

UK Arrests 280 in Nationwide Crackdown on Illegal Delivery Riders

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British authorities have arrested 280 suspected illegal delivery riders during a week-long enforcement operation targeting unauthorised migrant workers in the fast-growing delivery sector. The crackdown, conducted between 20 and 27 July, involved immigration officers stopping and questioning nearly 1,800 individuals across multiple locations in England, Scotland, and Wales.

The operation forms part of a wider government drive to combat illegal immigration and strengthen labour market enforcement, ensuring that workplaces comply with immigration rules and do not exploit undocumented workers. Authorities say the scale of the crackdown highlights the persistent challenges posed by illegal working in sectors such as food delivery, car washes, and hospitality.

Of those stopped during the operation, nearly one in five were arrested on suspicion of immigration offences, with many believed to be working without the necessary permissions. Officials also detained 53 individuals whose asylum claims are currently under review, reflecting the complex nature of migration enforcement where legal and illegal statuses can overlap.

In addition to arrests, civil penalty notices were issued to 51 businesses suspected of employing illegal workers, signalling increased scrutiny on employers as part of the government's effort to hold both workers and companies accountable. Sectors such as car washes and restaurants featured prominently in the investigation.

The enforcement teams also seized 71 vehicles linked to suspected illegal activity, including 58 electric bikes commonly used by delivery riders. Authorities confiscated approximately £8,000 in cash and £460,000 worth of illicit cigarettes, pointing to wider criminal activity connected to illegal labour.

The Home Office has responded to the findings by announcing a £5 million funding boost to immigration enforcement teams, aimed at expanding capacity and improving the ability to target illegal working across the UK. Officials emphasise the government's commitment to

upholding immigration rules and protecting legitimate jobs for British workers.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer faces mounting pressure to demonstrate tangible progress on immigration control amid rising public concern and growing support for Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, which campaigns on stronger border enforcement. Border Security Minister Angela Eagle stated that the government is “making sure rules are respected and enforced,” highlighting the political importance of the crackdown.

The operation also involved collaboration with major food delivery platforms, including Deliveroo, Uber Eats, and Just Eat, to share information and prevent the exploitation of illegal workers in the gig economy. This partnership reflects an acknowledgement that tackling illegal working requires cooperation between government and private industry.

In the year leading up to July, the UK returned over 35,000 individuals found to be residing without legal permission, a 13 percent increase compared to the previous year. The government has also enhanced cooperation with France through a new agreement allowing both countries to share information and repatriate migrants based on family connections and legal claims.

While the crackdown has been welcomed by those advocating for stricter immigration enforcement, critics caution that such measures risk unfairly targeting vulnerable migrant workers and fail to address the root causes of illegal working. Debate continues over how best to balance firm immigration controls with protecting workers' rights and preventing exploitation.

As the government continues to refine its immigration enforcement policies, the effectiveness of operations like this will be closely watched. The success of such initiatives will depend on their ability to deter illegal working, uphold the rule of law, and ensure that businesses comply with labour standards without driving workers into further precarity.