

WHAT IS IPTV?

IPTV - Internet Protocol Television - is a technology that enables the broadcasting of television content through the internet, instead of traditional methods, such as satellite or cable.

ARE IPTV SERVICES ILLEGAL?

IPTV services per se are not illegal as long as the service providers hold the correct licences for all the content they stream. However, many IPTV providers obtain audiovisual content illegally and lack the authorisation from content owners and copyright holders to stream copyrighted content.

SCALE OF ILLEGAL IPTV SERVICES IN THE EU

The proliferation of illegal IPTV services has become an increasing trend in the online space and their presence in the European Union is notable.

A 2019 study* commissioned by the EUIPO⁷ found that in 2018, around 3.6% of the EU-28 population used unauthorised IPTV services, generating close to EUR 1 billion in unlawful revenue for the illegal providers. These illegal activities can cause significant damage to rights holders and users (through loss of personal data and malware) and the profits made help to fuel other forms of organised crime, including fraud, corruption and drug trafficking.

HOW TO IDENTIFY AN ILLEGAL IPTV SERVICE

Infringers and online criminals have become increasingly sophisticated, resulting in some illegal IPTV services looking rather professional, so much so that they might confuse users. However, some red flags can help to identify the illegal nature of an IPTV service.

Below are some telling signs that an IPTV service may be illegal.



PRICE

The services offered are free or significantly cheaper than other legal services on offer.

Illegal services don't have to pay for production or licensing costs and taxes, making them cheaper than legitimate services.

If it is too good to be true, it probably is!



ANONIMITY OF THE USER

Legitimate providers are, in most jurisdictions, obliged to positively identify their customers.

They can do this by requesting users' personal details, in the form of a copy of their ID documents, or through their credit cards. Identification via payment services is not possible when cryptocurrencies are used to pay for services.



PAYMENT METHODS

Bitcoins and other cryptocurrencies are used as payment methods.

Although they are used to pay for genuine services too, cryptocurrencies are mainly used to pay for illegal IPTV services due to their hard-to-trace nature. Legal services generally offer other payment methods (direct debit, bank transfer, bankcards).



LACK OF INFORMATION OR A WEBSITE

An internet search on the service provider does not return any results.

Some illegal IPTV services use social media, closed groups, chat applications and other channels to communicate with customers and provide login information to access the services.

* <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0617f865-1bc6-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>



CONTENT PROVIDED

The service includes content generally not offered by other providers.

This includes international TV channels, content from multiple legal sources (i.e. Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Amazon Prime) in one single subscription, or content not generally available in the particular country or region.



ACCESS TO CONTENT

No official or dedicated app exists in official app stores like Google Play or IOS.

The method of accessing the streaming services is based on a playlist: **.m3u file**. The playlist is sent to the user by the service provider with instructions on how to install it in any third party IPTV application.

Since it is obtained illegally, the content may result in lower-quality video and audio stream and the provided channels are constantly changing. Newer trends have, however, begun to circumvent these issues.



LANGUAGE OF THE CONTENT

The content is in its original language or in a language other than the official language of the country where it is offered.

The service provider also communicates in a different language, or the language spoken is of poor quality, broken English or machine translated.



EXTERNAL FEATURES

The service includes pop-up windows, adverts and fake buttons that open external links.

Genuine (paid) subscriptions do not contain adverts, close window icons or other forms of buttons leading to external (malicious) content.

Use of IPTV player apps for illegal purposes

A rapidly developing piracy threat concerns the use of IPTV player apps to reproduce unauthorised audiovisual content. The use of these legal apps has caused significant damage to rights holders and has proved successful for infringers due to the ease with which they can be developed and deployed, widespread availability on app stores and difficulty to remove apps used for illegal purposes from the online space.

The European Commission maintains a [Counterfeit and Piracy Watch List](#) of online service providers and physical marketplaces located outside the EU that are involved in piracy and counterfeiting. The Watch List is compiled by DG Trade on the basis of public consultations. A new Watch List will be adopted in Q4 of 2022.



Scan to access the latest Watch List (2020)

EXAMPLES OF EUROJUST'S SUPPORT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLEGAL IPTV SERVICES AND ILLEGAL STREAMING

In 2019, Eurojust supported EU-led actions against an organised crime group (OCG) offering illegal streaming of TV programmes, series and films from platforms like Netflix, Amazon and HBO to close to 2 million subscribers worldwide. The actions led to the takedown of 50 servers in various EU countries, and a number of arrests and seizures of criminal assets worth EUR 4.8 million.



Scan to find out more about the operations supported by Eurojust.

The same year, Eurojust supported an action day targeting the illegal streaming of TV series and films operated from Switzerland. As part of the operation, three suspects were arrested by Swiss authorities, the website used to promote the illegal service was blocked and eight bank accounts in Switzerland were seized.



Last year, Eurojust began the implementation of the IPC Project. The project is funded by the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) and aims at enhancing the judicial response to IP crimes by building, promoting and exchanging knowledge, enhancing cooperation, and carrying out awareness raising and capacity building for judicial and law enforcement authorities.



Scan to learn more about Eurojust's work on IPC.