

This Release is issued on behalf of the South Regional Organised Crime Unit (SEROUCU)

A group of 13 gang members who trafficked people from the Middle East into the UK have been convicted.

A two-year investigation, led by detectives from the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit (SEROUCU), uncovered the network which specialised in facilitating the illegal movement of people from Iraq and the Kurdistan region into the UK.

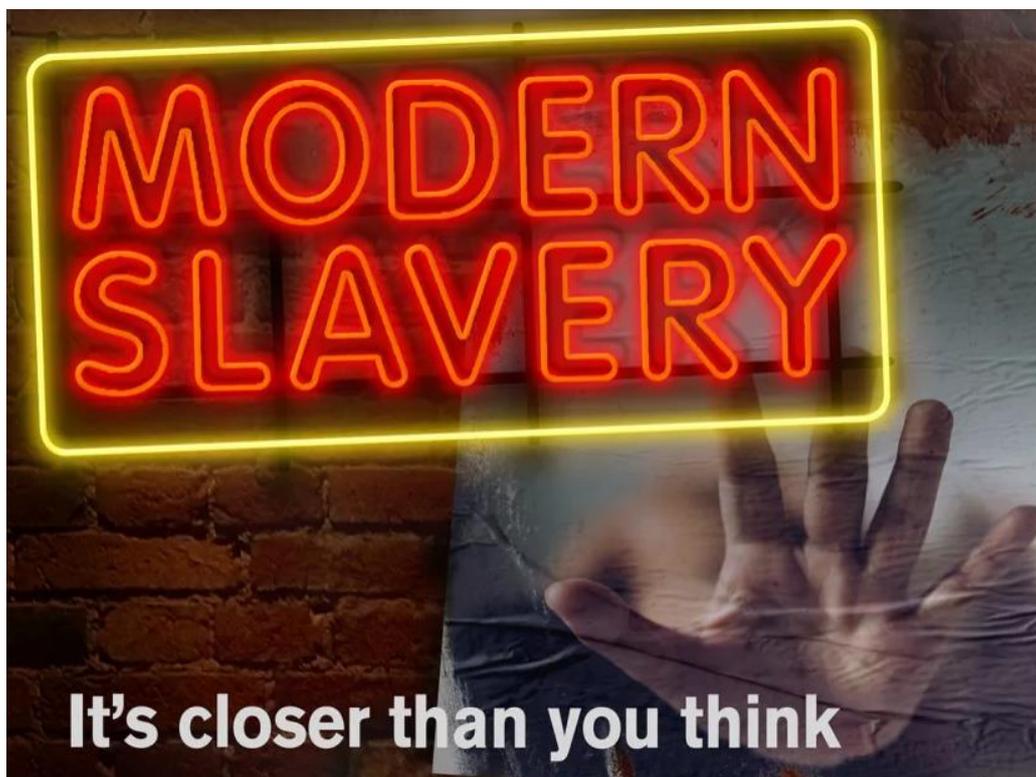
Several separate trials have now taken place and, following the conclusion of the final trial at Woolwich Crown Court, the full details of investigation can now be revealed.

The gang members were convicted of offences including conspiracy to assist in unlawful immigration, money laundering and perverting the course of justice.

Throughout the trials, the courts heard how the gang would use contacts across the UK, Europe and Asia to move people to a holding point – often in south-eastern France. They were then taken by taxi to Belgium, where they would be hidden within lorries heading to the UK by ferry.

The victims would travel either in the lorry cab, on top of the cab in the wind deflector, or underneath the trailer on a pallet shelf. If they were detained in the UK, they would immediately claim asylum and be released to UK family members, who had paid the organised crime group between £8,000 and £10,000 per individual.

If they were not caught, the lorry would take the victims to meet a UK-based member of the organised crime group at service station close to ferry terminal where they would be taken away in a waiting car.



This was a complex and challenging investigation which was led by detectives from SEROCU and involved colleagues from Sussex Police, Kent Police, Devon and Cornwall Police, West Midlands Police, Nottinghamshire Police, and UK Border Force.

Officers quickly established that this human trafficking operation was being led by 33-year-old Alan Hoger and 34-year-old Goran Ahmed – both from East Sussex.

Hoger and Ahmed, who are both Kurdish, had set up operating bases in Hastings and St. Leonards, in East Sussex for their criminal enterprise but had a nationwide network of customers, money launderers and criminal associates in places such as Bolton, Nottingham, Devon, Brighton, Eastbourne and Hull.

Hoger had boasted of being a millionaire to his friends, as he laundered his profits from the organised crime group with help from his wife - through legitimate companies - back to the Kurdistan region. Throughout this investigation, a total of £144,000 in cash was seized. Hoger was jailed for 10 years and Ahmed was jailed for eight years.

Other key members of the gang were:

- Cristinel Samson, a 50-year-old Romanian lorry driver, of Grimstone Avenue, Folkestone, Kent, *who was responsible for smuggling illegal migrants into the UK*
- Ionut Cornila, a 27-year-old Romanian lorry driver, *who was responsible for arranging and co-ordinating other drivers around Europe. The pair was sentenced to five years and four years imprisonment respectively, for their roles in the gang.*

A number of others were also jailed for their part in assisting the traffickers and attempting to disrupt the police investigation.

Detective Chief Inspector Steve May, from SEROCU's investigations team, said: "This gang took advantage of their links to the Middle East to exploit vulnerable people for financial gain, with no concern about putting their lives in danger.

"They targeted the Kurdish community and looked to make as much profit out of every individual they could exploit. Their only concern was their profit margins.

"They set up an elaborate network of contacts to facilitate their work, which was uncovered by SEROCU officers assisted by our colleagues in a number of police forces and other agencies. The joint approach to investigating this organised crime group was invaluable as we were dealing with offenders based all across the UK and beyond.

"We are pleased that the seriousness of this offending has been recognised by the sentences imposed by the courts.

"This case should serve as a clear warning to those involved in trafficking people into the UK. Be in no doubt, we have an extensive investigative network and range of tactics to combat such criminal activity. We will seek them out and bring them before the courts."

Detective Superintendent Jeff Riley, Sussex Police policy lead on modern slavery, said; "This case originated in Sussex and we worked closely to support our SEROCU colleagues in their arrests of the two principals. This case illustrates once again the success of the co-ordinated law enforcement approach to organised crime groups."

Details of those convicted over the course of four trials:

- Alan Hoger, 33-years-old of Kenilworth Road, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex was found guilty of four counts of conspiracy to assist in unlawful immigration to the UK (10 years) and one count of conspiracy to convert criminal property (5 years concurrent). He was sentenced to a total of 10 years imprisonment. He was the head of the organised crime group.
- Goran Ahmed, 34-years-old, of Farley Bank, Hastings, East Sussex was found guilty of four counts of conspiracy to assist in unlawful immigration to the UK (8 years) and one count of conspiracy to convert criminal property (4 years concurrent). He was sentenced to a total of eight years imprisonment. He was 'second in command' and would run the operation while Hoger was out of the UK.
- Cristinel Samson, 50-years-old of Grimstone Avenue, Folkestone, Kent was found guilty of two counts of conspiracy to assist in unlawful immigration to the UK and sentenced to five years imprisonment. He was a Romanian lorry driver responsible for smuggling illegal migrants into the UK.
- Ionut Cornila, 27-years-old of Romania, was found guilty of five counts of conspiracy to assist in unlawful immigration to the UK and sentenced to four years imprisonment. He was a lorry driver from Romania responsible for arranging and coordinating other drivers to bring illegal migrants into the UK.
- Mohammed Rasul, 30-years old, of Church Road, Ashford, Kent was found guilty of two counts of conspiracy to assist in unlawful immigration to the UK and sentenced to three years imprisonment. He assisted in facilitating illegal migrants entering the UK.
- Neyaz Hamasaid, 34-years-old of Stour Street, West Bromwich, was found guilty of one count of conspiracy to assist in unlawful immigration to the UK and sentenced to three years imprisonment. He assisted in facilitating illegal migrants entering the UK.
- Arie Ali, 27-years-old of Ashton Rise, Brighton was found guilty of one count of conspiracy to assist in unlawful immigration to the UK and sentenced to three years imprisonment. He assisted in facilitating illegal migrants entering the UK.
- Bakhtyar Mohammed, 46-year-old of Netherfield Road, Bolton was found guilty of one count of conspiracy to convert criminal property and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment, suspended for two years. He laundered £8,000 for the organised crime group.
- Kveta Conkova, 31-years-old of Kenilworth Road, St Leonards-On-Sea, East Sussex was found guilty of one count of converting criminal property and sentenced to three years and six months imprisonment. She is the wife of Alan Hoger and assisted with laundering money for the organised crime group.
- Ian Salam, 34-years-old of The Rookery, Eastbourne, East Sussex was found guilty of one count of converting criminal property, one count of perverting the course of justice and one count of conspiracy to pervert the court of justice. He was sentenced to four years and three months imprisonment. He assisted with laundering money for

the organised crime group and attempted to pervert the course of justice into the group.

- Susan Mohammed, 36-years-old of The Rookery, Eastbourne, East Sussex was found guilty of one count of perverting the course of justice and sentenced to four months imprisonment. She assisted with laundering money for the organised crime group
- Kaiwan Ali, 36-years-old of Dryden Street, Nottingham was found guilty of perverting the course of justice and will be sentenced on 12 August.
- Ari Ako, 37-years-old of Dryden Street, Nottingham was found guilty of perverting the course of justice and will be sentenced on 12 August.