# Iceland security guard’s basket defence highlights surge in UK shoplifting and retail risks



An incident involving a security guard at an Iceland supermarket in Walworth, south-east London, has gone viral, showcasing the acute challenges faced by retail staff. Captured on a customer’s mobile phone, the footage shows the guard wielding a shopping basket as a makeshift shield against a suspected thief, who is seen attempting to kick him. As the confrontation unfolds, the alleged intruder makes off with a bag, leaving the guard to navigate a precarious situation that highlights both the risks and absurdities facing workers in the retail sector.

This episode emerges against a backdrop of escalating shoplifting incidents across the UK. Recently released figures reveal that annual offences in England and Wales have surpassed half a million for the first time, with a record 516,971 shoplifting cases reported in 2024—a staggering 20% increase from the previous year. This surge is alarming not only for retailers but also for the employees who must confront the realities of a profession that is increasingly marked by risk. The British Retail Consortium estimates that retailers suffer losses exceeding £2.2 billion annually due to theft, a figure that underscores the toll of retail crime on the economy.

Public reactions to the viral video have varied widely, illustrating a complex relationship with crime and security. Many viewers praised the security guard’s quick thinking, expressing sympathy for his precarious position. One individual lamented, “These security guards don’t get paid enough,” reflecting a sentiment that resonated with numerous commenters about the inadequacies of remuneration in light of the risks workers face. However, not all responses were supportive; some commentators advocated for a more detached approach, suggesting the guard should have allowed the theft to occur since the store's inventory is insured.

The findings by the Office for National Statistics confirm that while police-recorded shoplifting figures are significant, they likely underrepresent the true extent of the issue. Reports indicate that small retailers often refrain from reporting theft due to perceived inefficacies in police response, leading to an estimated annual total of over 20 million shoplifting incidents, according to industry leaders. This pervasive problem feeds into wider discussions about crime, with experts citing factors such as high inflation and the emergence of organised criminal gangs as drivers behind the increase in shoplifting incidents.

As the government contemplates legislative measures to protect retail workers—such as explicitly defining assaults against staff in law—the concerns surrounding safety in retail environments continue to escalate. The recent rise in shoplifting coincides with heightened apprehension among employees regarding their safety in the workplace. In fact, the rise in attacks against retail workers has prompted calls for immediate action, as expressed by campaigners pushing for stringent legal protections.

In light of this climate, the predicament faced by the Iceland security guard reflects a wider societal issue—one that challenges notions of public safety, worker protection, and the economic implications of retail crime. As incidents like the one in Walworth draw attention, they serve as critical reminders of the pressing need to address retail crime holistically, balancing security measures with the wellbeing of those tasked with maintaining safety in often vulnerable environments.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14756853/Iceland-security-guard-arms-shopping-basket-ward-thief.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14756853/Iceland-security-guard-arms-shopping-basket-ward-thief.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/apr/24/shoplifting-uk-crime-retail-police-ons-data), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/caught-shoplifting-uk-england-wales-ons-b2738762.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/apr/24/shoplifting-uk-crime-retail-police-ons-data), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/24/shoplifting-rate-england-wales-rises-new-20-year-high)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.crimerate.co.uk/shoplifting), [[5]](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/latest), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/24/shoplifting-rate-england-wales-rises-new-20-year-high)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/apr/24/shoplifting-uk-crime-retail-police-ons-data), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/shoplifting-surges-30-england-wales-official-data-shows-2024-07-24/)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14756853/Iceland-security-guard-arms-shopping-basket-ward-thief.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/apr/24/shoplifting-uk-crime-retail-police-ons-data> - In April 2025, The Guardian reported that shoplifting offences in England and Wales reached a record high, with 516,971 incidents recorded in 2024, a 20% increase from the previous year. Retailers argue that official figures underestimate the problem, citing over 20 million incidents annually. The British Retail Consortium estimated that shoplifting costs retailers more than £2.2 billion each year. The rise in shoplifting has been partly attributed to squeezed household finances amid high inflation and organised gangs stealing to order. The government has vowed to tackle low-level shoplifting and make assaulting a shop worker a specific criminal offence.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/shoplifting-surges-30-england-wales-official-data-shows-2024-07-24/> - Reuters reported in July 2024 that shoplifting offences in England and Wales surged by 30% in the year leading up to March 2024, reaching the highest level in 20 years. The Office for National Statistics reported 443,995 recorded incidents, up from 342,428 in the previous year. Retailers contend that the situation is worse, as many shoplifting cases, especially in smaller stores, go unreported due to lack of confidence in police response. Major retailers, including Tesco, John Lewis, and Primark, have highlighted the issue, which reflects similar trends in the US and other regions. The British Retail Consortium estimated the industry's losses from theft at nearly £1 billion annually. The retail workers' union Usdaw expressed grave concerns, with General Secretary Paddy Lillis calling the rise an 'epidemic of retail crime.' In response, Britain's new Labour government plans to introduce a specific offence for assaulting shop workers.
4. <https://www.crimerate.co.uk/shoplifting> - CrimeRate.co.uk provides statistics on shoplifting offences in England and Wales. In 2024, police forces received 452,635 crime reports about shoplifting, a 19% increase from 2023's figure of 379,114 reports. The overall crime rate was 7.84 per 1,000 people in 2024, up from 6.57 per 1,000 people in 2023. The most dangerous cities for shoplifting are Cardiff, Swansea, and Nottingham, with crime rates of 17.99, 15.53, and 15.39 per 1,000 daytime population respectively. The safest area for shoplifting is the City of London, with a crime rate of 4.52 per 1,000 daytime population.
5. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/latest> - The Office for National Statistics (ONS) provides data on crime in England and Wales. In the year ending September 2024, there were 492,914 shoplifting offences recorded by the police, a 23% increase compared with the previous year. The ONS notes that while police-recorded crime does not tend to be a good indicator of general trends in crime, it can give more insight into lower-volume, but higher-harm offences, reported to the police, including those that the survey does not cover or capture well.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/24/shoplifting-rate-england-wales-rises-new-20-year-high> - The Guardian reported in July 2024 that the number of shoplifting offences recorded by police in England and Wales rose to a new 20-year high. A total of 443,995 offences were logged by forces in the year to March 2024, up 30% on the 342,428 recorded in the previous 12 months. The figure is the highest since current records began in the year to March 2003, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/caught-shoplifting-uk-england-wales-ons-b2738762.html> - The Independent reported in April 2025 that the number of shoplifting offences recorded by police in England and Wales has surpassed half a million for the first time on record, according to new figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Police recorded 516,971 shoplifting offences in 2024, a 20% increase on the 429,873 offences in 2023 and the highest number recorded since modern record-keeping practices began in 2003.