

Free holiday? Real risk.

People are being targeted online and in person with offers of paid trips abroad in exchange for transporting drugs.

What we are seeing

Recent local incidents, alongside reporting from Border Force, Crimestoppers and Prisoners Abroad, have highlighted growing concerns of British nationals being recruited to carry drugs after being offered free or paid "holidays" overseas. This will often involve countries where cannabis is legal, and can include free flights, luxury accommodation and additional financial incentives. Not everyone recruited to transport drugs will be a victim of trafficking. However, some people are targeted because of vulnerabilities such as disability, financial pressure or limited understanding of the risks, and may be deceived, controlled or exploited into carrying drugs.

Young adults in particular are being targeted on social media, with the promise of a taste of the influencer lifestyle. Crimestoppers, working with the NCA, has launched a campaign tackling this trend: [Combatting drug smuggling into the UK](#).

976

People courtering cannabis caught arriving by air in 2025 (up from 142 in 2023)

600 people arrested in the first 6 months of 2026 alone

The consequences are real. Anyone caught moving drugs into the UK risks up to 14 years in prison and a lifelong criminal record. Those caught abroad face the law of the country they are in, some of which carry severe penalties for drug supply, including the death penalty.



Signs to look out for

RECRUITMENT WARNING SIGNS

- Being befriended by new associates or friendship groups on social media, or in person
- Being encouraged to travel abroad by people they have recently met
- Being promised quick or easy money, financial rewards, or an all-expenses-paid trip
- Being unable to name who arranged the trip, or who they were travelling to meet

CONTROL & COERCION INDICATORS

- Confiscation or control of the person's passport or travel documents by another party
- Being told not to look in their suitcase or that they will be transporting something else, such as gold
- Being told that 'drug smuggling' is low risk, because cannabis is legal where they are travelling
- Debt framed as needing to be worked off, for example being told they owe money for flights, accommodation or other costs
- Threats, intimidation or emotional pressure, including threats made against family members
- Isolation from usual support networks while travelling or once involved

Where **control indicators** appear alongside **recruitment** to move drugs, this should prompt consideration of **exploitation**.

Why it matters to modern slavery & exploitation practice

Some cases meet the definition of trafficking under the Modern Slavery Act 2015, where **deception, coercion or abuse of vulnerability is used for the purpose of exploitation**. Where control indicators are present, consider a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) submission. Under Section 45, someone compelled to commit an offence, including a drug offence, as a direct result of trafficking may have a statutory defence in law.

What to do

- **Where concerns relate to a child (under 18) or an adult with care and support needs**, ensure relevant local safeguarding procedures are followed.
- **Anyone who has been approached**, or who suspects someone they know has, can call the police or report anonymously to Crimestoppers.
- **If someone has already travelled abroad**, they can seek advice from the British Embassy or High Commission. Contact details can be found on GOV.UK by searching 'Find a British embassy, high commission or consulate'. They may also be able to seek support from Prisoners Abroad.
- If the individual is travelling through a UK port or airport and is concerned about their own situation or safety, they can speak directly to Border Force officers, who may be able to provide help or refer them to appropriate agencies.
- **If someone has returned to the UK** and there are indicators of trafficking, consider referring to a first responder for an NRM submission. The police, Crimestoppers and/or the Modern Slavery & Exploitation Helpline can also be contacted.

CRIMESTOPPERS

0800 555 111

MODERN SLAVERY & EXPLOITATION HELPLINE

08000 121 700

PRISONERS ABROAD: URGENT ENQUIRIES

0808 172 0098