

News story: Channel Tunnel people smugglers jailed

Katy Bethel was found guilty of a charge of assisting illegal immigration on 8 August. Aaron Harris had previously admitted the same offence.

On 4 July 2015, Katy Bethel and Aaron Harris were stopped by Border Force in a van at the UK control zone in Coquelles, France. Harris, 28, was driving the vehicle and Bethel, also 28, was his passenger.

When Border Force officers searched the couple's borrowed Sprinter van they found 12 Vietnamese nationals (4 men, 5 women and 3 minors) hidden among a load of tyres packed into the rear.

Harris and Bethel, both of Dial Road, Gillingham, were arrested on suspicion of assisting unlawful immigration into the UK and the investigation was passed to Immigration Enforcement's Criminal and Financial Investigation (CFI) team. The Vietnamese nationals found in the van were handed to the French authorities.

Aaron Harris pleaded guilty on 30 January at Canterbury Crown Court and Katy Bethel was found guilty by a jury at Maidstone Crown Court on 8 August.

Harris was jailed for 5 years and Bethel for 2 years and 9 months at Maidstone Crown Court today.

Assistant Director David Fairclough, from the CFI team, said:

As these sentences demonstrate, abusing immigration laws and gambling with people's safety are taken very seriously by the courts.

Anyone thinking of doing the same should take this case as a warning. Working with our colleagues in Border Force we will catch you and ensure that justice is served.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or visit www.crimestoppers-uk.org.