# British Border Force rescues migrants in French waters amid Channel crisis controversy



A new controversy has emerged in the ongoing Channel migrant crisis following an incident in which a British Border Force vessel was compelled to rescue asylum seekers within French territorial waters. The event took place on Tuesday when a dinghy carrying dozens of migrants reportedly broke down approximately half a mile to a mile inside French waters. Despite concerns that some passengers were signalling distress, a French warship that had been shadowing the vessel did not intervene.

The Channel crossing has been described as an emergency, and French authorities have faced significant criticism over their failure to prevent more migrants from attempting the perilous journey. According to a witness, while French rescue vessels are responsible under a bilateral agreement to manage migrants in distress within their waters, this protocol was not observed on this occasion.

The witness said: “The UK Border Force vessel moved into French waters as the dinghy had slowed up - I think the tubes were deflating. They were getting slower and slower and they came to a stop half a mile to a mile from the border. Some of those on board signalled they were in distress.” The witness insisted that it was the French responsibility to pick up these migrants and highlighted a breach in protocols: “If they were signalling that they were in distress, the French should have picked them up. They have broken their protocols.”

After the British Border Force Ranger rescued the migrants, it remained nearby while another French vessel reportedly identified another migrant boat. The Ranger then proceeded further into French waters to collect more people attempting the crossing. The witness criticised the arrangement, stating: “It’s encouraging enough for the migrants when they can see the Border Force vessels waiting. Now they are getting into trouble and know they are still going to get picked up.”

An intercepted radio communication, reviewed by the Daily Express, includes the French warship inquiring of the British vessel, “What are your intentions with the dinghy?” The Border Force member responded, “I am going to export that with the UK Coastguard.” The French vessel then replied, “Thank you for your co-operation.”

Prominent political figures have voiced their opinions on the incident. Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp told the Daily Express: “This is a scandal. British vessels should not be picking up illegal immigrants in French waters - this is for the French to do. In fact, the French should be intercepting the illegal immigrants’ boats and taking them back to France. If they don’t do this, upon arrival in the UK the illegal immigrants should be rapidly removed to somewhere like Rwanda. They would then pretty soon stop coming in the first place.”

Nigel Farage, leader of Reform UK, commented on the financial aspect of the issue, highlighting the continued crossings despite substantial funding: “As we have given £500 million to the French to stop the boats, it is outrageous that their navy still escorts these boats to our 12 mile line and then hands them over to the UK taxi service. Only Reform UK will stop the boats.”

Kevin Saunders, a former Chief Immigration Officer at Calais for Border Force, also weighed in: “The rule is that France operates in their half of the Channel and Border Force operates in the UK half. Over time we have seen the French escort migrant boats to the half-way point, where they are ‘rescued’ by Border Force or RNLI. I was astonished to hear that the French have now taken another step backwards by asking the Border Force vessel Ranger to enter French territorial waters to pick up migrants and return them to Dover.”

This incident adds to the complexity and ongoing challenges surrounding the Channel migrant crisis. So far this year, nearly 11,000 migrants have made the crossing, placing continued pressure on both British and French authorities to manage the situation. The diplomatic and operational responses remain under intricate arrangements that are now being scrutinised in light of recent events.

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

## References

* <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1925158/british-border-force-vessel-takes> - This article reports on a British Border Force vessel, the Ranger, rescuing 13 migrants from a dinghy inside French territorial waters and returning them to Calais, marking the first such operation under a joint rescue initiative.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2lk950y1gpo> - The BBC article details the rescue operation where the Border Force Ranger saved 13 people from the water, and both the British and French vessels took the group to Calais, coordinated by French authorities.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/french-english-channel-migrant-border-force-yvette-cooper-b2581984.html> - This piece discusses the incident where a Border Force vessel entered French waters to rescue migrants, returning them to Calais, and includes statements from UK officials and the French coastguard.
* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/07/18/border-force-takes-migrants-back-france-channel-rescue/> - The Telegraph article covers the joint Anglo-French operation where the Border Force catamaran Ranger assisted in rescuing migrants in French waters and returned them to Calais, highlighting the cooperation between UK and French authorities.
* <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/french-english-channel-keir-starmer-border-force-yvette-cooper-b1171507.html> - This report details the rescue operation in the English Channel where a migrant died and 71 others were rescued, with the Border Force vessel returning the migrants to Calais, coordinated by French authorities.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/a2a37247-6b7a-460c-a014-951c859a8cfc> - The Financial Times article discusses the tragic incident where eight migrants drowned in the English Channel, highlighting the ongoing challenges and dangers of migrant crossings despite increased policing efforts.
* <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2048887/Migrants-France-UK-asylum-boats-dinghies> - Please view link - unable to able to access data