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UK Accounts for 40% of Europe's Phone Thefts as Police Tackle Rising Street Crime

July 26, 2025

— Categories: Crime



Britain now makes up two in every five phone thefts reported across Europe, with London emerging as the continent's hotspot for mobile snatching, as new figures lay bare the scale of the crime wave gripping the country. Officials and police are under growing pressure to tackle the increasingly organised gangs behind the surge, many of whom are shifting away from drug trafficking to mobile theft.

A recent analysis by US-based insurance provider SquareTrade revealed that although British customers only make up 10 percent of their European clients, they are responsible

for 39 percent of all mobile phone loss claims. London alone accounts for one in six of all phones stolen across Europe, making the capital the most targeted city on the continent.

The surge has been particularly alarming in recent years, with SquareTrade confirming claims in the UK have quadrupled since mid-2021. The summer and festive seasons have emerged as peak periods for theft, driven by a rise in festivals, holiday travel, and crowded shopping streets. According to managing director Kevin Gillan, “July creates a perfect storm. Festivals, holidays, and crowded spaces increase the risk of theft. London is especially vulnerable, and the UK now leads Europe in phone theft claims.”

Organised Gangs

Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that thefts from individuals rose by 50 percent last year to 483,000 incidents, with mobile phones being the most commonly stolen items. In London alone, more than 70,000 phones were reported stolen in 2024. However, the true number is expected to be significantly higher, as many victims fail to report thefts.

Despite a promise from the Home Office last year to clamp down on this rising problem, including a commitment to increase patrols and utilise Operation Opal, the national police intelligence unit, critics say more must be done. City Hall Conservatives have accused London's Labour mayor, Sir Sadiq Khan, of being slow to act, saying he has “virtually ignored the problem”, despite his insistence that he continues to support the Metropolitan Police with “record funding”.

The financial toll is equally staggering. The Metropolitan Police estimate that mobile phone thefts are costing Londoners and tourists at least £70 million annually. High-end devices remain prime targets, with SquareTrade confirming that iPhones are the most frequently stolen models. The iPhone 15 Pro Max tops the list, followed by the upcoming iPhone 16 Pro Max and Samsung's Galaxy S24 Ultra. On average, insurance claims related to these thefts amount to £1,200.

Law enforcement agencies are now battling a disturbing shift in criminal tactics. Once known for pushing drugs along so-called county lines, gangs are increasingly grooming young people to steal smartphones, drawn by the lucrative profits and reduced sentences. Many of these stolen devices are shipped abroad, with police saying around 80 percent of the 80,000 phones stolen yearly in London end up overseas.

A police investigation recently tracked a handset stolen from an estate agent on Baker Street to a Hong Kong tower block, where it was found alongside countless other stolen mobiles. One senior officer has urged tech giants like Apple and Google to play their part by rendering stolen phones useless. “They have the gift to stop the trade,” the officer said.

The crisis is not limited to urban hubs. While London accounts for around 75 percent of the thefts, forces across the UK, including those in rural counties such as Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire, and Suffolk, are seeing thousands of reports yearly. With an average of 230 phones stolen daily across the country, the problem is no longer a city-centric issue, but a growing national concern.