# UK hosts Five Eyes summit to tackle record migrant crossings and transnational smuggling



Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood is set to host a high-level meeting in London with her counterparts from the Five Eyes intelligence alliance—comprising the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—to discuss coordinated efforts to combat escalating people-smuggling activities. This summit marks Mahmood’s first major engagement since her appointment and comes amid record numbers of small boat migrant crossings into the UK, a challenge she has described as "utterly unacceptable."

The meeting, scheduled for Monday, will focus on intensifying border security measures and dismantling transnational smuggling networks. Mahmood outlined the two-day talks as pivotal in fostering joint strategies against organised crime, especially human trafficking, while also addressing related issues such as online child sexual abuse and the proliferation of synthetic opioids. Key attendees include senior officials such as US Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and Canada’s Gary Anandasangaree. This collaborative approach reflects the growing urgency in countering increasingly complex migration and security threats, which have become central to political discourse in the UK and globally.

The timing of the talks underscores a sharp rise in irregular migration via the English Channel, with more than 1,000 people arriving in small boats on a single busy day—adding to over 30,000 arrivals this year according to Home Office figures. This surge places intense pressure on the UK government to devise effective responses. Recent government statistics reveal that in the year ending March 2025, over 38,000 migrants arrived by small boats, a 22% increase from the previous year and part of a sustained upward trend since 2021.

This intensifying crisis has prompted fresh diplomatic efforts between the UK and France. Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron have agreed on a reciprocal 'one in, one out' migrant returns pilot scheme. Under this arrangement, new arrivals in the UK will be detained and returned to France, which will in turn accept an equal number of migrants with legitimate claims. While the deal aims to deter dangerous crossings and combat human trafficking, its initial scale—capped at 50 migrants each way weekly—is limited in comparison to the volume of crossings, which are expected to surpass previous annual records.

Despite government efforts, the human cost of these perilous journeys remains severe. Recent incidents include the deaths of a woman and child during an overcrowded crossing attempt from France, part of a grim tally of at least 14 migrant deaths along the Channel so far in 2025. Such tragedies highlight the increasing risks faced by those attempting to reach the UK, often driven by desperate conditions in their home countries and limited safe legal routes to asylum.

The UK government faces mounting scrutiny as migrant arrivals soar. Since January, nearly 20,000 people have crossed the Channel by small boats, marking a 50% increase from the same period last year. This surge has intensified public concern and political tensions, with opposition figures capitalising on immigration anxieties. Starmer’s government has pledged to crack down on illegal crossings and smuggling gangs, promising measures to end the use of hotels for asylum seeker accommodation and enforcing controversial bans on certain legal protections for claimants, which have drawn criticism from human rights groups.

Nevertheless, scepticism remains about the effectiveness of deterrence policies alone. Many migrants in northern France’s camps remain undeterred by the new UK-France return agreement, citing the high risks they face if returned and the absence of viable alternatives in other European countries. The cost of crossing has notably dropped, even as the journeys become longer and more hazardous, suggesting that economic deterrents are insufficient to stem the flow.

These developments underscore the complexity of the migration challenge confronting the UK and its allies. The forthcoming Five Eyes summit will be closely watched as governments seek more cohesive international responses to an issue that blends humanitarian, security, and political dimensions. As Mahmood steps into her new role, the effectiveness of these collaborative efforts will be pivotal in shaping both the UK’s border policies and broader migration management strategies in the years ahead.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g7xyn03yno?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/five-eyes-ministers-meet-discuss-smashing-people-smuggling-gangs-uk-says-2025-09-07/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/five-eyes-ministers-meet-discuss-smashing-people-smuggling-gangs-uk-says-2025-09-07/)
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* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/faf8cb56-1223-4199-9b31-f7669124ee0b), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/9302e0a8-2b4a-4f98-bcfc-6c6d1a003a88)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g7xyn03yno?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/five-eyes-ministers-meet-discuss-smashing-people-smuggling-gangs-uk-says-2025-09-07/> - Homeland ministers from the Five Eyes alliance—comprising the UK, US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—are convening in London to introduce new measures aimed at strengthening border security and dismantling people-smuggling networks. UK Interior Minister Shabana Mahmood announced the focus of the two-day meeting, emphasizing the importance of joint efforts to combat organized crime, particularly human trafficking. The summit follows Mahmood's recent appointment after a cabinet reshuffle by Prime Minister Keir Starmer. With migration becoming a major political issue in the UK and globally, the talks also aim to address online child sexual abuse and the spread of synthetic opioids. Key participants include US Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, Canada’s Gary Anandasangaree, Australia’s Tony Burke, and New Zealand’s Judith Collins.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/faf8cb56-1223-4199-9b31-f7669124ee0b> - UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron have agreed on a reciprocal migrant returns deal aimed at deterring irregular English Channel crossings. Under the 'one in, one out' pilot scheme, set to launch in coming weeks, small boat arrivals in the UK will be detained and returned to France, while the UK will legally accept an equal number of migrants with legitimate claims, such as family reunification, from France. The leaders emphasized their joint commitment to tackling illegal immigration and human trafficking, with Macron highlighting France's significant financial contribution to border defense. Although the scheme initially involves up to 50 migrants weekly in each direction, this represents only a small fraction of the more than 21,000 arrivals in the UK via small boats in 2025. The agreement is subject to legal review and consultation with the European Commission and EU member states. Resistance from other EU countries has complicated negotiations, fearing increased migrant pressure on frontline nations. The announcement follows increased domestic political pressure on Starmer and rising public tensions, exemplified by an anti-migrant protest display in Northern Ireland. The deal’s effectiveness remains uncertain and could hinge on the scale and enforcement of returns.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/f9397c2afb38ed80add49727026b67e9> - A tragic incident occurred during an attempted overnight crossing of the English Channel from France to Britain, resulting in the deaths of a woman and a child. French maritime authorities reported that the small boat, carrying nearly 80 migrants, was discovered off the Pas de Calais coast. Ten individuals requested rescue and were taken aboard a French Navy vessel and transported to Calais, while the rest continued toward British waters. This incident brings the total number of migrant deaths along this perilous route to at least 14 in 2025. Earlier in the same week, another migrant died and one was reported missing after a different boat overloaded with people broke apart during a crossing attempt. The body of the missing person has not yet been recovered. According to U.K. government data, over 12,500 people have made the dangerous journey across the Channel in small boats so far this year, highlighting ongoing challenges in managing migrant crossings and ensuring safety.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-migrant-arrivals-small-boats-hit-new-record-2025-07-01/> - In the first half of 2025, the UK has seen a record number of nearly 20,000 asylum seekers arriving by small boats, marking a 50% increase compared to the same period in 2024. This surge places significant pressure on Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government, which has vowed to curb illegal crossings and target human smuggling gangs. On a single day, 879 migrants arrived, further straining resources. While the government claims to have returned over 24,000 individuals without legal right to stay since last July, rising arrivals are attributed to favorable weather and overcrowded boats. The uptick has intensified public concern and bolstered support for Nigel Farage's anti-immigration Reform UK party, now leading in opinion polls. Starmer's May proposals to reduce immigration and remarks about Britain becoming 'an island of strangers' drew backlash for being divisive. Additionally, the government has maintained a controversial ban restricting asylum seekers' access to protections under modern slavery and human rights laws, a decision criticized by rights groups. The administration has also pledged to end the use of hotels to accommodate asylum seekers, as the immigration debate remains a central political issue.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/9302e0a8-2b4a-4f98-bcfc-6c6d1a003a88> - A recent UK-France agreement introducing a 'one in, one out' migrant policy—aiming to return new UK arrivals to France—has been met with scepticism among migrants in northern France camps. Despite warnings from a UK government campaign, many asylum seekers remain undeterred, citing desperate conditions in their home countries and unreliability of such deterrent policies. The scheme, promoted by UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron, is part of a broader strategy to reduce Channel crossings, which are projected to surpass previous records in 2025. Nearly 28,000 people have crossed this year, and the UK has seen a record 111,084 asylum applications during Starmer’s first year in office. Meanwhile, crossing conditions have worsened due to increased coastal security and expanded smuggling networks, with overcrowded boats and longer, riskier routes becoming more common. The cost of crossings has dropped to £800–£1,500, despite rising equipment costs, undercutting UK hopes of economically deterring migrants. Many, like Yasan and Mohamed, see the UK as a last hope after facing rejection elsewhere in Europe. Critics argue the new policy and increased securitisation only worsen migrant risks without addressing root causes or providing safe legal alternatives.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-march-2025/how-many-people-come-to-the-uk-irregularly> - In the year ending March 2025, 38,023 people arrived in the UK on small boats, 22% more than in the previous year (31,079). Small boat arrivals were relatively low from 2018 to 2020, with 10,608 small boat arrivals in total across these 3 years. However, since 2021 there have been between 29,000 and 46,000 small boat arrivals each year, with the highest number of arrivals in 2022 (45,774).