

Role of a hotline

This online guide is intended to share the collective expertise of experienced Internet hotlines in operation around the world. Understanding the origin and history of hotlines, and their role, is therefore essential.

Brief history of hotlines

The first Internet hotlines were developed in the late 1990s as a practical response to the availability of illegal content on the Internet, which in some countries was underpinned by new laws and policies aimed at addressing this trend.

Their aim was to provide a reporting service for the general public in their country to make anonymous reports of content they suspected to be illegal, in particular that they suspected to be Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) or to represent the sexual exploitation of children.

Since they first emerged, hotlines have provided a transparent and accountable public service for digital citizens and served as key partners for the public and private sector bodies responsible for removing and investigating the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children.

However, just as the challenge of online child sexual abuse material is global, so too is the solution. INHOPE – the International Association of Internet Hotline – was created in 1999 to help coordinate the efforts of national hotlines. Since then, the INHOPE network has continued to grow and expand well beyond EU borders. In 2016, the network is made up of 51 hotlines in 45 countries.

INHOPE's Mission

INHOPE is the global umbrella organization uniting national internet hotlines engaged in combating online child sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse material.

The mission of INHOPE is to support and enhance the work of these hotlines to strengthen the international efforts to combat child sexual abuse using a multi-stakeholder approach.

A global network of national hotlines

National hotlines play a crucial role on the front-line of the response ecosystem. They receive, review and refer reports of child sexual abuse material – often in addition to other categories of illegal content according to national legislation. They also play a central role in developing and maintaining national protocols for the removal of content from public access – a process often referred to as Notice and Takedown (NTD) – by identifying or confirming the presence of such content.

Since the first hotlines began providing a reporting service, the ways that data is produced, consumed, shared and stored have evolved and continue to evolve.

This means that hotlines have to adapt the way that they operate in terms of:

- Identifying and reaching their target audience
- Responding to reports
- Managing and referring the information reported to them to trusted partners

INHOPE works with its members to stay up to date with new challenges and to ensure all hotlines can access training on basic and more advanced analytical techniques. For more information, contact [INHOPE](http://hotlinedevelopmentguide.org/guide/#section-464) (<http://hotlinedevelopmentguide.org/guide/#section-464>).

**INHOPE, the global network of reporting hotlines
fighting child sexual abuse material on the Internet**

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INTERNET HOTLINES
INHOPE



* The INHOPE Foundation is INHOPE's charitable arm to help develop new hotlines worldwide.

The first hotlines

The first hotline for reporting child sexual abuse content was set up in the Netherlands in June 1996 as a joint initiative between industry, government and law enforcement. This was followed by similar initiatives for reporting illegal content in Norway, Belgium and the UK before the end of the year. Also during this period and in the early 2000s, national hotlines in many countries outside Europe were established, including in the United States of America, Taiwan, Canada and Australia. Since then, all European Union Member States and many other countries around the world have have created hotlines and are members of the global INHOPE network.



What is the basic function?

When surfing the Internet, a user may come across something that they suspect to be illegal and to show harm being done to a child. In a matter of a few clicks, the user can copy the URL of that content as displayed in their browser, open the reporting page of the hotline in the country where they are located, and submit the URL in total anonymity for expert analysis and action.

Some hotlines also provide reporting via mobile apps, and others work in cooperation with the Internet Industry to ensure referral or redirect buttons to their reporting page.

Whatever the route through which the report is made, the basic function of the hotline highlights the importance of a expansive communications strategy. Internet users must be aware of the operation to report, and must have easy access to their national hotline.

A note on blocking as a preventive measure

Some hotlines are responsible for and/or contribute to the creation of a URL block list. This could be a list of URLs confirmed to contain CSAM that meets the national definition of illegal in the country of the hotline.

The use of a block list may be defined by law or on a voluntary basis by the private sector, and the dynamics of access blocking vary from country to country. Useful as a preventive and interim measure, access blocking prevents a user from accessing illegal content for the time it takes for the content to be removed at source.

For countries without a national block list, visit the INTERPOL website to learn more about [INTERPOL's International Worst of List \(IWOL\) \(http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Crimes-against-children/Access-blocking/The-INTERPOL-%22Worst-of%22-list\)](http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Crimes-against-children/Access-blocking/The-INTERPOL-%22Worst-of%22-list) of CSAM domain-level

URLs. The INTERPOL “Worst of”-list is a combination of prevention mechanisms on the web by various actors to deter the commercial exploitation of children via websites. In the case that the website content matches the restrictive IWOL criteria, it can be included in the INTERPOL worst of list in cooperation with the relevant ISP and national authorities. The domain is then added into a filter to interdict the access to the contained material to the end user. This is available for public and private sector implementation at country level. The Internet Watch Foundation also offers its [URL list \(https://www.iwf.org.uk/members/member-policies/url-list/blocking-faqs\)](https://www.iwf.org.uk/members/member-policies/url-list/blocking-faqs) to its industry Members for deployment globally.

The imperative of Notice and Takedown

Even where a national or international block list is implemented, the **primary task of a hotline is to facilitate rapid removal of CSAM hosted in its country of operation, and to channel reports of CSAM hosting in another to that country of hosting for removal at source – Notice and Takedown (NTD).**

This is important when understanding the role of any hotline in the global response ecosystem.

If a country is identified as a known location for the hosting of illegal content, the national hotline will play a crucial front-line role in receiving reports and in having that content removed and where necessary investigated.

If a country is not a known location for hosting of illegal content on any significant scale, the national hotline will play a crucial role in receiving reports and transferring them to the hotline in the relevant country of hosting.

For the video, please visit <http://hotlinedevelopmentguide.org/guide/role-of-a-hotline/>