# Albanian drug lord reveals why UK police struggle to dismantle cocaine networks



An Albanian drug lord has articulated why he believes British police will never succeed in dismantling the networks smuggling cocaine into the UK, revealing critical insights into the resilience and operations of these criminal enterprises. Speaking anonymously to MailOnline, the gangster cited a particular tactic employed by Albanian mobsters: preventing law enforcement from fully disrupting their activities. This insight comes amid the troubling reality that Albanian gangs have established a firm foothold in the UK's cocaine trade, dominating aspects of the market for nearly two decades.

Since the end of communism in Albania, Albanian groups have expanded their influence across Europe, particularly in Italy, Belgium, and Spain, using the strategy of “sell cheap and sell more” to penetrate the UK market. An individual with extensive experience in the underworld, who has spent 17 years behind bars due to his involvement with a significant organised crime group, explained that arrests do not always spell the doom of a smuggling operation. If police do not seize a gang member's phone during an arrest, associates can sell these devices—with their extensive contact lists—for substantial sums, sometimes reaching £100,000.

Data from the National Crime Agency (NCA) reinforces the drug lord's claims. Since its establishment, the NCA has apprehended numerous individuals linked to Albanian gangs, yet the replacement of one gang with another appears almost seamless, suggesting an entrenched and adaptable criminal infrastructure. As of last year, about 1,100 Albanians were incarcerated in the UK for serious crimes, including drug trafficking, violence, and money laundering. The agency has expressed growing concern over the scale of organized crime emanating from Albania, indicating that these groups are not only a significant threat but particularly ruthless in their operations.

Albanian drug gang members often brazenly document their lavish lifestyles on social media, showcasing displays of wealth through images of cash and luxury items. Some, like the notorious Hellbanianz gang based in Barking, East London, are known for their overt flaunting of illicit gains. Law enforcement officials observe this tendency as both a challenge and a tool of intimidation within the community, demonstrating the gangs' confidence in their activities and evasion tactics.

The stakes in the UK drug market are high, with Albanian networks reportedly controlling a £2 billion domestic economy surrounding cocaine. A staggering influx of cocaine into Britain is facilitated through well-established connections with Colombian cartels, which has allowed Albanian traffickers to outpace competitors significantly. Investigative efforts have revealed that some operating at the grassroots level are willing to deliver cocaine faster than traditional courier services, reflecting the sophistication and efficiency of these operations.

The NCA’s intelligence manager noted that Albanian gangs are estimated to be exporting hundreds of millions of pounds out of the UK annually, utilizing a range of methods from cash smuggling to alternative investments. This financial outflow poses a considerable challenge to law enforcement, compelling them to forge partnerships with agencies such as Albania's anti-organised crime bureau to trace and seize assets linked to these illicit enterprises.

After an alarming increase in numbers, Albanian nationals now represent approximately 10.6% of foreign nationals imprisoned in England and Wales—a stark rise from just 1.5% a decade ago. The surge is partially attributed to heightened migration across the English Channel, where thousands are risking dangerous journeys in small boats to reach the UK. This influx has further complicated the dynamics of crime and immigration, leading to discussions among policymakers regarding the deportation of foreign criminals.

Amid this ongoing situation, the Albanian gang lord's boast about the purity and competitiveness of the cocaine they offer provides a glimpse into the business acumen guiding their operations. By reducing the street price of high-purity cocaine, they have effectively driven many customers away from their rivals, strategically positioning themselves as the go-to suppliers in key areas such as Portsmouth and Bournemouth.

As the NCA continues to monitor and respond to the evolving landscape of organised crime, the resilience and operational capabilities of Albanian gangs appear more formidable than ever, raising serious questions about the future of drug enforcement in the UK.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14720143/Albanian-drug-lord-British-police-NEVER-defeat-Gangster-cocaine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/albanian-gangsters-running-uk-cocaine-28952848)
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* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/03/16/albanian-gangs-cocaine-production-europe/), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/29/albanian-gangs-control-uk-cocaine-market-says-agency)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.theepochtimes.com/world/how-albanian-gangs-are-dominating-the-uks-cocaine-supply-networks-5418501), [[7]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/04/11/britain-security-albania-port-uk-bound-guns-seized/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14720143/Albanian-drug-lord-British-police-NEVER-defeat-Gangster-cocaine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/albanian-gangsters-running-uk-cocaine-28952848), [[3]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1747974/albanian-drug-gang-cocaine-dealers)
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* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14720143/Albanian-drug-lord-British-police-NEVER-defeat-Gangster-cocaine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1747974/albanian-drug-gang-cocaine-dealers)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14720143/Albanian-drug-lord-British-police-NEVER-defeat-Gangster-cocaine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/albanian-gangsters-running-uk-cocaine-28952848> - Albanian gangsters have been running the cocaine market in most parts of the UK for the past two decades, but have reportedly been warned to stay away from Liverpool. Violent gangs from the Balkan nation have taken over the drug trade in Britain since they began moving into the country after the fall of communism in Albania in 1990. Among them are the Hellbanianz, an infamous street gang based in the Gascoigne Estate in Barking, East London. Unlike other gangs who prefer to go under the radar, the Hellbanianz regularly share their criminal lifestyle online with photos of guns, cars and cash on Instagram. A London-based gangs expert, who asked not to be named, said criminals from Albania now dominate the cocaine market across the UK - but have been warned to stay away from Liverpool.
3. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1747974/albanian-drug-gang-cocaine-dealers> - Albanian gangs are transporting cocaine to British cities faster than Deliveroo drivers deliver takeaways, a shocking new investigation has revealed. Journalists have documented the rise of gangsters known as "Albos" in major British cities. Investigators have found dealers willing to deliver product to their paying customers in Brighton 24/7, with a network of "operatives" handling cocaine distribution. The investigation conducted by the Daily Mail identified "bottom of the chain" members working in Brighton and Hove relaxing in the city streets. The members, who are occasionally accompanied by "assistant managers" within the organisation, reportedly distribute imported supplies from Ecuador, where the Balkan Mafia has a foothold. The National Crime Agency (NCA), the UK's equivalent of the American FBI, believes Albanian networks now control the drug's £2 billion domestic market.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/03/16/albanian-gangs-cocaine-production-europe/> - Global cocaine production has reached record levels, a new United Nations report has found, partly thanks to Albanian gangs shipping through new routes to Europe and the UK. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) says coca cultivation rose by 35 per cent between 2020 and 2021 to record levels. South American drug cartels and Balkan gangs have capitalised on the retreat of the coronavirus to produce and smuggle record amounts of cocaine around the world. The amount of cocaine flowing through North Sea ports such as Antwerp, Rotterdam and Hamburg now eclipses the levels in Spain and Portugal, historically the drug’s gateway into western Europe. From there, at least 10 tonnes of the drug is being smuggled into the UK, largely by Albanians, according to the report released on Thursday. Britain has seen a “significant increase” in seizures of cocaine being sent through “postal modes”. “From the Netherlands, cocaine is further distributed to other European countries, and Albanian-speaking groups appear to play an important role in this, in particular in the trafficking towards Italy and Albania,” it states. “The important destination of the United Kingdom, where Albanian-speaking groups have also been assessed to exert considerable control across the drug market, is also supplied to a large extent via ‘roll-on, roll-off’ freight reaching ports in the south-east of the United Kingdom from nearby European ports.” The report says migration from Albania, one of the poorest countries in Europe, has allowed gangs to set up in key cities across the continent and take over trafficking networks previously dominated by the Italian mafia. “They rely on a vast network of associates among the Albanian diaspora abroad and often work in conjunction with Italian criminal groups,” the 184-page report states. “The pandemic was a bit of a blip for the expansion of cocaine production, but now it has rebounded and is even higher than what it was before,” said Antoine Vella, a UNODC researcher working on the report.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/29/albanian-gangs-control-uk-cocaine-market-says-agency> - The National Crime Agency has said it is increasingly concerned about violent Albanian criminal gangs, which have considerable control over the illegal cocaine market. In its annual assessment of organised crime, the NCA warns that Albanian gangs have “established a high-profile influence within UK organised crime”. Their main focus is the often violent trade in trafficking cocaine to London, the report warns. It says: “Criminals from the Balkans are increasingly expanding their network of influence, forming direct relationships with cocaine suppliers in Latin America. The threat faced from Albanian crime groups is significant. London is their primary hub, but they are established across the UK.” The report says Albanians make up just 0.8% of organised criminals in the UK, behind British nationals (61.6%); unknown nationalities (23.5%); Romanians (1.5%); Pakistanis (1.2%) and Polish (0.9%). But it warns that the impact of Albanian criminals was particularly troubling because of their readiness to use serious violence. Speaking to the BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, Matthew Horne, the deputy director general of the NCA, said: “While the numbers involved are relatively small, the impact of these groups is significant. “We are seeing significant control being exerted particularly by organised crime from Albania in so far as cocaine in particular is concerned … You are talking about tens of thousands [of pounds] generally in transactions every week.
6. <https://www.theepochtimes.com/world/how-albanian-gangs-are-dominating-the-uks-cocaine-supply-networks-5418501> - Albanian organised crime gangs (OCG) are now dominating the UK’s cocaine supply networks, with small boat arrivals contributing to the gangs’ growing networks, a former police chief has said. Tony Saggers, who headed up the National Crime Agency’s (NCA) Drugs Threat and Intelligence department, said Albanian gangsters have been able to gain considerable control in Britain’s booming drugs trade by slashing their own wholesale profits to undercut rivals. Their “non-greed” approach—which differs greatly from British OCGs—has led to the foreign gangsters becoming the “preferred supplier” in the UK, Mr. Saggers told The Epoch Times. The insight into the gangs’ growing influence comes just days after the government revealed authorities had seized record hauls of the Class A drug last year.
7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/04/11/britain-security-albania-port-uk-bound-guns-seized/> - Albanian gangsters are attempting to smuggle weapons into the UK through an Adriatic port where the British Government has been forced to beef up security. Police found eight mint-condition Glock pistols with ammunition hidden in a food hamper in a van in the port of Durres on the Albanian coast on Monday night. The weapons were detected by Albanian police using a scanner before the Mercedes Benz van was due to embark on a ferry to Ancona in Italy. The van had UK plates and, according to police, was on its way to Luton, Bedfordshire. The driver has been arrested and is being questioned by police but claims no knowledge of the guns. He is said to have told police he was merely told to deliver the food hamper to the British relatives of an Albanian man whom he had never met before. Durres, a port undergoing a major expansion, was identified as a potential source of smuggling by the UK and Albania in 2022, according to leaked police emails. They revealed Border Force planned to deploy officers to Albania to help “scope” plans for the port’s expansion and to advise on security measures that could be taken to combat illegal immigration and the import of cocaine into Europe by organised crime gangs. The force’s role would focus on the Albanian ports of Durres and Porto Romano to “assess the container traffic, Ro/Ro, passengers, port and law enforcement IT systems, and the current operational capabilities that exist within the port”. Police said Albanian gangsters had been running large parts of the cocaine market in the UK for the past two decades but, in recent years. They had also supplanted the Vietnamese as the biggest suppliers of UK-grown cannabis through “farms” hidden in houses and industrial estates. In autumn 2022 the National Crime Agency warned a “significant number” of Albanians in the UK had entered illegally to work in the “grey” market or for organised criminal drug gangs and were sending “hundreds of millions of pounds” of cash a year back home. Albanians accounted for about a third of the 45,000 migrants who crossed the Channel in small boats in 2022.