

Government Bans Online Adverts Promoting Small Boat Channel Crossings

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Online adverts that promote small boat journeys across the English Channel have been officially banned under new UK legislation aimed at curbing illegal immigration. The amendment to the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill introduces a criminal offence for promoting or facilitating unlawful entry into the country through online content.

The updated law targets the growing use of social media by human-smuggling gangs, who frequently advertise crossings, forged documents and illegal work opportunities. Under the new offence, those creating or sharing such content could face up to five years in prison, alongside substantial fines.

According to the Home Office, around 80 per cent of individuals arriving via small boats claim to have made contact with smugglers through social media platforms. The government has described the legislation as a necessary step in dismantling the digital networks that underpin organised immigration crime.

Rob Jones, Director-General of Operations at the National Crime Agency (NCA), said criminal gangs are using video testimonials and persuasive posts to lure people into paying for dangerous and illegal crossings. He added that this digital activity is central to the smuggling business model, which often exploits vulnerable individuals with false promises of safety and employment.

The legislation comes in response to a significant increase in Channel arrivals, with more than 25,000 migrants reported to have crossed into the UK by the end of July. That figure marks the fastest rise in small boat entries since such records began. Authorities are aiming to cut off the online promotional tools that help traffickers operate with impunity.

The ban builds on earlier efforts to combat the issue. Previous steps included social media restrictions for known traffickers, serious crime prevention orders, and cross-border cooperation with digital platforms to remove content. However, until now, there has been no specific criminal charge for posting or sharing this kind of material.

In addition to targeting small boat adverts, the offence also applies to the sale or promotion of counterfeit documents and promises of illegal employment. The move signals a broader push to hold individuals accountable not only for smuggling itself but also for enabling such activities through online platforms.

Ministers argue that the new legislation strengthens the UK's border security and reinforces its commitment to tackling illegal immigration at its source. The legislation is now expected to be enforced through dedicated intelligence units monitoring online content and coordinating action against offenders.