



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Guidance for UK Social Services regarding exploitation and trafficking concerns for vulnerable adults and young people (under 18 y/o)

Purpose: Since 2023, there has been a global increase in drug trafficking cases. FCDO data indicate that more and more individuals, especially young adults, are being targeted to traffic large quantities of cannabis back to the UK. Any individual under 18 should trigger additional safeguarding action in line with child protection responsibilities. Some of these individuals are known to UK Social Services and UK based consular casework teams have had contact from various councils seeking our support. UK Social Services do not typically have prior knowledge of the support remit and role of the FCDO in situations such as these. This guidance aims to inform UK Social Services of what steps they can take if they have concerns regarding an individual who may be or has already been exploited to traffic large quantities of drugs back to the UK from a foreign country. We have also included information that is more specific to cannabis and Thailand.

FCDO Travel Advice

FCDO Travel Advice has been updated for 68 countries due to an increase in drug, specifically cannabis, trafficking arrest and detention cases. Please check [FCDO Foreign Travel Advice pages](#) for the country you suspect the individual to be in as penalties for drug offences can vary greatly by country.

Currently, FCDO Travel Advice page for Thailand ([Safety and security - Thailand travel advice - GOV.UK](#)) states:

Illegal drugs and prison sentences

Thailand has strict laws against drug use, possession and trafficking. Possessing small quantities of illegal substances can lead to heavy fines or imprisonment. Possessing [Class A drugs](#) can lead to the death penalty.

Conditions in prisons and other detention facilities in Thailand are harsh, with limited access to healthcare. Detainees have died in custody. Some British nationals have suffered severe psychiatric problems because of drug use, sometimes leading to suicide.

Cannabis

Cannabis laws in Thailand are strictly enforced and have changed in recent years. You must follow local regulations on possession, use and export.

Cannabis use in Thailand is restricted to medical purposes only. You must not buy, possess or use it without a Thai-issued medical prescription, which is limited to a 30-day supply. Recreational use remains illegal.

It is illegal to take cannabis out of Thailand without the appropriate export permission from the authorities.

Attempting to take cannabis out of Thailand will result in penalties, including fines starting at 30,000 Thai baht per kilogram (about £684 per kg). If you do not pay, you will be detained or imprisoned. You will also be placed on an immigration watchlist affecting future travel to Thailand.

Cannabis is illegal in many countries. If you carry it when arriving in, or transiting through, another country, you risk arrest and serious penalties, including long prison sentences.

What you should do if the individual is still in the UK:

Speak to the person, educate them on the risks. Enlist the support of those within the person's support network such as family, friends and carers if appropriate to do so and with the person's consent. Convene a multi-agency meeting including, but not limited to, social services, care agencies, UK police, NHS, education, FCDO, UK Border Force.

Where risks are particularly high, the person is under 18 years old or where there are mental capacity concerns, consider whether requesting an emergency legal order to confiscate the person's passport or prevent their leaving the UK may be necessary. More information can be found here: [Stop someone getting a passport - GOV.UK](#).

Consider making an NRM referral.

What you should do if the individual has left the UK and is travelling or travelled to another country:

Report to the UK Police. The UK Police can:

- Raise a report for a missing person via Interpol to notify the local authorities.
- Consider if an NRM referral is necessary.

Report your concerns to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) via 0207 008 5000. Please provide as much of the information listed below as possible:

CLASSIFICATION

OFFICIAL

- Full name, date of birth, UK address, contact details (mobile, email, social media)
- Passport number
- Flight details (airline, flight number, departure/destination airports, dates and times)
- Hotel/accommodation details (address, duration of stay, persons on the booking)
- Background information; how did you find out about these concerns?
- Whether an NRM referral has been made, and whether the person is already known to the NRM
- If the person is a child (under 18) any relevant safeguarding concerns and/or history of involvement with children's services
- Contact details for SPOC for consular officer to speak with

What the FCDO can do:

- Open consular case for individual.
- Attempt to contact the individual in the first instance to signpost relevant advice.
- Notify the local authority in-country (this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis).

What the FCDO cannot do:

- Contact local immigration authorities to prevent an individual entry to a country
- Locate the individual in-country or conduct an in-person welfare check. This is the responsibility of the local authorities. FCDO can support with a referral if this is deemed appropriate.
- Accompany individuals through an airport to assure safe passage.
- Prevent individuals from carrying a suitcase containing drugs out of a country. We can only advise that this is not a suitable course of action.
- Fund legal or medical fees.
- Provide formal translation services.
- Interfere with the laws or procedures of a foreign country.

What you should do if the individual is arrested or in prison in another country:

Report the arrest the FCDO at the earliest opportunity. There may already be a case file open due to notification from the local authority in country. If there is not a case file, one will be opened, and local consular staff will begin local enquiries to confirm the arrest.

If an individual has specific vulnerabilities, for example physical or mental health concerns, please ensure consular staff are informed so they can raise this with the

local authority. However, appropriate treatment may not always be available or the same as what is provided in the UK. The FCDO can only lobby for individuals to be treated inline with International standards.

The FCDO cannot:

- Get a British national out of prison.
- Provide legal advice or fund a lawyer.
- Request special treatment for a British national.

Our full guidance which outlines the consular support available to British nationals detained overseas can be found here: [Arrested or in prison abroad - GOV.UK](#).

Country specific guidance can be found here:

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Concerns: If the individual arrested has a positive reasonable or conclusive grounds decision that they have been a victim of MSHT in the UK or if you believe the person may be a victim of MSHT please provide information/your concerns to the local lawyer or to consular staff so these can be provided to the local lawyer. Where the person involved is under 18 years old, there is an increased likelihood that they may be a victim of MSHT through child criminal exploitation.

Some countries may have their own NRM referral mechanisms. However, the FCDO cannot guarantee how another country choses to enforce NRM's or UK court orders. It is best to seek independent legal advice from a local lawyer if you would like further information.

Consular Assistance Department

Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office

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