

Dutch Police Read Messages of Encrypted Messenger 'Exclu'

3-4 minutes

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Dutch police have cracked another encrypted phone company, this time reading messages from, and then shutting down, "Exclu," according to announcements [from the police and Dutch prosecution service](#).

The news demonstrates law enforcement agencies' continued targeting of the encrypted phone industry, part of which has served organized criminal syndicates for years. The Dutch police specifically have been behind many of these hacks and shutdowns, working on other investigations into companies [such as Ennetcom and Sky](#).

"Our application has multiple use cases. Use it for encrypted chat or mail communication and store your files and notes locally in the encrypted and compartmented vault," Exclu's website reads. "Our communication platform has integrated the most sophisticated encryption protocols in the world to ensure no one gets access to your data."

Do you know anything else about Exclu? Were you a user or administrator of the service? We'd love to hear from you. Using a non-work phone or computer, you can contact Joseph Cox securely on Signal on +44 20 8133 5190, Wickr on josephcox, or email joseph.cox@vice.com.

In the announcements, Dutch authorities said they had been able to read Exclu messages over the last five months. Authorities estimated Exclu had around 3,000 users, with 750 of those speaking Dutch. Haroon Raza, a Dutch defense attorney, told Motherboard many of his clients used Exclu.

On Friday, police in the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, and elsewhere performed 79 searches and made 49 arrests. Those arrests include users and the owners and administrators of Exclu itself, according to the announcements. Italy, Sweden, and France were also involved in the investigation, according to the announcements.

Motherboard sent a request for comment to Exclu through its website and did not receive a response.

The encrypted phone industry is one deeply intertwined with organized crime. Sometimes, as [Motherboard has previously revealed](#), the companies are created and run by drug traffickers. In other cases, the companies start as legitimate businesses before deliberately serving the criminal market. In 2018, the FBI arrested Vincent Ramos, the CEO of a company called Phantom Secure, [after an investigation](#) in which Ramos suggested to undercover agents posing as drug traffickers that he made the product for their line of work. In Exclu's case, "The providers of this service are suspected of facilitating other criminals as a criminal organization," according to the announcements.

The announcement adds that users of Exclu who can invoke legal privilege, such as lawyers, can contact the authorities who will then, "if justified," delete their data. The Dutch authorities in particular [have previously read the messages of defense lawyers](#), including Raza's.

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