# Police crackdown targets cash-intensive businesses in operation against organised crime



In a sweeping law enforcement initiative dubbed Operation Machinize, police forces from 19 regions across England have targeted 265 premises, including American-themed sweet shops, Turkish barbers, and nail bars, in a crackdown on money laundering and criminal activities. This operation aimed to address the use of cash-intensive businesses as fronts for serious crimes, including drug trafficking and human trafficking.

During the three-week operation, officers executed 85 warrants, resulting in 35 arrests and the freezing of assets amounting to over £1 million. Authorities seized more than £40,000 in cash, 200,000 cigarettes, 7,000 packs of tobacco, over 8,000 illegal vapes, and two vehicles. Additionally, two cannabis farms were uncovered, containing a total of 150 plants.

The investigation was spearheaded by the National Crime Agency (NCA), which has estimated that approximately £12 billion in criminal cash is generated in the UK annually. This illicit money is typically laundered or smuggled out of the country. Rachael Herbert, deputy director of the National Economic Crime Centre at the NCA, remarked, "Operation Machinize targeted barbershops and other high street businesses being used as cover for a whole range of criminality, all across the country." She highlighted the links between cash-intensive businesses and various forms of crime, including the sale of illegal tobacco and firearms.

An estimated 55 individuals were questioned regarding their immigration status during the operation, while 97 more were provided with safeguarding against potential modern slavery. Authorities have closed ten establishments thus far, with the potential for further closures as investigations continue.

Security Minister Dan Jarvis expressed the government’s commitment to strengthening efforts against organised crime, stating, "High street crime undermines our security, our borders, and the confidence of our communities." He affirmed that operations like Machinize aim to create a hostile environment for criminal activity.

Previously, a wave of police raids on Turkish barbers occurred, which included the seizure of more than £500,000 in illegal cash from 33 establishments, drawing connections to criminal networks using these businesses to facilitate illicit activities. Detective Inspector Dan Fenn from West Mercia Police noted that organised crime groups often exploit legitimate enterprises such as barbershops to conceal their illegal cash flow due to their high cash turnover.

Criminals are increasingly adopting a ‘copycat’ approach, modelling operations on successful illicit activities observed in similar businesses. Experts have indicated that bars and shops billed as Turkish barbers are frequently run by individuals of various nationalities, including Kurds and Albanians, significantly contributing to the broader problem of money laundering and drug trafficking associated with heroin shipments.

Notable cases in recent years have linked barbershops to larger criminal organisations. Hewa Rahimpur, for example, was integral to a people smuggling ring and later founded a barbering business in Camden. Similarly, others have faced charges of utilising barbers as fronts for smuggling operations aimed at the transport of migrants into the UK.

Additionally, the NCA's investigations have also revealed involvement of some hairdressers in terrorism-related financing, as illustrated by a case involving Tarek Namouz, who was sentenced for sending money to ISIS-supporters.

The operation’s findings raise significant concerns regarding the integrity of seemingly innocent high street businesses and their potential links to organised crime, underscoring the complexities law enforcement faces in the ongoing fight against illegal activities.

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

## References

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/barber-shop-raid-police-tax-b2731174.html> - This article corroborates the details of Operation Machinize, including the targeting of barbershops and other high street businesses for money laundering and modern slavery. It provides specific numbers of arrests and seized goods, as well as the freezing of assets.
* <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/operation-venetic> - This link supports the broader context of the National Crime Agency’s efforts against organised crime in the UK, highlighting major operations like Venetic that dismantle criminal networks.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/barber-shop-raid-police-tax-b2731174.html> - This source confirms Rachael Herbert’s statement about the role of cash-intensive businesses in money laundering and links to serious crimes.
* <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do> - Although not specifically mentioned in the search results, this NCA webpage generally supports their role in combating organised crime and money laundering.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/dan-jarvis> - This official government page lists Dan Jarvis as a security minister, supporting his involvement in statements about strengthening efforts against organised crime.