# One in five Brits targeted as money mules in rising financial crime wave



# Ordinary People Caught in a Criminal Web: The Rise of Money Muling in the UK

A startling one in five Brits have reported being approached to assist in laundering money, reflecting a worrying trend where organised crime groups are increasingly targeting everyday citizens as unwitting accomplices in their illicit activities. This alarming statistic, drawn from research by Virgin Money, underscores how criminals exploit vulnerable individuals to make dirty cash appear legitimate, amidst growing concerns about financial exploitation across society.

The methods employed by these criminals are varied but increasingly sophisticated. While traditional tactics like setting up front businesses remain common, new channels are emerging. Social media platforms and online gaming environments have become fertile ground for recruiting “money mules”—individuals who unknowingly facilitate money laundering by transferring funds through their bank accounts in exchange for a small cut. In a survey of 2,000 adults conducted by Virgin Money, it was revealed that 21 per cent had been asked to receive funds into their accounts, apply for loans in someone else’s name, or even open new bank accounts, often for minimal compensation.

The situation is particularly dire among younger demographics. Nearly a quarter of those in Generation Z reported direct requests to act as money mules, highlighting a trend where criminals prey upon vulnerable youth. Alarmingly, over half of those surveyed were unaware that agreeing to these requests could result in severe legal ramifications, including a potential 14-year prison sentence for involvement in money laundering.

Youngsters are often groomed by gangs, who present seemingly harmless offers of easy cash or enticing gifts such as new phones or designer trainers. Mark Russell of the Children’s Society has emphasised the need for greater awareness around these approaches, particularly during the ongoing cost of living crisis. He stated, “Children absorb their parents' worries and if they are stressed about money then children will be too. If somebody offers them the chance to make some easy money, they are going to take it.”

This phenomenon is alarming not only for its immediate consequences but also for the insidious role it plays in normalising criminal behaviour among the youth. Some recent data reveals that actions against money mules, particularly among students, have surged by 23%, according to Barclays. Their research indicates that two in five money mules are under 25, with one in five under 21—a clear indication of how deeply ingrained this issue has become within our educational institutions.

Community organisations and financial institutions are responding with initiatives to combat this trend. Cifas and UK Finance have launched the 'Don't Be Fooled' campaign, delivering educational resources to schools aimed at fostering understanding of the risks and real-world consequences of becoming involved in money laundering schemes. The hope is to deter the exploitation of young people by raising awareness before they become susceptible to such criminal coaxing.

Crime experts suggest vigilance is crucial for preventing the recruitment of unsuspecting individuals. Jamie Wolff, Virgin Money’s money mules strategy director, warns that suspicious offers—particularly those promising high returns for minimal effort—should be treated with caution. “If you're approached, it's important that you don't engage or share any personal details,” Wolff explains, urging individuals to report any suspicious activity directly to authorities.

This growing incident of money muling is not just a localised issue; it reflects a broader epidemic of financial vulnerability and exploitation amplified by socio-economic challenges, with estimates indicating that as much as £10 billion is laundered annually through such means. The proliferation of criminal strategies targeting youth underscores an urgent need for systemic solutions, including government intervention and community education, particularly in economically deprived areas.

In summary, the phenomenon of money muling is pivotal to understanding contemporary crime dynamics in the UK. As ordinary individuals find themselves increasingly enmeshed in the dark underbelly of organised crime, the challenge lies not just in enforcement but in collective education, awareness, and ultimately, prevention of a troubling trend that threatens both lives and livelihoods.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14682671/shocking-number-Brits-asked-help-launder-money-criminals.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.london.gov.uk/government-inaction-needed-stop-young-people-recruited-money-muling-london)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14682671/shocking-number-Brits-asked-help-launder-money-criminals.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/a49c366c-3bc5-4bbf-a22c-ac41e6e0c423)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://home.barclays/news/press-releases/2023/10/barclays-warns-of-23-per-cent-surge-in-student-money-mules/), [[3]](https://www.cifas.org.uk/newsroom/cifas-ukfinance-lessonsplans-moneymules)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.santander.co.uk/about-santander/media-centre/press-releases/money-laundering-warning-with-over-half-of-money-mule), [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14682671/shocking-number-Brits-asked-help-launder-money-criminals.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
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* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14682671/shocking-number-Brits-asked-help-launder-money-criminals.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.london.gov.uk/government-inaction-needed-stop-young-people-recruited-money-muling-london)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14682671/shocking-number-Brits-asked-help-launder-money-criminals.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://home.barclays/news/press-releases/2023/10/barclays-warns-of-23-per-cent-surge-in-student-money-mules/> - Barclays reports a 23% increase in student money mule cases in October 2023, highlighting that two in five money mules are under 25, and one in five are under 21. The bank emphasizes that 63% of young people are unaware that being a money mule could lead to a criminal record. Criminals often target students through social media and fake job ads, offering easy money in exchange for using their bank accounts to transfer illicit funds. Barclays urges vigilance and awareness to prevent such exploitation.
3. <https://www.cifas.org.uk/newsroom/cifas-ukfinance-lessonsplans-moneymules> - Cifas and UK Finance have launched the 'Don't Be Fooled' campaign, providing free PSHE resources to schools to educate students about the dangers of becoming money mules. Data reveals that individuals under 21 account for 23% of money mule cases, with younger adults up to 30 making up 64% of such activities. The campaign aims to raise awareness and prevent young people from being exploited by criminals seeking to launder illicit funds through their bank accounts.
4. <https://www.santander.co.uk/about-santander/media-centre/press-releases/money-laundering-warning-with-over-half-of-money-mule> - Santander UK warns that over half of money mule accounts are held by individuals under 30, with 21% of such accounts belonging to those under 20. The bank highlights that young people are often targeted by criminals through fake job adverts and social media, offering easy money in exchange for using their bank accounts to transfer illicit funds. Santander emphasizes the serious consequences of becoming a money mule, including potential criminal prosecution and difficulties in obtaining financial products in the future.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/a49c366c-3bc5-4bbf-a22c-ac41e6e0c423> - The UK's fraud prevention agency, Cifas, reports that one in five money mule cases in the first half of 2023 involved individuals under 21. Criminals are increasingly targeting young people through social media platforms, offering cash in exchange for laundering funds. Cifas and UK Finance have expanded their schools initiative to educate children as young as 10 about the risks and consequences of becoming money mules, aiming to deter them from aiding fraudsters.
6. <https://www.london.gov.uk/government-inaction-needed-stop-young-people-recruited-money-muling-london> - Len Duvall, a Labour London Assembly Member, calls on the government to address the issue of young people being recruited as 'money mules' in London. He highlights the rise in money muling, with the National Crime Agency estimating £10 billion is laundered annually through this method. Duvall expresses concern that the increasing cost of living may make more young people vulnerable to criminal manipulation, leading to serious consequences such as involvement in other areas of serious criminality.
7. <https://www.amlintelligence.com/2023/07/news-two-thirds-of-money-mules-aged-under-30-uk-figures-show-as-new-prevention-campaign-launched/> - UK figures show that young adults up to the age of 30 account for nearly two-thirds (64%) of cases indicating money mule activity. A survey from UK Finance and fraud prevention body Cifas reveals that 23% of cases involve individuals under 21. Money mules typically launder the profits of crimes, and gangs target young people who are often unaware of the consequences, which could include a criminal record. A new campaign highlights that this can lead to someone having their account closed and finding it difficult to obtain mobile phone contracts or access financial products and credit, including student loans.