# Border Force uncovers £18.5 million cocaine haul hidden in lorry bound for Scotland



A significant drug bust has highlighted the persistent issue of drug trafficking in Northern Ireland, marked by the recent discovery of 185 kilos of cocaine concealed within a lorry bound for Scotland. This seizure, which occurred in Belfast on May 19, carried a staggering estimated street value of £18.5 million. Border Force officers discovered the drugs hidden in sophisticated compartments running the length of the trailer, a feat that underlines the ever-evolving tactics employed by organised crime groups.

The driver of the lorry, Georgi Markov Panchukov, 50, from Nova Zagora, Bulgaria, was swiftly arrested and faced charges in connection to the drugs on May 20. When he appeared before Belfast Magistrates Court on May 21, he was remanded in custody pending his next scheduled court appearance at Belfast Crown Court on June 18. This operation is described by the National Crime Agency's Belfast Branch Commander, David Cunningham, as “an extremely significant seizure of class A drugs destined for the streets of the UK.” He further indicated that this incident is likely a part of a much larger network attempting to bypass UK border controls by using the Common Travel Area.

This dramatic episode is not an isolated incident but rather part of a troubling trend in Northern Ireland. In December 2023, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) made its largest-ever seizure, recovering 118 kilos of cocaine valued at £10 million, hidden beneath frozen meat products in another lorry. Such discoveries raise alarming questions about the sophistication and scale of drug trafficking operations in the region. In this case, a man in his 30s was arrested and later released on bail; however, the investigation highlighted the increasing complexity of concealment methods employed by traffickers.

Earlier in September 2023, another sizeable seizure occurred when a Northern Ireland-based lorry driver faced charges related to a £6.8 million cocaine haul, with 136 kilos found cleverly hidden in a compartment of the lorry's trailer. Each of these cases illustrates a growing trend where traffickers utilise more advanced and deceptive strategies to evade law enforcement, emphasising the ongoing battle against organised crime in the area.

Cunningham indicated that operations like the recent bust are crucial in disrupting drug trafficking networks that fuel violence and exploitation within communities. "This seizure will have dealt a significant blow to the organised crime group behind it," he noted, reinforcing the collaborative efforts between the NCA, Border Force, and the Organised Crime Task Force. Such partnerships are critical as they strive to dismantle operations and bring those involved to justice.

As investigations into this latest seizure progress, it serves as a stark reminder of the persistent challenges facing law enforcement agencies in Northern Ireland. With international drug traffickers employing increasingly sophisticated means, the importance of vigilance and robust cooperation among law enforcement bodies cannot be overstated. The ongoing efforts to combat this rise in drug trafficking will require continued dedication and resources to ensure that communities remain safe from the scourge of illegal substances.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: 1
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6. Paragraph 6: 1
7. Paragraph 7: 1, 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/lorry-heading-scotland-found-stuffed-35266136> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-67731838> - In December 2023, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) seized 118 kilograms of cocaine, valued at £10 million, in a lorry stopped in Jonesborough, County Armagh. The drugs were concealed beneath frozen meat products. A man in his 30s was arrested on suspicion of driving offences and later released on bail. This operation marked the largest cocaine seizure in Northern Ireland's history. The PSNI, in collaboration with the National Crime Agency and UK Border Force, conducted the search, highlighting the sophistication of the concealment method and the scale of criminality involved.
3. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/2023/12/15/news/largest-ever-cocaine-seizure-for-psni-after-10m-worth-of-drugs-found-in-south-armagh-5PRBK2CRONHDPEW5TDNJAFK64Q/> - In December 2023, the PSNI made its largest-ever cocaine seizure in south Armagh, with an estimated £10 million worth of drugs found concealed within boxes of frozen meat in a lorry. A man in his 30s was arrested at the scene on suspicion of driving-related offences and was released on police bail. The sophistication of the concealment method and the sheer quantity of the drugs indicated the scale of criminality involved. The PSNI's Organised Crime Branch commenced a robust investigation into the matter.
4. <https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2023-12-20/man-in-court-over-nis-biggest-ever-drugs-bust> - A 38-year-old man, Ciaran McBride, appeared in court charged over Northern Ireland's largest-ever seizure of suspected cocaine, valued at £10 million. The drugs were found hidden in boxes of frozen meat in a lorry stopped in south Armagh in December 2023. McBride was remanded in custody and will appear in court again in four weeks. The judge described the offence as 'no doubt a serious offence' and 'organised crime at its highest level'.
5. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2023/09/26/news/northern_ireland-based_lorry_driver_charged_in_connection_to_6_8_million_cocaine_seizure-3645241/> - In September 2023, a Northern Ireland-based lorry driver, Edgaras Slusnys, was charged in connection with a £6.8 million cocaine seizure. The National Crime Agency found 136 kilograms of cocaine hidden in a sophisticated compartment in the rear doors of the lorry's trailer. Slusnys appeared in court in Liverpool, charged with possession with intent to supply class A drugs, and was remanded in custody to appear at Liverpool Crown Court in October.
6. <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2023/12/15/psni-seize-cocaine-worth-some-10m-in-co-armagh-believed-to-be-forces-biggest-ever-haul/> - In December 2023, the PSNI seized an estimated £10 million worth of cocaine in County Armagh, marking the force's largest-ever haul. The drugs were concealed within boxes containing frozen meat products in a lorry stopped in the Jonesborough area. A man in his 30s was arrested on suspicion of driving-related offences and released on police bail. The sophistication of the concealment method and the sheer quantity of the drugs indicated the scale of criminality involved.
7. <https://www.rte.ie/news/ulster/2023/1215/1422237-cocaine/> - In December 2023, police in Northern Ireland seized €11.6 million (£10 million) worth of cocaine near the border in south Armagh. The drugs were found hidden in a shipment of frozen meat in a lorry stopped in the village of Jonesborough. This marked the largest-ever seizure of cocaine by the PSNI. A man in his 30s was arrested at the scene on suspicion of driving-related offences and released on police bail as the investigation continued.