The EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) detects and investigates malicious content on the internet and in social media.

The work of the EU IRU, which is based at Europol’s European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC), not only produces strategic insights into jihadist terrorism, but also provides information for use in criminal investigations.

Terrorists’ use of the internet and social media has increased enormously over the course of recent years. Jihadist groups, in particular, have demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how social networks operate and have launched well-organised, concerted social media campaigns to recruit followers and to promote or glorify acts of terrorism and violent extremism.

As this is a problem that spans multiple linguistic audiences and jurisdictions, a common EU response was necessary, hence the establishment of the EU IRU in 2015.

The EU IRU has the following core tasks:

- 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 comprises of a team of experts with multiple and diverse knowledge and skills, ranging from experts in religiously inspired terrorism, translators, information and communications technology developers and law enforcement experts in counter terrorism.

Since it was set up, the EU IRU has assessed in total 42,066 pieces of content, which triggered 40,714 decisions for referral across over 80 platforms in more than 10 languages*. On average, the content flagged for referrals has been removed in 86% of the cases (* figures of December 2017).