

This is a Global Player original podcast.
We need help from France to UK.
UK, yeah.
That I make this.
Very good.
It's my work.
Brilliant.
How many people is going to be in the boat?
Total.
How many people?
Maximum 15 people.
15.
Maximum.
Look.
I sent family with children like one year.
Look at this.
One woman.
One year.
One year.
Children.
Friend, I have cousin everywhere.
Yeah.
Birmingham, London.
Yeah.
Manchester.
You almost never hear that.
That was the voice of a people smuggler.
Part of the highly organised network of crime gangs who are
funneling thousands of people across Europe and then the
English Channel every single month.
In some cases, to their graves.
On this episode, we do at last hear one of their voices and
we get a sense of who they are, what they're doing, what
keeps their deadliest of trades in motion.
We've covered the channel crisis on the news agents many
times.
It's one of the main political fishes of our time, but we
haven't covered it quite like this.
This is the first episode of a new investigation series of
the news agents, which we'll be doing every month or so,
reporting on agenda setting stories in Britain and beyond.
It could hardly be more appropriate to start with this
one, where Britain and the world, such an unstable world,
collide on those 20 miles of channel.

It's Lewis here.

Welcome to a news agent special investigation.

What, if anything, can stop the people smugglers?

And why is nothing our government is doing apparently working?

So, I'm standing right on the beach of Berksley Mail, which is the closest point to England is actually Dungeon S, which is where hundreds and hundreds of people try and get to from this beach every week.

A distance, by the way, which is twice as long as Calet over, and you can hear, you don't need to see it, you can hear how rough the sea is every single day.

There isn't a calm day on this stretch of water, and it is weird here.

You know, I've been here so many times or along this stretch of French coast, so many times reporting from here, and it never stops being weird, partly because this beach and beaches like it, you just know that every single morning, this stretch of coast becomes a center of hundreds and hundreds of people clamoring on tiny little makeshift rafts trying to get to England.

And then by the afternoon, as when I'm here now, you just see hundreds and hundreds of people, tourists, taking afternoon stroll, and that juxtaposition is weird.

And then, of course, it's weird because this stretch of coast is the end point, or the beginning of the end point for a thousand thousand journeys, subject to a thousand thousand ambitions and dreams, and you just wouldn't know it.

And it is also basically the end point of the People Smugglers business operation.

And those People Smugglers, we almost never hear from, but you are going to hear from them on this show.

And it is so valuable.

It's valuable partly because it reminds us partly what we know, which is, yes, they're exploitative.

Yes, they have no regards for human life.

They're indifferent to it.

No, no matter what the French government or the British government says, the authorities are nowhere near smashing their business model.

They're absolutely rampant all along this part of France.

But it also is valuable because you will hear that in their own different ways, both what the left say and what the right

say about these people and about this problem are in their own different ways, wider the mark.

In recent months, even in recent days, this story has got bigger and bigger.

It's reaching fever pitch, a defining fissure of our politics.

It's going to be the Conservatives and only the Conservatives that stop the boat.

It is not illegal to arrive here in a boat and claim asylum.

The migrants and the People Smugglers find another way.

The problem just gets worse with every new gimmick.

What the UK does with them once here is becoming an increasingly divisive and controversial issue.

No fear.

The UK is all welcome here.

But let's be clear about what's really going on here.

The British people deserve to know which party is serious about stopping the invasion on our southern coast and which party is not.

The newsagents has worked with an undercover team to try and set up a meeting with a smuggler over many months.

The smugglers are shadowy figures in the makeshift camps which surround Paddock Alley.

But eventually, one did agree to meet with us.

A Kurdish man, part of the Kurdish mafia who operate in these parts.

What you're about to hear is a conversation with our undercover operative posing as someone looking for passage for a relative.

It is an insight into the mind of both the smuggler and the way their model operates.

Money, you'll be amazed to hear, was the first thing on his mind.

And then the process of what happens once they arrive, talking him through it, step by step.

The police is waiting for you?

Yes.

The police is going with us?

The police is going with us.

You go together and ship the boat.

You're here?

Yes.

After you go to England to finish?

This is very, very safe.

I say, promise me, I have people from Georgia,
Albania, they buy me 4,000 pounds.
8,000 pounds.
But you are a good man.
Why I give you this money for?
When the boat arrives, the police will help bring to the
Dover, yes?
Dover, yes.
Then what happens when he gets off the boat?
He goes to there, he makes the azir.
He gives azir, normal, he goes to hotel for sterna.
Yes, yes.
He's a salesman, isn't he?
Describing a four-star hotel, awaiting anyone who arrives
in the country.
Remember, they will say anything, and they're going to say
anything regardless of whether it's true.
It's all part of the service.
In that vein, he goes on to describe what our operatives
relative should do once they've been in Britain for a week,
and he encourages him to claim that he's being persecuted.
Next interview is big.
You have to be ready.
OK.
You have to make a good case.
I understand.
We have to make a good case.
Political problem, sir.
Humanity.
Yeah.
But politics is good.
Politics, they cannot bring you back to your country.
I understand, yeah.
But humanity, the problem is he's from India.
He's coming from...
You can't say I have a problem with the Bombay mafia.
With the mafia.
Bombay mafia.
OK.
I understand.
I understand then.
So after when they do the big case, he has to make a story.
Yes.
Yeah, yeah.

So we can say, Bombay mafia.
Yeah, yeah.
We can say something like this.
For him to get the asylum is this.
Why not?
You made some paper in your country.
Yeah.
Say, I have a problem with this mafia.
They want to kill me, my family.
So it is true that people can game the system,
and smugglers encourage them to do so.
You heard it.
And of course they do.
And it doesn't mean that they'll succeed.
Remember, the highest rate of asylum success are from countries which are failed states,
and the risk is obvious.
Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and so on.
These people don't need to lie, even if some do.
It is also interesting that our smuggler is also very well aware of Brexit,
and how that makes his life easier,
in that Britain is no longer part of the information sharing systems that we once were,
especially with regard to criminals.
Look, now England is without Europe, you know?
Finger from Bulgaria, Serbia, here, it's not a problem.
Because England is without Europe.
He's out in Europe.
I understand.
This is very good.
It's been successful, your trips.
Yes, yes.
The boat rides.
The boat rides, everything.
Okay, good, good.
Because he's very worried.
No, no, no.
My cousins.
Say him, don't worry.
No, no, no, no.
We get worried about water.
No, no.
Say, look, I sent a family with children like one year.
One year.
One year.
Children.

One year, baby.
It's chilling, isn't it?
They're indifferent.
The lies that they tell to those desperate for them to be true.
These people just aren't afraid of the authorities.
They're part of that sophisticated network,
which stretches across Europe and the Middle East.
They are excellent salesmen, and they'll say whatever it takes,
and they are as indifferent to life as it gets.
For the people here, the people trying to cross,
you have to also understand,
they might not like the smugglers,
but they do perform a service they want.
This is The News Agents.
So, I'm back in a place called Royal South,
which is not too far from Dunkirk.
I've been here many times before.
It's one of the sort of locations in this part of northeast France,
which is part of the kind of merry-go-round of life here.
The police come in to places like this,
they collect all of the migrant stuff,
they collect all of the migrant stuff,
they put knives through the tents,
they confiscate stuff from things,
and then they move on, and they settle in a new place.
And then the charities, humanitarian groups, come along,
and they provide them with all new things.
And it is part of the endless doob-loop of this policy
and sort of failed policies.
And it's one of the reasons, by the way,
that many of the people here say they want to leave
because of how they're treated by the French police.
And it is full of mainly young men, some women too,
and kids who are just waiting, waiting for the call
from the smuggler to take to the waves.
Kurdish, Kurdish.
Oh, Kurdish?
Kurdish, yes.
Which one?
Which one?
Soran.
Soran.
Yes.
Yes, yes, yes.

Miss your family?

Yes, yes.

Family in Iraq.

Miss you.

Miss your family.

One of the things about these places
is the conditions are just foul.

I mean, they're completely foul.

I mean, there's no sanitation,
people just have to live in filth, really,
in the middle of the woods.

I mean, it's primeval in lots of ways.

And it's always a weird reminder
of the extent to which the French authorities
basically just abandon
these whole areas.

I'm standing right in front of what can only really be described
as a swamp of rubbish.

Trolleys, endless numbers of shopping trolleys,
carrier bags, bottles, glass bottles, plastic bottles,
cardboard boxes, nappies, flies,
buzzing everywhere, animals, doubtless as well.

And no one really does anything about it
because this whole area of France,
in a way that I don't think British people appreciate,
local people have just got used to this.

They've got used to the men wandering down the motorways,
sometimes with women and mothers
and babies and prams as well.

It is a set of parallel lives
lived against the rest of France.

We got talking to a couple of the young men in the camp.

So you think it's dangerous here already?

Yeah, yeah, it's dangerous.

I go to three, four times,
going to the police is a problem now,
coming now, catching now, go back to the jungle,
go back to the jungle.

That's five, six times I'm trying now.

But it's dangerous in the water, isn't it?

No danger, I'm checking the waves, no problem.

No problem.

Whether it's a good time or not,
whether it's a good time or not.

But the boats are very crowded?
No, no, the boat is the best, no problem,
no danger problem.
I would say the jackets are better,
55% or 55% go now.
But people have died, people have died.
No problem, any people, no jacket are heavy,
no jacket is a die, it's no money, it's no jacket.
Just these 15 people going to the boats,
no danger.
And have you heard about Rwanda?
About Britain sending people like you to Rwanda?
Rwanda.
Rwanda, have you heard about that?
No, I don't know.
You never heard about that?
Yeah, I don't know.
Because you know the British government?
To the England.
Yeah, England.
They say they want to send people like you,
who arrive in England.
Yeah, it's going to the Wanda.
To Rwanda, in Africa.
Why is it going?
Well, they say they want to send you there
because you're not welcome in England.
I don't know, I don't know.
You've not heard about that?
Yeah, I don't know.
But it wouldn't put you off.
It wouldn't deter you.
You still want to go anyway.
Is it going to the Wanda?
Yeah.
I said I'm not going, okay, no,
but go back to the France.
Yeah.
And you're not worried about the waves,
about the channel, about the sea,
the danger of dying on the boat?
No, not danger.
So there you go.
Mohammed had no idea about Rwanda.

Never heard of it.

Okay, it hasn't happened yet.

And some people have heard of it.

But again, what you've got to understand is,
is that it's not going to matter.

Even if it takes off, it's not going to matter.

Because what you're dealing with here

is a group of people who,

whether they're economic migrants,

because genuine refugees,

a combination of the two,

they are basically people

who in one form or another are desperate,

either because they genuinely are victims

of political persecution,

or because they're desperate for a better life,

which is not an ignoble thing,

even if it's one that they don't technically have a right

to come over to Britain or anywhere else

to try and pursue.

Political instability is getting worse across the world.

And the other thing is, is that

they genuinely believe,

something you hear all the time

in places like this, is this idea of

inshallah, or Allah willing,

they genuinely believe they are guided by providence.

And that whatever happens

to make it across the channel if they don't,

that's in the hands of God.

And they believe, all of them,

each of them, that they're lucky,

and that they will.

And that is a very hard thing

if you're sat in the home office in Britain

to really factor into your equation,

or do much to counter.

There is so much fantasy

peddled on all sides of this debate.

No one willing to have a conversation

about who these people really are,

that yes, it is a nuanced argument

that sometimes economic migrants

and refugees can mix.

You can be both.
That with so many people on the move worldwide,
so much instability,
it is completely inevitable
that some, a small, relative proportion,
end up, literally, on our shoulders.
So we've come into a cafe
just off the main stretch of coast.
And we wanted to talk to someone
we've been working with to try
and get to one of these smugglers.
And the person is a real authority on this
because they're an undercover operative
and they have been working on this story
on and off for 25 years.
So he really knows what he's talking about.
He knows what he's talking about.
And so I think you'll find what he says
is absolutely fascinating
in terms of the sheer failure
of the British and French authorities
to get to grips with this problem,
a problem which, in his experience,
is actually getting far worse.
Right, well, I have been dealing with this subject
looking into these stories for the last 27 years.
And I can tell you,
the problem has only got bigger and bigger and bigger.
Smugglers are back bigger and better than ever.
The other important thing is that
the smuggling operations are very dynamic.
They actually change and adapt
to whatever new restrictions
or compliance procedures are being enforced.
So they are very, very devious.
Do you think there is a way to stop them?
The only way I can see is to open, legalize the...
You know, routes for people to come here to claim asylum.
Open the routes.
That's the only way I can see it being dealt with.
Allow people to apply from here, from France and elsewhere?
Well, allow people to apply in their own country, for example,
or a third country if they get out.
And not to say that, well, you've left the country of your persecution.

You have now...
You're not entitled to asylum in the UK,
which is what's happening.
So allow them to apply wherever
and to get a safe passage here.
That's the only way to stop it,
to put these smugglers out of business.
I suppose people listening, watching this might think,
or, you know, we found them, we found this guy.
Why can't the French find them? Why can't the British find them?
Why can't they shut them down?
They're wandering around here. It's not quite a bit of the time.
Well, they could do.
My clients mounted an undercover operation.
That's how I was able to do it.
I don't understand why the police,
especially the French police,
can't mount these types of operations
similar to what the newsagents, podcasts, has done.
Why can't they do these operations?
Why can't they mount these operations,
infiltrate the camps,
find out who are the main traffickers,
and put them out of business?
The majority of the prosecutions that have taken place,
to my knowledge, have resulted from exposure in the media,
not exposure by undercover officers
or undercover methods, police methods.
So I don't know why.
Maybe it's expense of launching these operations.
Maybe there's a disinclination
in the part of the French authorities.
They'd rather have them out than in.
This is what I believe, actually.
They are sort of keeping one eye shut
or turning a blind eye to the paying lip service
to the British government that they are cracking down.
Because if they do crack down, what happens?
Refugees stay here in France.
It becomes their problem.
So we're standing back on Dunkirk Beach,
which probably in about 12 hours' time
from when we were recording this is once again
going to be full of small boats

setting off on their journeys across their channel,
that perilous journey.
And you've heard it on the show today.
You've heard a smuggler who isn't put off
or deterred by virtually anything,
either the British or French governments are doing.
The people who are trying to cross in those boats
saying the same thing.
The threat of Rwanda isn't making a difference.
The Nationality and Borders Bill
didn't make a difference.
The Illegal Migration Bill so far hasn't made a difference.
And what you've basically got,
if you really sit and think about it and zoom out here,
is two sets of policy makers,
two sides of the channel,
basically both doing their best
to demonstrate the wisdom of Einstein's definition of insanity,
i.e. doing the same thing or basically the same thing
again and again and expecting or hoping for a different result.
If they really wanted to put the smugglers out of business
or at least to damage the smugglers,
then they know what they could do.
They have the option of allowing people to apply
in their own countries or in France
or in a nearby country or whatever.
Then the boats would stop or they would lessen.
They just would because people just wouldn't take the risk
and they wouldn't want to pay the smugglers.
But they won't do that.
And they won't do that partly for politics.
So the channel crossings, whatever you hear from politicians,
are going to continue.
The boats will not stop.
In a sense, as we've said before,
the channel, the boats, are the policy.
This is The Newsagents.
Right, I'm back at Newsagents HQ.
And that is it from us for this week
and this first edition of Investigates.
We should say, of course, that we did approach the Home Office
for comments and this is what they told us.
The unacceptable number of people risking their lives
by making these dangerous crossings

is placing an unprecedented strain on our asylum system.
Our small boat's operational command
is working alongside our French partners
and other agencies to disrupt the people's smugglers
and stop the boats.

The Illegal Migration Act will mean that people arriving
in the UK illegally are detained
and promptly removed to their country of origin
or a safe third country.

We remain committed to ending the use of expensive hotels.
That is why we are moving people into alternative,
cheaper accommodation,
doubling up in hotel rooms
and clearing the legacy backlog.

Make of that what you will.

Thanks to the production team who've worked on this episode,
Gabriel Radis and Rory Simon,
especially big thanks to Rory, who produced in France
and filmed and edited the video version of this piece,
which you can watch online.

There will be many more investigations to come
if you have any ideas for what you'd like to see on the show
as always, you can email newsagentsatglobal.com.

The editor of the newsagents is Tom Hughes.

The commissioning editor for Global is Vicki Etchel's

The Main Show is back on Monday.

Thanks so much for listening. See you then.

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.