

Pandemic sees criminals target online shoppers: Europol

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The coronavirus pandemic has sparked a sharp rise in online shopping fraud, Europe's policing agency warned on Thursday, saying criminals continued to prey on victims working from home.

Fears of catching the virus have driven a sharp increase in [online shopping](#), which in turn has led to a major rise in [delivery](#) fraud in the second year of the pandemic, Europol said in its annual cybercrime report.

"The extension of lockdowns throughout Europe has brought with it a number of new e-commerce opportunities, which have often proven to be a target for criminals," the Hague-based agency said.

"Criminals offer goods and receive payment without delivery, defraud online shops with weak security measures, or use delivery services as phishing lures," it said.

Mobile phones in particular were being targeted, with [criminal gangs](#) posing as delivery services pretending to offer information about a parcel, but in reality hoping to get the victim's account and credit card details.

This included sending messages via SMS on mobile phones, a practice referred to as "smishing."

Meanwhile, the dark web continued to be the main market place for illicit activity, despite recent global police successes in taking down illegal websites such as DarkMarket in January.

Europol said cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and Monero remained the most popular form of payment for illegal goods and services on the dark web.

Weapons appear to be increasingly traded on the dark web as well as through encrypted chat groups, Europol said.

Novel weapons, such as those made by three-dimensional printers, were also on the rise.

For instance, Spanish police in September last year busted a workshop where these weapons were being made.

There, law officials seized templates for guns downloaded from the [dark web](#) and several 3D printers, "one of which was in the process of printing a small firearm," Europol said.

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