

# Dover people smuggler jailed

A Romanian man who attempted to smuggle two Albanian nationals into the UK hidden in a specially adapted minibus has been jailed for more than two years.

On the evening of 5 May, Border Force officers at the Port of Dover stopped a Romanian registered minibus that had arrived on a ferry from Dunkirk.

The vehicle was being driven by Razvan-Iulian Petraru, 34, who was the only visible occupant.

The minibus had been split between a seated passenger area and a rear void – partitioned off by a wood panel – which was loaded with tyres.

An X-ray scan of the vehicle revealed two people hidden in a false roof concealment. The hiding space had been screwed in place and was just 25cm deep, leaving just enough room for the men to lie prostrate in the hiding space. There was no way the men could have accessed the void without assistance.

When removed from the vehicle the men both produced passports that identified them as Albanian nationals with no permission to be in the UK. Petraru was then arrested on suspicion of assisting unlawful immigration into the UK and the investigation was passed to officers from Immigration Enforcement's Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) team.

In subsequent interviews Petraru, of no fixed UK address, declined to answer any questions put to him by CFI officers.

On Monday, 8 June, at Canterbury Crown Court, Petraru admitted charges of assisting unlawful immigration to the UK. He was sentenced immediately to 27 months imprisonment.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

Criminals like Petraru, who perpetrate heinous acts like this, have no consideration for the safety of the people they are smuggling – in this instance trapped inside a cramped partition with no means of independent escape.

The message is clear, if you are involved in immigration related criminality you will be caught and jailed.

The two Albanians found in the minibus are being dealt with in line with the immigration rules.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or [visit the Crimestoppers website](#).

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## Asset recovery scammers target investors during coronavirus pandemic

Essex and London Properties Ltd was [wound up by the courts](#) in September 2018 and the Official Receiver was appointed liquidator of the company.

Investors in the property investment scheme have since been the target of unsolicited approaches from recovery room scammers, who falsely claim they have funds that can be returned to creditors.

The Official Receiver previously cautioned creditors of Essex and London Properties Ltd about recovery room scammers and is repeating the message ahead of [Scam Awareness Fortnight](#), as the scammers have re-emerged and are using a number of ploys to illicit funds.

Correspondence seen by the Official Receiver has shown that the scammers are using the current uncertainty during the coronavirus pandemic to urge creditors of Essex and London Properties Ltd to work with the unauthorised firms immediately to secure their returns and avoid disappointment.

Other methods being used by the scammers include telling people that money can only be distributed on a 'first-come-first-served' basis and they must pay a fee before the funds can be unlocked.

The unauthorised firms have also sent doctored bank statements showing false payments by the Official Receiver to show that funds are available for distribution and have posed as staff from the Insolvency Service. In one case, an investor was given a residential address to send £3,000 to in an envelope so that the investor could receive further payments.

Joanna Caswell, Deputy Official Receiver, said:

Many investors have reported to us that they have received unsolicited correspondence from firms that claim they have funds to distribute to them. Not only are these letters false but they use scare tactics to frighten people into action.

These schemes pose a serious threat and we strongly advise anyone who invested in Essex and London Properties Ltd to not engage with anyone who claims they can recover your investments. The Official Receiver will never contact anyone offering to recover their money for a fee or recommend another organisation offering the same service.

The Insolvency Service is working in close partnership with other government agencies during coronavirus to share intelligence and contribute to

activities to help put a stop to scammers during the pandemic. If you receive unsolicited approaches from people offering to recover your investments, you can report these activities on the [online complaints gateway](#).

Creditors of Essex and London Properties Ltd who have received an unsolicited letter or email should notify the Official Receiver immediately by email to: [piu.or@insolvency.gov.uk](mailto:piu.or@insolvency.gov.uk).

When there are updates on the progress of the liquidation of the company, creditors will be contacted by the Official Receiver directly.

## **1. Understand the insolvency process**

When a company enters liquidation, its assets are realised to repay the debts that caused the company to become insolvent. Investors in the company can register as a creditor with the company's liquidator to stake a claim on the company's assets. The liquidator will distribute any available funds to creditors once the liquidation process has been resolved.

There are no other avenues for the assets to be recovered and realised, so if you are approached by a company that offers one, you should be extremely sceptical.

## **2. Report anything you think could be a scam**

If you believe you are a victim of a scam that relates to a case being handled by the Official Receiver, contact the Official Receiver with details so we can investigate and warn other creditors if necessary. You can also report scams via the [online complaints gateway](#).

Further advice on how to protect yourself from scams is available from the [Financial Conduct Authority](#).

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# **[£63 million for local authorities to assist those struggling to afford food and other essentials](#)**

Press release

New funding confirmed for local authorities to help those struggling financially as a result of coronavirus.



Additional money will sit alongside the £6.5 billion of extra support being provided through the welfare system to support the most vulnerable in society.

An additional £63 million has been confirmed by government today (Thursday 11 June) to be distributed to local authorities in England to help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials due to coronavirus.

Local authorities are already working hard to support those who are vulnerable and this additional funding will contribute to that work.

Many have existing mechanisms to provide this support in a way that suits the needs of their community. This includes provision of cash payments, food vouchers, or alternative means of support.

This funding will sit alongside the alongside the [£6.5 billion of extra support](#) the government is providing through the welfare system to ensure the most vulnerable in our society are protected throughout this crisis.

Food Minister Victoria Prentis MP, who leads the cross-government Food and Essential Supplies to the Vulnerable Task Force, said:

“The extraordinary circumstances of this pandemic have meant real financial difficulty for many households, with people left facing hard choices.

“To help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials, today we are announcing an additional £63 million which will be given to and distributed by local authorities to those in need.

“Local authorities are already doing a brilliant job helping the most vulnerable in their communities and this extra money will enable them to help more families and individuals at this extremely difficult time.”

[Further government support](#) is available for those struggling as a result of coronavirus. If you need urgent help, [contact your local council](#) to find out what services are available in your area.

Published 11 June 2020

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# [Latest statistical release now available](#)

News story

SLC publishes statistics on student loans for higher and further education



SLC has published its [latest statistical release](#) providing information on student loan outlays, repayment and borrower activity. The release includes reports for all four UK countries and covers:

- Income Contingent Student Loan balance by repayment plan type
- Total amount lent to student borrowers
- Interest added to Income Contingent Loans
- Average Income Contingent Loan balances
- Income Contingent Loan repayments

Please note this year's data shows significant differences to the previous year due to the More Frequent Data Sharing (MFDS) between HMRC and SLC introduced in April 2019, providing a more up-to-date picture of loan balances and repayments.

The transition to MFDS in the last year has affected how repayments and interest amounts have been reported, meaning these figures cover almost two financial years (those processed in both 2018-19 and 2019-20). Prior to MFDS, repayments and interest shown in a given financial year were mainly for the year before.

The improved data does not affect the actual amount borrowers need to repay or the interest applied. The data sharing is part of a number of measures to create a more efficient loan repayment system and also helps to prevent graduates overpaying at the end of their loan.

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## [Data charges removed for websites supporting victims of crime](#)

The UK's major telecoms companies have agreed their customers' mobile phone data won't be used up if they're seeking information and support online.

Zero-rating these websites is the latest in a series of commitments from the telecoms industry to support vulnerable people during the pandemic. It comes at a time when some charities are reporting significant increases in visits to their websites.

Instructions to stay at home as much as possible may have been a major cause of anxiety for some victims while social distancing measures mean it is harder for organisations to offer face-to-face support.

To ensure this vital support remains available mobile network operators EE, Vodafone, O2, Three, Sky Mobile, Virgin Media, Tesco Mobile and giffgaff have agreed that their customers will not incur data charges when accessing support and information on the following websites:

### **Providing support for victims and witnesses of crime**

Victim Support – [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk)

### **Providing support for victims of sexual violence and abuse**

Rape Crisis – [www.rapecrisis.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk)

The Survivors Trust – [www.thesurvivorstrust.org](http://www.thesurvivorstrust.org)

Male Survivors Partnership – [www.malesurvivor.co.uk](http://www.malesurvivor.co.uk)

### **Providing support for victims of domestic abuse**

Refuge – [www.refuge.org.uk](http://www.refuge.org.uk)

National Domestic Abuse Helpline – [nationaldahelpline.org.uk](http://nationaldahelpline.org.uk)

Women's Aid and Welsh Women's Aid – [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk) and [www.welshwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk)

Providing support for children suffering abuse

NSPCC – [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

This agreement will help people who are at risk of violence during

this pandemic get the information and support they need, particularly those on pay as you go contracts or tight data allowances.

This is yet another positive commitment from the UK's brilliant mobile network providers to support the vulnerable and contribute to the national effort to overcome coronavirus.

Justice Minister Alex Chalk said:

Victims need to know that support remains available despite this pandemic.

Ensuring free access to these important websites and more funding for vital helplines is just one part of the work we are doing to make sure no victim is left to suffer alone.

The move follows previous commitments from the UK's internet service and mobile providers to support and protect [vulnerable consumers](#) and [the NHS](#) during the pandemic.

As part of this all of the UK's internet providers have already agreed to remove all data allowance caps on current fixed broadband services, so accessing these websites through a home broadband connection will not incur data charges.

### **Further Quotes**

The Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales Dame Vera Baird QC said:

This is something that I have called for and I am pleased that the Ministry of Justice and the mobile network operators have responded and worked together to make it happen.

No one should be denied access to these important sites because of data restrictions. This move will allow even more victims – especially those who may be struggling to use traditional contact methods during the lockdown – to access the help and support they need, and I hope that it becomes a permanent arrangement.

Nick Jeffery, CEO of Vodafone UK said:

We believe in the power of technology to make a positive difference in the world, and have worked to support domestic abuse organisations for many years. The Bright Sky app – developed by the Vodafone Foundation and Hestia and which provides support and information to anyone affected by domestic abuse – has seen a 47% increase in downloads during lockdown. This is a huge concern and

we wholeheartedly support this initiative.

Robert Finnegan, CEO of Three UK said:

We believe that the most vulnerable people in society should be able to access the help and support that they need at this difficult time. Zero-rating access to these websites is a great initiative that Three are pleased to support.

Tom Denyard, CEO of Tesco Mobile said:

At Tesco Mobile, we understand that the ability to connect can be a lifeline for many so we want to ensure that our customers have access to information and support during this difficult time, without the need to use their data allowance. We hope that by giving free access we are helping, even in a small way, to provide some level of comfort to victims of crime.

Lutz Schöler, CEO of Virgin Media said:

The role of connectivity in our lives has never been more apparent than it is right now. We know that, in these difficult times, being able to connect to the outside world and access help and support is vital. We're committed to providing easy, unrestricted access to these important websites for our customers at a time when they may need it most.

Nicola Green, Director of Corporate Affairs at 02, said:

We are pleased once again to be working with the Government during the COVID-19 pandemic to support vulnerable people. The ability of domestic violence victims to access support services through digital connectivity can help protect and remove them from dangerous situations. 02 is delighted to back this initiative.

Debbie Klein, Group Chief Marketing, Corporate Affairs and People Officer for Sky said:

Like many, we are deeply concerned to see the shocking increase in the number of people reporting incidents of domestic violence during lockdown. Sky is committed to supporting our customers and those affected by ensuring they are able to seek information and support online without using their data".



Christian Thrane, MD Marketing, BT / EE said:

We're pleased to be able to support this important initiative to help domestic violence victims during the pandemic.

Ash Schofield, CEO at giffgaff said:

Since the coronavirus pandemic began there's sadly been an influx of outreach to websites offering support to vulnerable victims of crime. During such difficult times, we at giffgaff have joined forces with other telcos to provide vulnerable victims of crime free access to the websites offering vital support needed.

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors:**

- This is in addition to [NHS websites](#) and other support websites already zero rated by some mobile network operators, and includes Imkaan, a website dedicated to addressing violence against Black and Minority Ethnic women and girls.
- The majority of these websites have now been zero rated, but this is on an operator by operator basis. All of the mobile network operators have committed for the zero rating to take effect as soon as possible.
- Mobile network operators have agreed that these measures will be in effect until at least 31 October 2020.
- Those who have run out of data will still be able to access these websites by typing the exact web address into their mobile internet browser.
- Zero-rating usually applies on a domain basis only. Third party content on these websites may not be covered by the zero rating.