# Migrant rescues in English Channel strain Coastguard as crossings surge



Amidst escalating concerns regarding migrant crossings in the English Channel, a recent incident underscored the challenges faced by the UK Coastguard. Reports revealed that the Coastguard was occupied with multiple migrant rescue operations early on a Saturday morning, thereby limiting their ability to assist a yacht and a kayak that had issued alerts about their safety. This situation arose as around 15 small boats attempted to make the perilous journey from France to the UK, with several dinghies departing from Gravelines—a beach that has seen concerning patterns of family groups setting out in overcrowded vessels.

While HM Coastguard reported that public safety was not compromised during their response, they acknowledged the complexity of managing concurrent incidents. They asserted that the yacht and kayakers did not ultimately require assistance, a claim that speaks to the resource allocation challenges governing maritime safety in the Channel. The situation illustrates the broader issue of migrant crossings, with figures indicating a steep rise in boat arrivals this year, despite ongoing efforts aimed at curbing these dangerous journeys.

An analysis of recent statistics reveals that migrant interceptions by French authorities have dropped significantly in 2023, with only 38 percent of attempted crossings being thwarted. This is in stark contrast to last year, when intercept rates were nearly 45 percent. The drop has occurred despite a substantial £480 million investment by the UK government to bolster patrols along French shores. Critics argue that this financial commitment, which aimed to double the number of patrol officers and establish a joint command centre, has yet to yield the desired results in curbing the number of migrants attempting to cross the Channel.

Furthermore, changes in tactics employed by human smuggling networks have exacerbated the problem. Smugglers are adapting by moving launch points away from the beach, allowing migrants to wade into deeper waters to board small boats—a method that complicates law enforcement's ability to intervene. A notable recent event saw the French Coastguard rescue 83 individuals from two boats in distress near Gravelines, highlighting the continual strain on maritime resources as the number of crossings remains high.

Political responses to the migrant crisis continue to evolve. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has voiced intentions to tackle small boat crossings through comprehensive measures that target smuggling operations and enhance return partnerships with other countries. His proposals have faced scrutiny, with some critics drawing parallels between his rhetoric and historically charged speeches that evoke fears of racism and division. Nonetheless, Starmer has asserted the necessity of a multifaceted approach, which includes building international agreements and increasing enforcement efforts.

Additionally, the Home Office continues to express a commitment to ending what they describe as dangerous crossings that pose risks to human life and border security. However, with mounting legal challenges and changing laws in France permitting greater police action, the situation remains fluid and fraught with controversy. As the government rolls out new plans, including potential "return hubs" in the Balkans, the ongoing debate amplifies concerns over human rights for migrants and the ethical implications of such policies.

Despite these governmental efforts, projections indicate that 2025 could see record levels of Channel crossings, with over 13,000 arrivals already logged this year, suggesting that without a significant shift in strategy, the humanitarian crisis at sea will endure.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14768333/Migrant-rescues-English-Channel-meant-coastguard-busy-come-aid-stricken-yacht.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/29/french-coastguard-rescues-83-people-from-small-boats-crossing-channel)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14768333/Migrant-rescues-English-Channel-meant-coastguard-busy-come-aid-stricken-yacht.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/29/french-coastguard-rescues-83-people-from-small-boats-crossing-channel), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/29/french-coastguard-rescues-83-people-from-small-boats-crossing-channel)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14768333/Migrant-rescues-English-Channel-meant-coastguard-busy-come-aid-stricken-yacht.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/29/french-coastguard-rescues-83-people-from-small-boats-crossing-channel), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/29/french-coastguard-rescues-83-people-from-small-boats-crossing-channel)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14768333/Migrant-rescues-English-Channel-meant-coastguard-busy-come-aid-stricken-yacht.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/29/french-coastguard-rescues-83-people-from-small-boats-crossing-channel)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14768333/Migrant-rescues-English-Channel-meant-coastguard-busy-come-aid-stricken-yacht.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/2023/jan/29/french-coastguard-rescues-83-people-from-small-boats-crossing-channel> - On 29 January 2023, the French coastguard rescued 83 individuals from two small boats in the English Channel near Gravelines, France. The boats encountered difficulties while attempting to cross to England. The coastguard successfully rescued 54 people from one boat and 29 from the other, ensuring their safe return to Calais. This operation highlights the ongoing challenges faced by authorities in managing the increasing number of small boat crossings in the Channel.
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