

Source: Hotline.ie, the Irish centre combatting illegal content online

1 in 5 child sexual abuse webpages included a paywall

Hotline.ie findings reveal that 1 in 5 webpages assessed as displaying child sexual abuse images and videos, in 2019, included a paywall alongside “preview” images to advertise premium access to further abusive content subsequent to payment.

Hotline.ie Analysts also came across forum threads showing “preview” imagery and referencing content trading as an alternative “payment” method to gain access to “the community” and/or premium abusive content.

“It can be jarring to witness individuals conversing so casually about the sexual abuse and exploitation of defenceless children, as if they are a commodity. The discussions attempting to normalise, legitimise and justify the consumption and production of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) may be as unsettling as the content itself.” Sean, Hotline.ie Analyst.

Hotline.ie findings also show child sexual abuse material is spread across all available digital mediums, with some online services being misused to serve as gateways or meeting environments (i.e. forums, bulletin boards, chatrooms, etc.), whilst others as “end-destination”.

In its [latest Annual Report](#), Hotline.ie notes that the commercial* aspect of CSAM is not always obvious or easy to ascertain due to cross-platform production, sharing, distribution and the myriad of payment methods (i.e. membership systems, advertising frames, pre-paid cards, credit systems, text message payments and virtual currencies) used at different points in the online journey.

*“As an NGO working in this field, we know it’s very difficult to think of vulnerable babies and children becoming victims of crimes involving sexual abuse. To know that certain individuals are also profiting from the abhorrent abuse of children and their suffering reinforces the urgency to act and our commitment to do all that we can, every day, to contribute to the eradication of CSAM from the Internet. **By removing child sexual abuse material we reduce the supply and confront the demand, whilst preventing repeat-victimisation of children who have suffered sexual abuse.**”* Ana Niculescu, Chief Executive of Hotline.ie

Key figures and findings released by Hotline.ie in their latest Annual Report include:

- Hotline.ie identified and removed more child sexual abuse material than ever before, with **1 in 4 of 10,773 public reports received in 2019 classified as CSAM**. This represents a marked **increase of 79%** in CSAM reports **over the previous year**.
- The **2,575 URLs which displayed thousands of child sexual abuse images and videos** appeared **across 62 domains**, traced to **32 countries** worldwide. **64% of the CSAM** found by Hotline.ie was **hosted in Europe**, with **0.3% of the known CSAM in Ireland**.

- **83% of the victims** depicted in the child sexual abuse images and videos, Hotline.ie Analysts worked to remove in 2019, were **pre-pubescent children aged 4 to 12**.
- **157% increase in child sexual abuse video content** displayed alongside abusive images when compared to the 2018 figures of same.
- Hotline.ie identified **998 disguised websites distributing child sexual abuse images and videos**, a significant increase **from 158 in 2018**.

For a more detailed analysis of facts, figures and findings, the **Hotline.ie 2019 Annual Report is available in digital format** <https://www.hotline.ie/library/annual-reports/2020/annual-report-2019.pdf>

“We’ve witnessed all in society coming together to support and protect one another against the COVID-19 pandemic. There is now a sense of urgency to also come together to better protect children against sexual abuse and exploitation online. The public should remain vigilant and continue to report concerns to Hotline.ie, one report can make a tangible difference in the life of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.” Ana Niculescu, Chief Executive of Hotline.ie

The public is given this advice:

- If you suspect to have stumbled across sexual content of under 18s online, report it to Hotline.ie. You can do so anonymously, securely and confidentially and action will be taken.
- Provide the exact URL where the suspected child sexual abuse imagery is located.
- You should also report non-photographic child sexual abuse content such as computer generated, drawings, pseudo-photographs etc.
- Urgent situations where persons may be in immediate danger should always be reported directly to An Garda Síochána.
- For information, advice and free education resources addressing a range of Internet safety issues and concerns please see <https://www.webwise.ie/>

[END]

Editorial notes:

- ***Commercial CSAM:** the true scale of commercial CSAM is very difficult to ascertain as it would require test transactions in order to gain access to the “premium” content. Hotline.ie cannot and does not conduct any form of transaction to access CSAM. The investigation of crime together with evidence gathering to support criminal proceedings is a matter for law enforcement alone.
- ****Disguised CSAM websites** only reveal the abusive imagery when accessed following a predefined “digital pathway” of links from other websites (gateways). When the website is accessed directly through a browser, legal content is displayed instead. In some cases the imagery displayed on such websites is hosted across hosters in different jurisdictions whilst accessible anywhere in the world.
- To learn more about the **intricacy, ripple effect and tangible difference of one report to Hotline.ie** could make, please read the **Analyst testimonial** included in **Hotline.ie Annual Report (page 15)**.
- Hotline.ie is a registered business name of Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland (registered company no. 285632, non-for-profit)
- **Hotline.ie is the Irish centre of expertise combatting illegal content online**, and it also provides a web-reporting service where members of the public can securely, anonymously and confidentially report

suspected illegal content online, especially child sexual abuse material and activities relating to the sexual exploitation of children i.e. child grooming.

- **Hotline.ie operations are approved and overseen by the Department of Justice and Equality. Hotline.ie works in close collaboration with** An Garda Síochána, online service providers operating from Ireland, and 46 other hotlines worldwide coming together under the INHOPE umbrella, to ensure that CSAM is swiftly removed at source irrespective of where in the world it may be hosted.
- **While the legal term in Ireland is “child pornography”** (Child Trafficking and Pornography Act 1998 [as amended by the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017], **if you are not referring to the legal definition, Hotline.ie urges you to use respectful terms to avoid trivialising the physical and psychological harm suffered by victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, such as child sexual abuse material (CSAM), child sexual abuse imagery (CSAI), online child sexual exploitation (OCSE).**
- For more information on Hotline.ie please read the [latest Annual Report](#) or visit www.hotline.ie