

# MONEY MULES:

who are they, what do they do  
and why is it illegal?



# WHAT IS A MONEY MULE?



A money mule is someone who allows their bank account and/or bank card and PIN to be used by criminals to launder money. This allows the criminal to deposit illegally obtained money into the money mule's bank account and then to withdraw it (using the money mule's bank card and PIN) or transfer it to other accounts. In this way, the fraudsters stay out of the loop.

The phenomenon of "money mules" is expanding: scammers not only ask for bank cards and codes, but increasingly also for (a copy of) identity cards, mobile phone numbers and address details to commit fraud in the name of the owner.

## Young people are an easy target

Young people are more easily seduced by the promise of 'fast money' or are often unaware of the consequences of what at first sight seems to be an innocent 'favour'. A Febelfin study shows that they are more susceptible to this than adults (14% versus 2% respectively). More than one in ten young people would therefore lend their bank card and PIN number in exchange for money. People in financial difficulties are also more likely to be tempted by the promise of 'quick money'.

## How are money mules approached or recruited?

The criminals approach the money mules in various ways:

- on the street, especially around schools and railway stations or nightlife area's
- via social media such as WhatsApp and Instagram or Telegram.

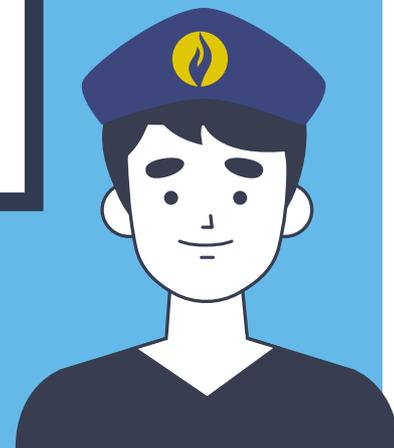
## Why it's not that innocent

In itself it seems fairly harmless: you just give out your account number, bank card and your details and receive some money in return. You don't actually have to do anything else. Easy money, right? Not quite.

Thanks to the help of money mules, criminals remain under the radar. They can work completely anonymously and use the regular circuit to move stolen money around. The money mule therefore collaborates in money laundering, sometimes without being aware of it, and is an accomplice to fraud. Even though they are unaware of what is happening in their bank account, the responsibility still lies with them.

***“The recruiters tell you what to do and what amounts others have already earned in the same way. It is all completely safe, so to speak, but making easy money is never without risk and is usually downright dangerous, even if it doesn’t seem so at first.”***

*Stijn De Ridder (Antwerp Police)*



## WHAT DOES A MONEY MULE RISK?

### **Criminal consequences**

Acting as a money mule is not without criminal consequences. After they have been identified, an interrogation by the police follows. If the money mule realises and acknowledges their mistake, there is a chance that a trial can be avoided and the police can sometimes come to an amicable settlement in the form of a fine. Community service is also a possibility. In addition, the money mule will have to pay back part of the damage suffered (i.e. the money that was channelled through their account) to the victims in full. If the money mule is a minor, the parents may be held fully liable.

In case of a trial, the money mule is summoned to court and risks a suspended or effective prison sentence and a fine. The money mule then has a criminal record.

### **Other consequences**

There are not only criminal consequences. The bank may, for example, deny the mules a bank account or a loan in the future. Some money mules are also physically threatened by the criminals and most of them never receive the promised remuneration. Sometimes the money mule’s account is completely looted.



## TIPS

### What can you do as a parent or guardian?

1. Explain to young people what money mules are, so that they can recognise them and are better prepared if they come into contact with recruiters or recruitment adverts. Teach them that there is no such thing as 'quick money'.
2. Teach them how to deal with accounts on social media that promise quick and easy money. Report the accounts to the government's hotline for deception, fraud or scams: <https://meldpunt.belgie.be>
3. Make it clear that they should never lend out their bank card, account or codes, even to so-called 'friends'.

### What advice do you give if someone has fallen into the money mule trap?

- Contact your bank as soon as possible.
- Call Card Stop to have your card blocked.
- Go to the police.
- Talk about it with friends and people you can trust.



For more information: [www.febelfin.be](http://www.febelfin.be)

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