

A joint operation between the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (Ceop) and Lincolnshire Police has uncovered a UK-based paedophile network.

Dubbed Operation Alpine, the investigation found a website that offered more than 1,300 suspected paedophiles across 45 countries access to millions of child abuse images.

In the UK 211 suspects have been identified and more than 178 premises have been searched to date

Head of Ceop Peter Davies said: "From the outset of this operation our strategy was to safeguard children found to be at risk, wherever they were, bring offenders to justice, deter people from using the internet to share child abuse images and reassure the public that police forces, national bodies and partner agencies can work together effectively to protect them.

"Many of the images being shared online were horrific. The lengths to which people went to try and conceal their criminal activity were huge but did not prevent them being caught by persistent and dedicated work."

Nearly all of the UK's police forces were involved in the investigation. Police found an industrial-sized server that was so large that the lights in the room dimmed when it was turned on because of the amount of power it required to operate. Officers said it had a memory capacity of 4.5 terabytes, equivalent to 3.2m floppy disks.