

Woman Arrested in Small Boats Smuggling Probe

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— Categories: Crime

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A 29-year-old woman has been arrested in London on suspicion of money laundering as part of a National Crime Agency (NCA) investigation into the supply of small boats to people-smuggling gangs.

The arrest took place at an address in Surrey Quays, where the woman was taken into custody and is now being interviewed. She is suspected of receiving funds linked to the supply of small boats and maritime equipment transported from Türkiye to criminal groups operating across Europe.

According to the NCA, the operation is part of a wider crackdown on organised immigration crime. Lydia Bloomfield, the NCA's regional head of investigation, said the agency remained committed to “target, disrupt and dismantle” smuggling gangs and those providing the boats and equipment used in Channel crossings.

The arrest comes as new Home Office data highlights the growing scale of the small boats crisis. Since the general election, more than 51,000 migrants have arrived in the UK via the

Channel, a 40 per cent increase compared with the same period last year. Of the 43,600 asylum claims made by small boat arrivals, around one in four of all applications, most were lodged immediately after entering Britain.

Clandestine arrivals, such as those hiding in lorries, accounted for 11 per cent of asylum claims. Others arrived legally on visas before later applying for refugee status.

At the same time, the number of deportations has fallen. In the year to June, 2,330 migrants who crossed the Channel were removed from the UK, a seven per cent drop compared with 2,516 in the previous 12 months. Observers warn that declining removals undermine enforcement efforts, even as arrivals rise.

The Home Office confirmed that 111,084 asylum applications were made in the year to June, up 14 per cent on the previous year. This surpasses the previous peak of 103,000 recorded in 2002, during Tony Blair's government.

In a further development, the number of foreign nationals extending their visas in the UK has reached a record high. A total of 1,041,786 visa extensions were granted in the past year, nearly 230,000 more than the year before, a rise of 28 per cent.

The figures place renewed pressure on the government's ability to secure the UK's borders while ensuring public resources are not overstretched.