
Europol's Internet Referral Unit One Year On

Since its launch one year ago, Europol's European Union Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) has assessed and processed for the purpose of referral towards concerned internet service providers over 11 000 messages across some 31 online platforms in 8 languages. The content had been put out by criminals to spread violent extremist online content materials.

91.4% of the total content has been successfully removed from the platforms by the social media and online service providers.

Additionally, EU IRU has expanded its open-source and internet monitoring activities in order to contribute to the disruption of illegal migrant smuggling networks. Content advertising smuggling services for migrants and refugees was referred for the purpose of removal.

The unit has also provided operational support to 44 investigations across the EU, delivering 82 operational products and deploying 4 Europol staff on-the-spot (3 during the terrorist attacks carried out in Paris late last year and 1 to support French authorities during the European Football Championship EURO 2016).

EU IRU staff employs their unique linguistic capabilities to refer content issued by Al Qaeda or the Islamic State.

Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol: "EU IRU has proven to be a successful concept aimed at reducing terrorist and extremist online propaganda. The constructive partnership with relevant social media and private companies has helped Europol deliver a strong response to this problem affecting the safety and liberty of the Internet".

EU IRU was set up by the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the EU and is built upon Europol's Check-the-Web service. Its main role is to anticipate and pre-empt terrorist abuse of online tools, as well as to play a pro-active advisory role vis-à-vis EU Member States and the private sector in this regard.

A key unit of Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC), EU IRU focuses on:

- Supporting the competent EU authorities by providing strategic and operational analysis;
- Flagging terrorist and violent extremist online content and sharing it with relevant partners;
- Detecting and requesting removal of internet content used by smuggling networks to attract migrants and refugees;
- Swiftly carrying out and supporting the referral process, in close cooperation with the industry.

The EU IRU tactical approach towards referrals is targeted. The procedure aims to focus on the propaganda linked to a high profile event and relayed by high profile accounts i.e. Paris attacks, Brussels attack, Magnanville murder, Orlando shooting.

The primary objective is to be relevant during the 'viral' time of the propaganda. The secondary objective is to gather information to better understand the tactics and modi operandi of the main online propagandists in order to improve the disruption mechanism.

Besides the support provided to the EU Member States, EU IRU is closely cooperating with third party partners within the framework of the EU Internet Forum. In this context and with the European Commission's support, EU IRU has engaged with the online service companies to promote 'self-regulation' activities by the online industry. It has become a trusted partner allowing new avenues for cooperation for the benefit of the EU Member States, both in the prevention and investigation fields.

[EU Internet Referral Unit - YEAR ONE REPORT](#)

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