role of sexual violence and child abuse within paramilitary organisations.

Rob Jones: We are obviously deeply concerned about the type of violence that you describe. We have seen some statistics in England and Wales on the prevalence of cocaine in relation to domestic violence and in relation to violence against women and girls. That is really important to us. On the use of that type of violence by paramilitaries, we are probably not best placed to answer. It is probably something that the PSNI is closest to because it deals with that very directly. Miles, I do not know whether you have anything to add.

Miles Bonfield: No, I would say that the PSNI will have a better view than we do.

Q253 **Alicia Kearns:** Chair, perhaps the Committee could write to the PSNI to ask for its view.

Rob, is there anything that we should be aware of that is new, alarming or



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that we should keep an eye on with trends in activity by paramilitaries in Northern Ireland?

Rob Jones: As we spoke about earlier, the reconciliation of street cash from drug sales to euros and then into cryptocurrency is the new money laundering system that operates at scale. We have seen some evidence of that and have been successful in contesting some of it. We will continue to do that. That new way of bouncing money around the world through international cash controllers and with cryptocurrency to complement moving bags of cash around is something that we are very concerned about and are actively pursuing.

Q254 **Chair:** Can I pick up on a couple of earlier questions? In my constituency, I see young men coming over, being trafficked and then being involved with social services. It is all very complex, with trading standards and arrest. What oversight is there? Is it from the Home Office or the NCA? There are so many different agencies involved, and obviously this is happening in Northern Ireland as well. Who has oversight, and what is being done to co-ordinate that oversight?

Gordon Summers: Are we assuming that they have claimed asylum?

Chair: Yes.

Gordon Summers: Their care is the responsibility of the local social services; the actual support is provided by the Home Office. We have a welfare and wellbeing responsibility that we take really seriously. We work closely with local social services to make sure that that is provided. It is probably the most worrying of all the types of people trafficking, for the reasons that you have picked up on. I am not pretending to be an expert, but if you want more detail, I can provide it for you later.

Chair: That would be really interesting.

May I say a very big thank you to Gordon, Rob and Miles? This has been a very interesting session.