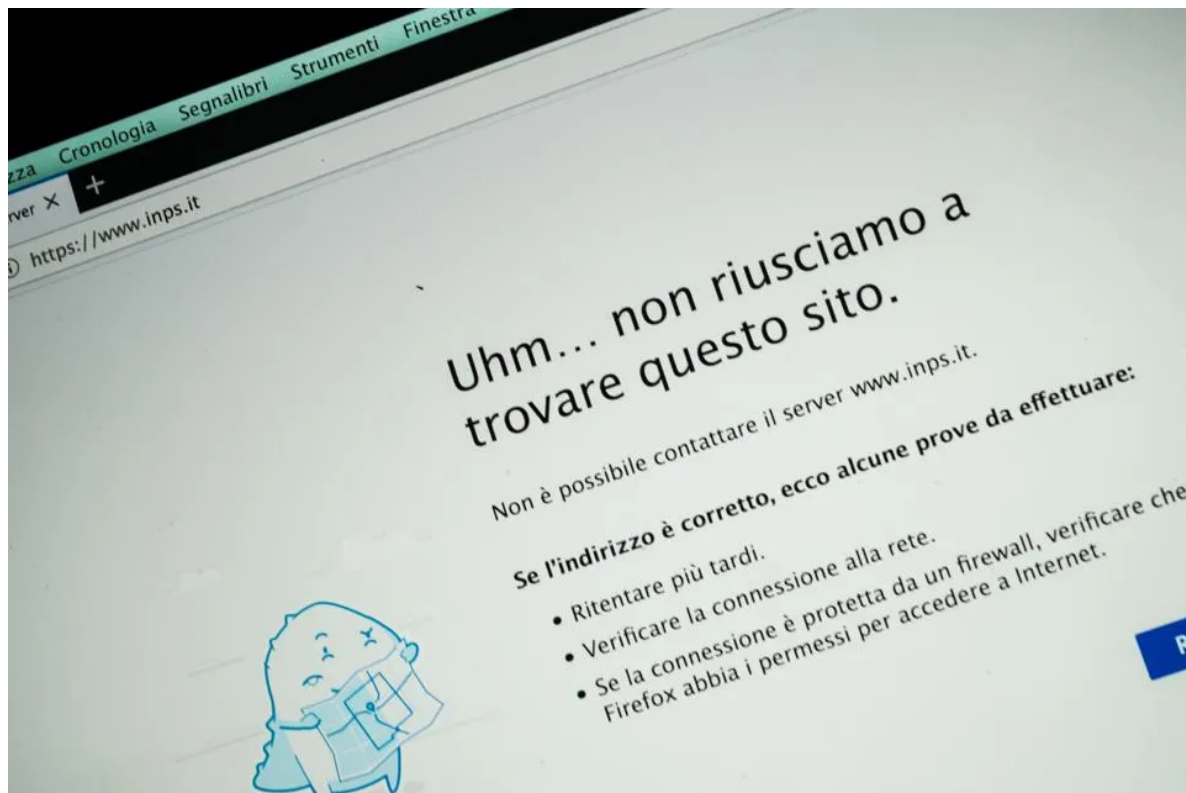# Cyber Attack Disrupts COVID-19 Payouts: Hackers Take Down Italian Social Security Site

Davey Winder

3–4 minutes

The Italian website responsible taking applications

for COVID-19 emergency payouts has been taken ... [+] down by hackers

Are there no depths that cruel hackers and cybercriminals will not plumb during the COVID-19 pandemic when everyone else is pulling together? The answer, if a cyberattack on the social security coronavirus benefits application website over the last few days is anything to go by, is no. A big, fat, shameful no.

We've already seen supposed "elite hackers" [attacking the World Health Organization](), cyber criminals [hitting a COVID-19 vaccine testing facility with ransomware]() and healthcare workers being targeted with [Windows malware using coronavirus information as the lure](). Now, [it has been reported](), hackers have forced the Italian social security website to shut down for a period, as the most vulnerable in society started their claims for a €600 ($655) crisis payout.

[MORE FROM FORBESThere's No COVID-19 Cure Online: $14 Million Seized In Fake Pharma]()

We had to close the website says welfare agency head

The general director of Italian welfare agency INPS, Pasquale Tridico, told the state broadcaster RAI on April 1 that there had been several hacker attacks across the previous few days. "They continued today, and we had to close the website," Tridico said. This at the same time as the site was receiving 100 application requests per second, according to Tridico.

Italian police have been informed of the ongoing cyberattacks, and the ruling Democratic Party has suggested that national security services could be put on the case of finding out who is responsible. Deputy party leader, Andrea Orlando, told Reuters that "These jackals must be stopped immediately." But that could prove a lot easier said than done.

"The website is already tremendously overloaded with legitimate users desperately seeking help among this unprecedentedly disastrous crisis," Ilia

Kolochenko, CEO of web security company ImmuniWeb, said, "hence, even a tiny botnet is now apt to substantially disrupt the website's availability and performance."

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The worst-case scenario

That's assuming this isn't something worse, much worse. "The most dangerous scenario is, however, if a professional cyber gang is behind this disgraceful attack," Kolochenko said, adding "they will likely exploit some weaknesses and architectural flaws of the web application to boost the amplitude of the DDoS, eventually expecting to get a ransom for stopping their activities."

Which would leave the Italian authorities in a challenging position, having to choose between two evils: pay the ransom and start a flood of similar attacks on government assets, refuse and leave vulnerable people unable to get financial help

when they need it the most. "I hope DDoS protection companies will soon offer their help to the affected agencies," Kolochenko concluded, "otherwise, we will see the first large-scale example when cybercriminals are factually taking human lives away."

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