# Police launch crackdown on high street money laundering in UK



In a significant operation aimed at addressing high street money laundering in the UK, police forces from 19 different regions launched a coordinated crackdown on various businesses suspected of facilitating illegal activities. Over a span of three weeks, officers visited 265 premises that encompassed a range of establishments, including American-themed sweet shops, Turkish barbers, nail bars, and vape shops, which were believed to be misused for laundering illicit cash.

This extensive initiative, termed Operation Machinize, was spearheaded by the National Crime Agency (NCA) and conducted in collaboration with local police forces, Trading Standards, Home Office Immigration Enforcement, and HMRC. The operation led to the freezing of bank accounts containing assets amounting to more than £1 million, execution of 85 warrants, and 35 arrests. Furthermore, police investigations resulted in the questioning of 55 individuals regarding their immigration status and the safeguarding of an additional 97 individuals who may have been victims of modern slavery.

During the operation, authorities seized over £40,000 in cash, 200,000 cigarettes, 7,000 packs of tobacco, more than 8,000 illegal vapes, and two vehicles. They also uncovered two cannabis farms, containing 150 plants in total. The results from the initial phase of Operation Machinize have led to closures of 10 shops, with further closures anticipated as inquiries continue.

Security Minister Dan Jarvis commented on the operation, asserting its objective in creating a "more hostile environment for organised crime." He emphasized the need for decisive action against high street crime, linking it to broader threats against community safety and security.

Rachael Herbert, deputy director of the NCA's National Economic Crime Centre, highlighted the targeted nature of the operation, stating, "Operation Machinize targeted barbershops and other high street businesses being used as cover for a whole range of criminality, all across the country." She elaborated that these cash-intensive businesses often serve as fronts for money laundering, connecting them to serious crimes such as drug trafficking, organised immigration crime, modern slavery, firearms offences, and the sale of illicit goods.

An analysis by the NCA estimates that around £12 billion of criminal cash is churned annually in the UK, with many of these funds typically escaping the country or getting integrated into legitimate financial frameworks through various money laundering methods. The operations targeting Turkish barbers have raised suspicions over the rising prevalence of such shops amid an observable downturn in high street businesses.

Detective Inspector Dan Fenn from West Mercia Police's Economic Crime team remarked, "Organised crime groups are opportunistic and exploit legitimate businesses... The high cash turnover makes them ideal for disguising illicit activities." The connection between cash-intensive establishments and criminal enterprises has been underscored by emerging patterns of gangs using these businesses as a means to obscure their financial operations.

The crackdown follows several high-profile arrests linked to the exploitation of barbershops in criminal networks, including Hewa Rahimpur, who was involved in a significant people smuggling operation, and Gul Wali Jabarkhel, accused of using his barber shop as a base for recruiting drivers for human trafficking.

Concerns also extend to other entrepreneurs in the sector, such as Tarek Namouz, the owner of Boss Crew Barbers, who was sentenced to 12 years for financing terrorism through his business.

In addition to the focus on barbers, the crackdown included the targeting of an array of American-themed candy stores. Many of these shops have been accused of selling banned products, attracting scrutiny for their potential links to health risks due to ingredients banned in the UK.

As the investigations unfold, law enforcement agencies are poised to continue their effort to dismantle criminal enterprises operating under the guise of legitimate businesses, reinforcing their commitment to maintaining public safety and integrity within local communities.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/national-crime-agency-wales-england-dan-jarvis-american-b2731299.html> - This article supports the claims about Operation Machinize, detailing its scope, the involvement of the National Crime Agency, and the arrest of individuals suspected of crimes like money laundering and modern slavery.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/barbershops-police-crackdown-laundering-b1221877.html> - This article corroborates the police operation targeting barbershops and other cash-intensive businesses for money laundering and related crimes.
* <https://www.westmercia.police.uk/news/west-mercia/news/2025/april/watch-500k-seized-in-crackdown-on-barbershops-used-for-money-laundering/> - This page provides details on a specific crackdown on barbershops in West Mercia, highlighting the issue of money laundering and organized crime using such businesses.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - The source article itself is hosted on this URL, providing comprehensive information about the operation and its objectives.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-crime-agency> - This website offers background information on the National Crime Agency's role and operations, which contextualizes their involvement in Operation Machinize.