

# Tackling the Developing World of OCGs through a Multi-Agency Strategy

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# The project in brief

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- Prisons as a place for recruiting new members, creating joint ventures with other organisations, and expanding their activities towards new lucrative markets.
- Prisons are the new frontline in fighting organised crime, intensifying the difficulties of tackling OCGs' networks.
- Little cooperation among law enforcement agencies despite substantial potential value in developing disruption strategies through effective multi-agency working.
- A multi-agency and data-sharing approach, with collaboration between police forces and HMPPS.

# 2018 Serious and Organised Crime Strategy

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Focus on SOC criminal activities

- SOC is a **national security threat** endangering integrity, legitimacy and sovereignty of the UK and its institutions
- “Individuals planning, coordinating and committing serious offences, whether individually, in groups and/or as part of transnational networks” (Home Department, 2018: 11)

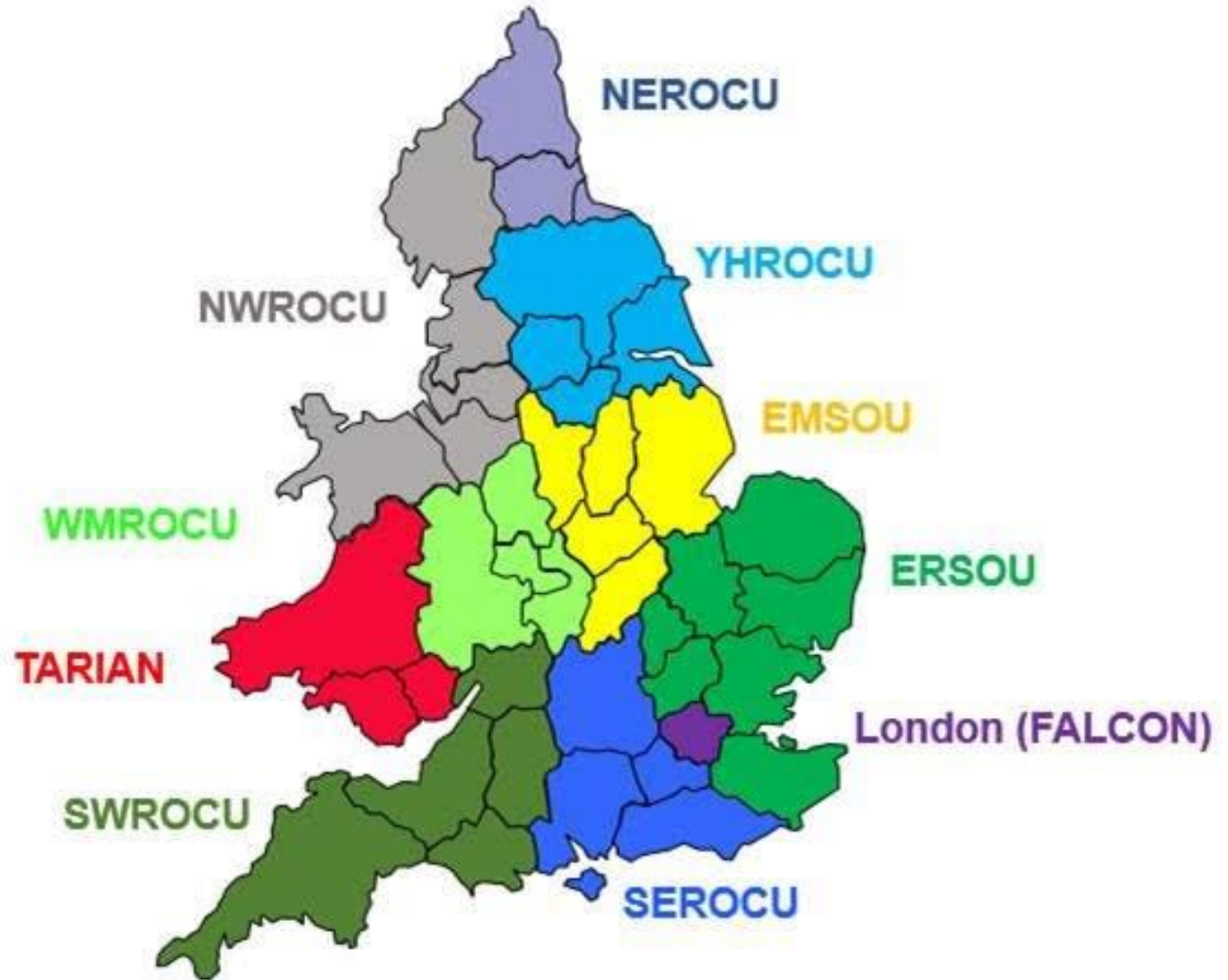
- |                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>1. child sexual abuse</b> | <b>6. organised</b>            |
| <b>2. modern slavery</b>     | <b>acquisitive crime</b>       |
| <b>and human</b>             | <b>7. cyber crime</b>          |
| <b>trafficking</b>           | <b>8. fraud</b>                |
| <b>3. organised</b>          | <b>9. money laundering</b>     |
| <b>immigration crime</b>     | <b>10. bribery, corruption</b> |
| <b>4. illegal drugs</b>      | <b>and sanctions</b>           |
| <b>5. illegal firearms</b>   | <b>evasion</b>                 |

# The new multiagency units

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This strategy promotes the creation of mixed units:

- at the local level (Serious Organised Crime Units - SOCUs)
- at the regional level (Regional Organised Crime Units - ROCUs)
- coordinated nationally (by Multi-Agency Approach to Serious and Organised Crime – MARSOC)



# The Research Design

## Aim:

To evaluate the implementation of the 2018 SOC Strategy and its multi-agency approach; the policies against OCGs in prison; and the cooperation between police and prison.

## Methodology and dataset:

- 1) Documentary analysis of legislations, strategies, protocols, and official reports
- 2) 55 in-depth interviews with CJS practitioners (police, prison, and probation) active at national, regional, and local levels
- 3) Official actions & informal strategies

# The interviews

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## 8 interviews with national coordination unit

- MARSOC

## 10 interviews with ROC units:

- Northeast
- Yorkshire
- Wales
- Southwest
- London
- Southeast
- West Midlands
- East Midlands

## 37 interviews at the local level including

- 15 HMMP Hull and Humber
- 22 Humberside police

# Some literature

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- Organised crime groups (OCGs) and gangs treat prisons to:
  - Establish informal governance (Butler, Slades and Nunes Dias, 2018)
  - Conduct potential lucrative activities such as the drug trade (Gooch and Treadwell, 2020)
  - Recruit new members (Wood et Al., 2014) and create joint ventures with other criminal organisations
  - Expand their activities towards new markets (Gaston and Huebner, 2015)
  - Organise their criminal acts in the outside world (van der Laan, 2012)
- Focus on disruption strategies adopted by law enforcement (Kirby and Snow, 2016)
- Gap on the policies adopted by prisons to tackle OCGs and forms of cooperation between police and prison to counter OCGs expansion ...

# OCGs in prison

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The UK prison population/setting is highly vulnerable to crime:

“OCGs continue to use prisons to **network and recruit individuals** with desirable skills, enabling them to strengthen, diversify and extend their criminal enterprises” (NCA, 2021: 11)

“We often call it the **university of crime** –you've joined a new network (of OCG) and it's a bigger network coming out of prison because then you understand that people with different skills whom you know can further your OCG” (Police officer)

“The problem with prison is that when OCGs get inside, they start networking, and then there are **crossovers** to other OCGs, and they need to survive in there. There's a **big business** within the prison for organised crime [...] It's the supply of mobile phones, of drugs, and of any illicit commodity within the prison” (HMPPS OC Unit)





# Multi-agency focus

A **holistic approach** is necessary:

“At the local, regional, national and international levels, we will align our **collective efforts** to respond as a **single system**” (Home Department, 2018: 18)

Prison should understand:

“How serious and organised crime is a threat to prison and probation services and why it is important to tackle that threat (...) Procedures must be in place to ensure **effective management of OCGs’ members in prisons** and under community supervision” (HMPPS, 2019: 7)

# Information sharing and holistic strategies I

## Data sharing and coordination:

“Working in silos doesn’t work, we’ve got to use everything to try and tackle serious organised crime” (Police officer)

“What we need to do is bring all those experts **around the table** and do this multi-pronged approach where we can disrupt and make life difficult, leave no safe space for them (OCGs) to operate” (Police officer)

# Information sharing and holistic strategies II

The multi-agency approach increases the level of **trust** between the police forces and the HMPPS:

“It’s not just about our ability to share intelligence, it’s about **where it’s stored, who has access to it, what do they do with it once they have it**, it’s all those sorts of things [...] if it’s a human thing, it’s around trust, it’s around what are they going to do with that piece of intelligence, so that’s what we need to try and get over” (Police officer)

# A shift in the criminal justice system's response to OGCs: Improving collaboration

Officers from police and HMPPS recognise the value of **prison intelligence officers (PIOs)**:

“That is why they (*PIOs*) are there, to make sure that (*the multiagency approach*) is effective [...] You have to look at **consistency** around staffing and resourcing. Some prisons are really busy, some prisons are less busy. So, it's probably one of the most important invisible things that PIOs do (*to liaise*), nobody really knows this goes on, but it goes on every single day” (Prison intelligence officer)

# Challenges in consolidating the multi-agency strategy

“Then in terms of sharing, it’s just incredibly difficult in-between agencies [...] there is a lot of hesitancy and obviously getting stuck in routines and paperwork (MARSOC)”

# Challenges in consolidating the multi-agency strategy

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## Technology barriers and obstacles

- Different database/software in use
- Access

## Issues of (mis)trust and understanding

- Conceptualizations/operational definitions of SOC & gangs do not always match
- Different aims
- Differing organization and work culture

## Institutional bureaucracy

- Excess bureaucracy reduces the time that staff have for more concrete implementation of multi-agency practices

# Final recommendations

Adopt one **common database** for intelligence purposes and data exchange

**Simplify the software** used for intelligence and sharing

Adopt **one shared protocol** on how to deal with OGCs inside and outside prisons to circulate across the CJS –clear distinction between high and low-risk OGCs' individuals and a common definition of risk

**Increase the number of PIOs/liaison officers** responsible for local and regional areas

**Increase trust** to improve the cooperation and intelligence exchange via **regular meetings, workshops, and exchange events**, nationally, regionally, and locally

# Further research paths

- ❖ What are other jurisdictions doing? What approach have they adopted and how is it implemented?
- ❖ EU and non-EU countries (e.g., Italy, Brazil, etc.), with different levels and types of OGCs
- ❖ Benefits from the comparison, also in terms of cross-border cooperation to counter OGCs operating transnationally





**ANY QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?**

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