SOMI joins forces with Alexander Hanff, That Privacy Guy!, to expose the scale of online surveillance and call for stronger enforcement of data protection laws

Rotterdam (The Netherlands) and Malta, 17th November 2026 – An investigation into 100 of the world's most visited English-language websites has recorded more than 500,000 privacy-related events, revealing extensive data transfers from visitors' devices to third parties without consent.

The investigation, conducted by Alexander Hanff, a computer scientist, sociologist and lawyer with more than 30 years of experience in data protection, examined websites across several categories, including news, academic publishing, reference platforms, social media and video-sharing services. Stichting Onderzoek Marktinformatie (SOMI) is supporting the publication and communication of the findings, with the aim of raising public awareness and exploring potential collective legal action.

The investigation

Between 1st - 3rd October 2026, each website was accessed from within the European Union using a clean Google Chrome browser profile, without privacy-enhancing tools or user interaction. Each homepage was observed for five minutes, without interacting with cookie or consent banners, to examine what happens before a visitor provides consent.

The investigation recorded more than 250,000 tracking events across the 100 homepages alone. An additional audit of the websites' privacy and cookie notices generated a comparable number of events, bringing the total to more than half a million.

International data transfers

The findings raise serious questions about compliance with European privacy and data protection legislation, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the ePrivacy framework.

The findings reveal extensive connections between visitors' devices and third-party companies receiving data during website visits. Notably, the majority of these data transfers were directed to companies headquartered in the United States.

Under the GDPR, transfers of personal data outside the European Economic Area (EEA) must meet strict requirements to ensure adequate protection of individuals' privacy and fundamental rights. The EU recognises the United States as providing an adequate level of protection only for organisations participating in the EU–US Data Privacy Framework.

Other transfers must rely on a valid legal mechanism, such as Standard Contractual Clauses. Without these protections, transfers may violate the GDPR and expose individuals' personal data to risks, including access by US authorities under applicable legislation.

Report publication and next steps

The full research report was published on 17 November 2026 and distributed to legislators, supervisory authorities and media organisations. In the week following publication, the researcher intends to submit complaints to the competent supervisory authorities concerning the audited organisations.

The research can be accessed on: https://websentinel.eu/research

SOMI will support the dissemination of the findings and explore opportunities for potential collective legal follow-up to help ensure that consumers' rights are effectively protected.

If consumers have visited any of the audited websites, SOMI encourages them to exercise their data protection rights using My Data Finder, a free tool that helps consumers request access to the personal data companies have collected and processed about them.

My Data Finder can be accessed on: https://somi.nl/en/mydatafinder

Alexander Hanff

Alexander Hanff or “That Privacy Guy!”, is a computer scientist, sociologist and lawyer with a passion for making privacy accessible, understandable, and implementable for businesses of all sizes. Alexander has more than 30 years of experience in navigating the complex world where technology intersects with law, he helps organisations build trust through transparent and compliant privacy practices.

About SOMI

Stichting Onderzoek Marktinformatie (SOMI) is a non-profit organisation focused on societal issues. SOMI is recognised by the European Commission as an organisation active in data protection and data autonomy, and it advocates for the protection of fundamental rights for consumers and minors using a range of online services.

Through its app, SOMI gives individuals control over their personal data: “All your data. All yours.” The organisation uncovers malpractices, informs the public, and supports those who have been harmed – including through collective actions, injunctions, and the enforcement of compensation claims. SOMI is currently investigating legal violations by numerous digital service providers and social media platforms.

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