# Albanian mafia’s cocaine empire drives UK drug-driving deaths to record highs



A tragic incident in Manchester highlights the stark reality of Britain’s escalating drug-driving crisis, with the heart-wrenching story of three-year-old Louisa "Lulu" Palmisano, who was fatally struck by a van driven by Rawal Rehman. Following a cocaine-fuelled binge, Rehman had more than 20 lines of the drug in his system when he mowed down the innocent toddler during a morning stroll with her mother. His subsequent 12-year prison sentence reflects a grim trend: drug-related road deaths have surged by 164 per cent in less than a decade.

Cocaine, now a common fixture in Britain's illicit drug landscape, has seen usage rates that experts describe as "ubiquitous," with the UK boasting the world's second highest rate of cocaine consumption, only behind Australia. The escalation in cocaine use has prompted alarming statistics, including 1,118 deaths linked to the drug in just 2023—a 30 per cent increase from the previous year. Increasingly, users are driving under the influence, as the drug’s stimulating effects can lead individuals to underestimate their level of impairment, complicating the issue further.

The primary players in this burgeoning crisis are Albanian criminal organisations, which have successfully seized control of the UK cocaine market. These groups employ sophisticated tactics akin to supermarket retail, where bulk purchasing leads to lower prices and higher purity. Such practices enable them to dominate the supply chain, especially by forging direct links with South American cartels, significantly affecting the drug's availability throughout the UK. Professor Ian Hamilton, an addiction expert at the University of York, highlighted that this strategy allows these crime families to ensure their product remains attractive to consumers, as they focus on volume sales over the less frequent, more lucrative transactions of the past.

Notably, gang warfare and related violence are rising sharply due to the lucrative nature of the cocaine trade. The National Crime Agency (NCA) has noted that disputes among these gangs often escalate into serious violence, affecting innocent people and contributing to a broader culture of fear. The Albanian mafia's influence has extended across multiple UK regions, establishing strongholds that make it challenging for law enforcement to impose control. The notorious Hellbanianz gang, well-known for its dominance in East London, exemplifies how these groups assert their presence through social media and street-level violence.

Prominent figures within this dark underworld have become infamous, including Dritan Rexhepi, who was apprehended after 27 years on the run. Once a prominent figure on the Metropolitan Police's most wanted list, he led the Kompanio Bello drug cartel, believed to be responsible for trafficking substantial quantities of cocaine. Additionally, other significant operations have involved individuals like Jamie "The Iceman" Stevenson and collaborative efforts with various criminals, including Bulgarians and Italians, enhancing the multinational nature of the trade.

Law enforcement agencies have stepped up their efforts, with Border Force reporting a 75 per cent increase in cocaine seizures, amounting to over 26 tonnes intercepted last year. Additionally, UK authorities have established international partnerships aimed at tackling the problem at its source, including the deployment of British officers in Colombia and Ecuador. Yet, with more than £4 billion generated from cocaine sales annually in the UK—akin to the entire annual revenue of the publishing industry—establishing control over the trade appears an uphill battle.

As significant drug seizures continue to offer fleeting victories, the underlying issue resonates profoundly, exemplified by the case of Lulu Palmisano. It serves as a horrific reminder of the human cost behind Britain's escalating drug crisis and underscores the pressing need for comprehensive strategies to counteract this tide of drug-related violence and fatalities. Without concerted and meaningful efforts, tragedies such as this will continue to haunt the fabric of society.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14756577/Albanian-mafia-fuelling-Britains-drug-driving-epidemic-cocaine-heartbreaking-consequences.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/albanian-mafia-flooding-britain-drugs-14038772)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14756577/Albanian-mafia-fuelling-Britains-drug-driving-epidemic-cocaine-heartbreaking-consequences.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/13/kings-of-cocaine-albanian-mafia-uk-drugs-crime), [[5]](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/albanian-gangsters-running-uk-cocaine-28952848)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/29/albanian-gangs-control-uk-cocaine-market-says-agency), [[6]](https://irpimedia.irpi.eu/en-albanian-mafia-uk-cocaine-supply/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/13/kings-of-cocaine-albanian-mafia-uk-drugs-crime), [[4]](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/albanian-mafia-flooding-britain-drugs-14038772), [[7]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/03/16/albanian-gangs-cocaine-production-europe/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14756577/Albanian-mafia-fuelling-Britains-drug-driving-epidemic-cocaine-heartbreaking-consequences.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/albanian-mafia-flooding-britain-drugs-14038772)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/29/albanian-gangs-control-uk-cocaine-market-says-agency), [[6]](https://irpimedia.irpi.eu/en-albanian-mafia-uk-cocaine-supply/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/03/16/albanian-gangs-cocaine-production-europe/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14756577/Albanian-mafia-fuelling-Britains-drug-driving-epidemic-cocaine-heartbreaking-consequences.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://irpimedia.irpi.eu/en-albanian-mafia-uk-cocaine-supply/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14756577/Albanian-mafia-fuelling-Britains-drug-driving-epidemic-cocaine-heartbreaking-consequences.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/13/kings-of-cocaine-albanian-mafia-uk-drugs-crime> - This article discusses how Albanian gangs have seized control of the UK's cocaine market by negotiating directly with Colombian cartels, leading to lower prices and higher purity. The gangs' influence has significantly shaped the UK's drug landscape, making cocaine more accessible and contributing to record fatalities. The piece also highlights the Hellbanianz gang's presence in East London and their use of social media to assert dominance.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/29/albanian-gangs-control-uk-cocaine-market-says-agency> - The National Crime Agency (NCA) reports that Albanian gangs have established significant control over the UK's cocaine market, particularly in London. These gangs have formed direct relationships with Latin American cocaine suppliers, posing a significant threat due to their readiness to use serious violence. The NCA warns of the potential danger to innocent people from gang warfare and the impact on the UK's drug trafficking landscape.
4. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/albanian-mafia-flooding-britain-drugs-14038772> - This article reveals that Albanian mafia groups have taken over the UK's £5 billion cocaine market. By bypassing traditional wholesalers and negotiating directly with Colombian cartels, they have reduced prices and increased purity. The piece also mentions the Hellbanianz gang in East London, known for their social media presence and dominance in the Gascoigne estate, and notes that the UK now has the highest number of young cocaine users in Europe.
5. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/albanian-gangsters-running-uk-cocaine-28952848> - The article discusses how Albanian gangsters have dominated the UK's cocaine market for the past two decades, with notable gangs like the Hellbanianz in East London. Despite their widespread influence, these gangs have been warned to stay away from Liverpool due to local gangs 'protecting' the area. The piece highlights the gangs' use of social media to flaunt their criminal lifestyle and their control over the drug trade in various UK regions.
6. <https://irpimedia.irpi.eu/en-albanian-mafia-uk-cocaine-supply/> - This piece examines how Albanian criminal groups have taken control of the UK's cocaine market by negotiating directly with Latin American producers, leading to lower prices and higher purity. The article highlights the gangs' strategic approach, contrasting it with the typical British drug dealer's desire for quick profits. It also notes the UK's thriving drug market, generating around €30 billion in profit before the pandemic, and the Albanians' influence in this sector.
7. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/03/16/albanian-gangs-cocaine-production-europe/> - The article reports on the surge in cocaine production in Europe, with Albanian gangs playing a significant role in trafficking. It details how these gangs have established control over the supply chain, from Latin America to Europe, and their influence in countries like the Netherlands, Italy, and the UK. The piece also discusses the impact of increased cocaine production on drug-related violence and the challenges faced by law enforcement in combating this issue.