# Labour’s drone patrols in the Balkans criticised as ineffective response to Channel migrant surge



Amid escalating scrutiny over migrant crossings in the English Channel, the new Labour government’s strategy—now featuring drone patrols in the Western Balkans—seems more a desperate PR stunt than a viable solution. Funded by British taxpayers, this initiative is a half-hearted attempt to stem the tide of illegal migration that has surged alarmingly since Labour took power.

Sir Keir Starmer’s recent visit to Albania, where he is expected to push for enhanced cooperation on a flawed offshore processing plan, serves as a telling measure of Labour's inadequacy in tackling this crisis. With migrant arrivals surging to over 12,000 this year—a staggering 40 percent increase from 2024—his commitment to controlling illegal immigration sounds more like empty rhetoric, particularly following a shocking revelation that over 600 crossed the Channel in a single day just as he was speaking about solutions.

The tragic deaths of more than ten individuals attempting to reach British shores further underscore the urgency of effective action, yet Labour’s solutions continue to fall short. While improving weather conditions have escalated migration attempts, Starmer's insistence on “intervening upstream” ignores the primary need for firm, decisive action at home. The criminal networks profiting from this human tragedy are thriving unchecked while Labour hesitates with reactive measures that have proven ineffective.

UK funding of £1.6 million earmarked for technology deployment along the Albania-Kosovo border, including drones and vehicle recognition systems, might enhance Albanian capabilities, but does little to address the core issue: a lack of enforcement on British soil. The collaboration may strengthen bilateral ties, yet without addressing root causes and tightening local immigration policies, any gains are likely to be short-lived.

Moreover, Labour’s claims of progress against organized crime ring hollow when juxtaposed against a backdrop of escalating crisis. Pledged partnerships with countries like Serbia and North Macedonia appear more as platitudes than actionable steps towards dismantling smuggling networks, as essential deterrents continue to be neglected. The infamous Rwanda scheme—previously heralded as a robust strategy for deterring illegal crossings—was scrapped under this government, leaving a void of effective policies to combat human trafficking.

Labour's plans to assist deported migrants in Albania by finding local jobs are commendable in theory, but in practice, they represent yet another superficial fix to a deeply rooted problem. It is necessary to address the motivations behind migration instead of merely managing its consequences. Unfortunately, Labour's execution of this strategy is marred by the absence of a coherent plan.

Critics, including Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp, have labeled Starmer's engagement with Albania as "pure theatre," emphasizing that Labour's abandonment of comprehensive deterrent strategies impedes any promises of success. Meanwhile, Italy’s ambitions to create processing camps in Albania have already faced significant legal challenges, further complicating any cooperative efforts.

As discussions with Albania's socialist leader Edi Rama unfold, it remains to be seen if they can forge a productive alliance. Yet, with Albania's pursuit of EU membership, this partnership could falter if clear, actionable measures on migration are not established.

In summary, while Labour's latest measures against illegal migration may give the illusion of a decisive stance on border security, critics are right to call for a more coherent, robust, and enforceable long-term strategy. Without it, the stubborn issues of human trafficking and the perils faced by migrants will undoubtedly continue to pose significant challenges, suggesting that the current government is ill-equipped to tackle this pressing crisis effectively.

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

## Bibliography

* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14713407/Britain-pay-drone-patrols-Western-Balkans-Keir-Starmers-desperate-bid-grip-stopping-migrants-reaching-English-Channel.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-technology-to-combat-criminal-gangs-in-albania-and-uk> - The UK has funded a £1.6 million network of cameras, including drones and number plate recognition systems, along the Albania-Kosovo border to combat illegal migration and criminal gangs. These technologies enable Albanian authorities to detect British vehicles used by smugglers and track migrants in mountainous regions difficult to police. The initiative aims to enhance cooperation between British and Albanian police in addressing people-smuggling activities.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-closer-international-collaboration-will-be-key-to-smashing-the-criminal-gangs-who-profit-from-migration-misery> - Prime Minister Keir Starmer emphasized the need for enhanced international cooperation to tackle criminal gangs profiting from illegal migration. At the European Political Community meeting in Budapest, he announced new agreements with Serbia, North Macedonia, and Kosovo to increase intelligence sharing and intercept smuggling gangs. The UK aims to dismantle these networks at their source, addressing the significant number of migrants transiting through the Western Balkans.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-drive-international-cooperation-on-irregular-migration-as-host-of-western-balkans-summit> - The UK is set to host the Berlin Process Summit in Autumn 2025, bringing together leaders from six Western Balkans countries and other European leaders. The summit aims to strengthen cooperation to combat irregular migration along key transit routes, aligning with the UK's strategy to control borders and disrupt people-smuggling gangs. Dame Karen Pierce has been appointed as the UK's Special Envoy to the Western Balkans to drive these objectives forward.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-to-build-on-progress-in-tackling-illegal-migration-as-he-meets-western-balkans-leaders-in-albania> - Foreign Secretary James Cleverly visited Albania to build on the UK's partnership with Albania in tackling illegal migration. The visit highlighted the success of joint efforts, including the reduction of small boat crossings by Albanian nationals by 90% since December 2022. Discussions focused on enhancing cooperation to address the drivers of illegal migration and strengthen economic ties between the UK and Albania.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cpdv1yxg8jqo> - The UK has signed new agreements with Western Balkan countries—Serbia, North Macedonia, and Kosovo—to tackle people-smuggling gangs. These deals aim to increase intelligence sharing and cooperation to intercept and arrest these gangs, with the goal of dismantling their operations at the source. The Western Balkans is a key transit route for migrants heading to the EU or UK illegally, with nearly 100,000 migrants transiting through the region last year.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/sep/16/giorgia-meloni-starmer-showed-great-interest-in-our-albania-migration-deal> - Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni stated that UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer showed 'great interest' in Italy's migration deal with Albania. The UK has pledged £4 million to support Italy's crackdown on irregular migration, which includes processing some asylum claims in Albania. This collaboration aims to address the challenges posed by small boat crossings in the English Channel and enhance cooperation between the UK, Italy, and Albania.