

## TRACIT calls for stronger enforcement, better border controls to stop the flood of fakes in the UK

### UK Shoppers Unknowingly Fueling an ‘Illegal Empire’ by Purchasing Fake Goods, Reveals New Research

- *37% of Brits have knowingly bought fake goods, with the average person purchasing up an average of 10 fake goods in the past six months*
- *1 in 5 consumers admit they feel comfortable purchasing fake goods*
- *The most commonly bought fakes include clothing (53%), cosmetics (30%), alcohol (23%) and tobacco products (20%)*
- **London** leads fake purchases (50%), followed by the **North East** (45%) and the **West Midlands** (41%)
- *Nearly three-quarters (70%) say they would stop buying fakes if they knew they supported illicit trade*
- *TRACIT calls for **urgent UK Government action** as fake goods fuel organised crime, drain public services and erode UK businesses*

A new study by the [Transnational Alliance to Combat Illicit Trade](https://www.tracit.org) (TRACIT) reveals that fake goods are fueling a multi-billion-pound shadow economy in the UK – with consumers unaware they are helping to fund organised crime, undermine public services and erode job markets.

The research shows that 37% of Brits have knowingly bought fake goods, with the average person purchasing up to 10 counterfeit items in the past six months. The most commonly bought fakes include clothing (53%), cosmetics (30%), alcohol (23%) and tobacco products (20%).

While the popularity of fake products continues to rise, many consumers remain unaware of the broader harm such purchases can cause. Nearly three-quarters (70%) say they would stop buying fakes if they understood the link to illicit trade and human trafficking.

*“Fake goods aren’t a harmless bargain – they fund a shadow economy that’s draining public resources, propping up serious criminal networks, and putting consumers at risk,”* said **Jeff Hardy, Director General of TRACIT**. *“It’s time to break the silence on the real cost of fake goods and empower consumers with the facts.”*

*“At a time when the Government is looking for ways to fund public services and reduce the burden of taxpayers, this is money worth recovering. Tackling illicit trade isn’t just a criminal justice issue – it’s a public finance opportunity.”*

The scale of illegal trade is staggering. Fake goods are estimated to fund an illegal global economy worth £3.1 trillion – a sum larger than the economies of most countries. This isn’t just a one off, but a

persistent and deeply damaging force undermining global economic growth and employment. Behind every fake item lies a supply chain that can include exploitation, corruption and organised crime.

The UK public is slowly connecting the dots: 57% of Brits believe their personal tax bill would be lower if the trade in fake goods was eliminated. Yet many consumers still sleepwalk into 'too good to be true' deals, especially during financially challenging times. Moreover, we need the UK government to step up protections for all those who unknowingly buy fakes sold locally or online by people trying to make a quick profit.

What feels like a bargain can actually help fund serious organised crime such as human trafficking, forced labor, drug smuggling and wider criminal networks, all while robbing HMRC of the needed revenue to fund frontline services like the NHS, policing and education.

#### Other findings include:

- **21%** of Brits say they feel comfortable buying fake goods – underscoring how fake goods are becoming more common and accessible
- **6.7 million** young people (aged 16–34) have seen ads for fake products on social media – often targeted to where they spend the most time
- While demand for designer brands remains high, many young people are turning to fake goods without understanding the broader consequences. **43%** of 16–24-year-olds say they feel peer pressure to own designer items – an estimated **6.5 million** people say they've turned to counterfeit items for this reason
- Just under **1 in 5** (19%) of people in South East England say they feel comfortable buying fake goods, compared to **1 in 4** (25%) of those living in Bristol
- **Almost a quarter** (24%) of people living in Leeds feel pressured to own designer goods

The *Illegal Empire* campaign aims to close the awareness gap, showing how everyday consumer choices – like buying a designer bag or a cheap counterfeit vape – contribute to far-reaching consequences.

Fake goods don't just hurt brands, they undermine public services by cutting off vital tax revenue, fuel organised criminal networks that profit from smuggling and trafficking and threaten legitimate jobs by undercutting honest businesses. What may seem like a harmless purchase is often linked to exploitation, unsafe working conditions and organised crime that spans across borders.

*"This is about facts, not fear," Hardy added. "Consumers have the power to make informed decisions. But first, they need to understand what's really at stake."*

*"We're calling on the UK Government to treat the trade in fake goods as the serious economic and criminal threat it is. Stronger enforcement, clearer legislation and a coordinated national response are needed. The public is waking up to the real cost of counterfeits. Now, the UK Government must act to dismantle the illegal empire."*

Visit <https://stoptheillegalempire.org> to learn more, explore the data, and get tips on how to spot and avoid fake goods.

For more information about TRACIT's work tackling illicit trade globally, visit <https://www.tracit.org/the-illegal-empire-campaign.html>

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### **METHODOLOGY**

*The research was conducted by Opinion Matters, among a sample of 2000 UK adults, aged 16+. The data was collected between 30.04.2025 - 02.05.2025. Opinion Matters abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct and ESOMAR principles. Opinion Matters is also a member of the British Polling Council.*

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