

# EU report on online child sex abuse ‘a wake up call’

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By Cormac O'Keeffe  
Irish Examiner Reporter

In January 2014, a man was arrested as part of a major investigation into online child sexual exploitation. The individual had more than 80 social networking profiles, email addresses, and video chat accounts to sexually abuse children via webcams on compute

Once victims had sent him an indecent image or video of themselves, he started threatening them and involving them in far more serious abuse.

The youngest child was an eight-year-old girl — she was forced to involve other children in the abuse. The suspect pretended to be a 13-year-old boy.

His case was one of a number highlighted in a report on sexual exploitation of children online, published by Europol, the EU police agency.

The suspect also coerced adult men into performing a sexual act via webcam which was recorded and used against them unless they paid money.

The report said it was not known if the indecent materials provided by the children were commercially distributed online, but added: “Bearing in mind the profile of the suspect, this possibility cannot be excluded”.

In a second case, a 17-year-old girl was a victim of extortion which started when her boyfriend took a photo of her breasts with his mobile phone, and shared it with his 17-year-old friend.

The latter sent the photo via a social media platform to the victim to inform her he had it, demanding money and threatening her with publishing her photo elsewhere if she refused to pay.

Verbal blackmailing also took place at school. The girl gradually began to give him €10 or €20 over the course of a few months, totalling about €600.

In a third case, a 17-year-old boy in Edinburgh took his own life in July 2013. He had been targeted online by an offender who posed as a teenage girl and with whom he had shared indecent images of himself. The victim

was then blackmailed by the offender, demanding money. He was told that if he failed to pay he would post the victim's naked images on social networking sites.

The report was conducted by the European Financial Coalition against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children Online, a coalition of experts from law enforcement, the private sector, and civil society.

It said it was concerned at the emergence of an online market selling sexualised images either extorted from children or taken from photographs and videos voluntarily uploaded by minors on social network sites.

It said the development of a profit motive, in addition to a sexual motive, was a new development in what was increasingly a sophisticated and hard-to-detect online crime. Both individuals and large-scale enterprises were involved.

It warned parents that images they post online of their own children can and are being used by people for sexual purposes — including on social network profiles such as “the most sexy 4, 5, 6 years old”.

It also said there was large-scale sexual extortion, which combined blackmail with webcam scamming, which usually took place on dating sites, in chat rooms or social networks. It said there was some evidence pointing to a ring of African and Southeast Asian networks targeting victims throughout Europe, often operating on “an almost industrial scale from call-centre type offices”.

Elsewhere, the report documented the threat posed by the live streaming of abuse for payment. The people involved offer homeless children and even their own children for sexual abuse for payment.

Senator Jillian van Turnhout, who has campaigned on tackling child abuse imagery, said the report was “a wake-up call” to legislators, parents, and schools.

“The fact that this area is mutating is very scary and very worrying. You have both large-scale organisations and individuals — down to one classmate to another — engaged in sexual exploitation.

She said her experience with young people was that they act responsibly when real dangers are explained honestly and openly. And she called on parents to be careful about what images of children they post online.

To report child abuse images log onto [www.hotline.ie](http://www.hotline.ie) (part of [Inhope.org](http://Inhope.org)). For details on safe online use see [www.spunout.ie/onlinesafety](http://www.spunout.ie/onlinesafety). CARI, therapy and support for children affected by abuse, can be contacted on 1890 92 4567

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