Cybercrime and Disinformation during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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On 3 April 2020, Europol published a report on cybercrime and disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Forms of cybercime include ransomware, DDoS, child sexual exploitation, the darknet, and hybrid threats such as disinformation and interference campaigns.

According to the report's key findings, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a visible and striking impact on cybercrime activities compared to other criminal activities. Cybercriminals seem to have adapted quickly to the new situation and capitalise on the anxieties and fears of their victims.

Phishing and ransomware campaigns are being launched by criminals to exploit the current crisis and are expected to continue to increase in scope and scale. Activities revolving around the online distribution of child sexual exploitation material also appear to be on the rise. Reflecting on the darknet, the initial fluctuation in sales seems to have stabilised, with various platforms distributing illicit goods and services. In order to make profit or advance geopolitical interests, criminal organisations as well as states and state-backed actors also seem to be exploiting the public health crisis. The report concludes that disinformation and misinformation surrounding COVID-19 is also being increasingly spread around the world, affecting public health and effective crisis communication.

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