



## **THE TOEX PROGRAMME – BRINGING CRIMINALS TO JUSTICE**

### **Overview**

**18 Organised Crime Groups  
identified**

**15 Priority Individuals  
identified**

**354 Safeguarding referrals  
completed**



**Kate Thacker**

Detective Chief Superintendent,  
Programme Director of the  
Tackling Organised Exploitation  
Programme (TOEX)

TOEX, the specialised programme led by Kate Thacker, takes a proactive and intelligence-led approach to policing, offering resources and expertise to help agencies tackle complex cases involving organised exploitation. With a track record of delivering justice, TOEX has supported successful investigations such as Operation Headdress and Operation Booker through the work of national and regional teams

embedded into the UK-wide Regional Organised Crime Unit network (ROCU). The programme has worked to transcend borders and crime types to create holistic and enriched outcomes. With additional funding from the Home Office and collaboration with partners across the UK law enforcement network, TOEX continues to make strides in the fight against organised exploitation.

### **A proactive and intelligence-led approach to policing**

TOEX is supported by government funding and takes a proactive intelligence-led approach that involves mapping the threat, developing the intelligence, and supporting appropriate ownership and progression of the resulting investigation. Led by T/Detective Chief Superintendent Kate Thacker, Director of TOEX, the project benefits from her extensive career as a detective and former Head of Investigations at Norfolk Constabulary, with more than 27+ years of experience.

Speaking about TOEX, Kate Thacker explains that the programme is a critical resource for police forces dealing with complex cases involving organised exploitation. By providing access to specialist resources and expertise, the programme helps agencies to identify and pursue criminals involved in these activities, safeguarding more people and pursuing criminals wherever they may be operating. She adds that TOEX was created to address the fact that organised exploitation knows no borders, and criminals involved in these activities often operate across multiple jurisdictions.

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## A track-record of delivering justice

Regarding the recent successes of TOEX, Kate Thacker highlights a couple of notable case studies. More than 79% of investigations that TOEX are supporting relate to VAWG offences - 64% involve an aspect of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking and 17% involve an element of Child Sexual Exploitation. Operation Headdress and Booker are examples of these investigations.

Operation Headdress received a referral from a third-sector partner, indicating that there were a network of brothels operating in Birmingham and surrounding areas. The team, with help from surrounding forces, identified an organised crime group recruiting vulnerable young females in Hungary, usually via a family member or friend already in the UK. The victims left their homes, some leaving children, with the offer of work in hospitality or agriculture, before finding out the offer had fallen through once they had arrived in the UK. The group, using debt bondage, advertised the women online and forced them to engage in sex work, paying controllers a proportion of the money made. Enforcement activity with TOEX was carried out in late 2021, and several people in the UK were arrested and charged with conspiracy to arrange or facilitate the travel of another person with a view to exploitation and conspiracy to control prostitution for gain.

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## Kate Thacker's hopes for the programme

Kate Thacker hopes that TOEX will continue to operate as the nationally led and regionally delivered 'hub and spoke' model, which is threat neutral and provides the opportunity to support serious and organised crime investigations with the coordinated deployment of intelligence and analytical tools that meet policing's business needs.

The TOEX Programme received additional funding of £6.5 million from the Home Office in April 2022, which will be allocated each year for three years. Last year, in an effort to upscale the offering, briefings were delivered to all 43 UK law enforcement agencies to highlight how TOEX collaborates with them to tackle organised exploitation. The presentation focused on the operational delivery, implementation, performance, and technical enablers of the programme.

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## Operation Booker

Another example of TOEX's deployment is Operation Booker, a joint operation between Northamptonshire Police and Romanian Police, with support from EMSOU's TOEX team, Europol, and Eurojust. The operation aimed to target a modern slavery gang that exploited vulnerable people by luring them to the UK with job offers. The gang would then take their ID documents and phones, forcing them to work long hours with little or no pay. As a result of the operation, 27 people were identified and safeguarded, and seven arrests were made. TOEX played a crucial role in building intelligence and using systems to help bring the exploitation to light. Their work continues to create a long-term solution to support victims of modern slavery and bring those responsible to justice.



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## Cutting-edge technical capabilities

In addition to the operational response supporting investigations in the ROCUs, TOEX continues to develop the means to support policing's business need with the creation of technical enablers that are cost-effective, threat-neutral and can deliver at scale for UK law enforcement. Each of these tools and capabilities follow the principle of 'build once, many uses', and are intended for wide usage and application across policing – i.e., their design can be applied to many threat types and are intended for frontline use. The tools, designed with engagement of data protection professionals, are technically documented for scrutiny, have proven invaluable time-saving aids in complex investigations, building efficiencies into the investigation process and facilitate the discovery of previously unknown insight.

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### Capability example: translation tool

Over 211 million characters of operational text translated to date, for a total cost of £1700.

TOEX develops and realises capabilities and tools for use against organised exploitation demand. Some of those tools may be suitable for national deployment on behalf of all forces and will be offered for wider use. The Police Digital Service (PDS) possess the remit to create repeatable solutions on behalf of all forces. Building on the successful evolution of the National Blueprints – including Microsoft Office 365 and the Sentinel cyber security products – PDS are now seeking to deploy 'Shared Services for policing', with TOEX leading the way as the first to realise a centrally-hosted service for tools, beginning with translator.

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### TOEX Data Platform

Live since May 2021, the TOEX Data Platform is an operational model scaled to nine forces producing real-world outcomes for frontline response.

The TOEX Data Platform has a unique ability to conflate local, regional and national data allowing valuable assets to focus on high-harm victims and offenders; filling gaps in tactical intelligence; supporting effective investigations and enriching strategic understanding. Ultimately, this is used to enhance collaboration, evidence-based decision making, contributes to the safeguarding of vulnerable people and helps pursue those causing harm. This is a first for UK policing and is already creating efficiencies in time and resourcing. In addition, it supports the use of explainable machine-learning (i.e., predictive analytics) to identify hidden harm, which can then be flagged for human assessment and review, informing evidence-based activity thereafter.

For example, the three TOEX Force Profiles - Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG); Missing Persons; Violence & Sex Offender Register (ViSOR) - use cloud-based analytical tools to conflate the full crime, intelligence and custody data held by nine forces against the information in the TOEX Data Platform to produce strategic and tactical products for safeguarding activity and the pursuit of offenders.



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## Looking to the future

Kate Thacker is optimistic about the programme's future, "TOEX has been delivered in collaboration with partners across the UK law enforcement network and having moved from pilot year to full national implementation, we continue to reach out to key stakeholders on a regular basis via briefings, our quarterly e-magazine, and other publications. In each, we highlight operational updates of interest, demonstrating the value added by our national and regional TOEX teams through case studies, and sharing opportunities for innovation and good practice in the arena of data analytics and intelligence."

For further information please visit

**[WWW.TOEXPROGRAMME.CO.UK](http://WWW.TOEXPROGRAMME.CO.UK)**

