

Briefing to the Lanzarote Committee

Online Child Protection during COVID-19



Key Headlines-

- The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) is very concerned about the “perfect storm of events” that has been created as a result of national lockdowns enforced across Europe and the rest of the world. With both children and those who seek to exploit them spending increasing amounts of time online and potentially trapped with their abusers.
- Traditional opportunities for safeguarding through teachers and social workers are reduced. The National Crime Agency in the UK stated on 04 April¹, that referrals from these professions are down as reporting from children has remained stable. The same press release stated that an **estimated 300,000 people in the UK** pose a threat to children either through online or contact offending.

IWF findings during lockdown-

- There have been **8.8 million attempts to access known child sexual abuse imagery** in the first month of the lockdown. These figures relate to just UK users from three internet companies within the IWF membership who have measured the number of hits against the IWF’s webpage blocking list.
- These attempts cannot be attributed directly to an actual attempt by a human or an individual and only give an indication of the scale of the problem. There is no comparable data available to see how this compares with other times of year.
- The IWF also recorded an **89% reduction in the removal of CSAM during lockdown**. Between 16 March and 15 April only **1,1798 URLs** were removed from the IWF URL list, compared with **12,627** in the previous month (16 Feb-15 Mar).
- The reduction in the removal of CSAM can be attributed to:
 1. *Other hotlines closing for periods of time internationally-* At least three closed for a period and eight were operating under severe limitations.
 2. *Content moderators in companies-* were asked to work from home and therefore could not moderate this type of content remotely or without appropriate safeguards in place. There was also a move towards great AI for some content.
 3. *IWF staff were operating at a reduced capacity for a time-* so hotline chase up work couldn’t take place to help increase speed of removal.

IWF Activity during lockdown-

- IWF analysts were designated as key workers by UK Government throughout the pandemic and continued to work from our offices.
- We split our analysts into two teams to ensure resilience of our operation. The two teams returned on 01 June on a full-time basis and we are now back to full operation of assessing both public reports and proactively seeking this content.
- IWF remained in close contact with the UK Government throughout the pandemic and facilitated a discussion about content moderation which was Chaired by the Home Office, Security Minister, Rt. Hon. James Brokenshire MP, and had representation from companies and law enforcement.

¹ <https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/online-safety-at-home>

- The UK Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP, also hosted a virtual “Hidden Harms” summit at Downing Street to draw attention to the issue of harms such as child sexual abuse and domestic abuse. A summary of the findings of that summit and next steps can be found [here](#).

Internet Watch Foundation 2019 Annual Report-

- The IWF also launched its key headline findings for 2019 in April. We continued to see a rising trend in child sexual abuse images and videos being hosted in Europe.
- 89% of the 132,700 webpages we removed in the last year were hosted in Europe.
- 71% of those were hosted in the Netherlands, equating to just under 94,000 webpages hosted in the Netherlands. This was up from 47% in 2018.
- Self-generated content continued to rise. A third of all the webpages we actioned contained self-generated content and 76% of that was of girls in the 11-13 age range. We are now working with the UK Home Office and technology companies about running an awareness campaign to target this age range and their parents about the dangers of sharing this imagery online.

IWF launches a podcast series- Pixels from a crime scene-

- The IWF has recently launched a six-part podcast series which investigates the global scandal of the sharing of child sexual abuse images and videos on the open internet on a daily basis.
- The podcast includes interviews from victims, law enforcement, charities, experts and even criminals at the front line in the global battle to control the spread of child sexual abuse.
- You can download the podcast series on any normal platform Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google podcasts, but you can also find out more information on the [IWF website](#).

For further information on the work of the IWF, please contact our Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Michael Tunks, on mike@iwf.org.uk, or our Policy and Public Affairs Assistant, Tess Leyland, on tess@iwf.org.uk.