BEREC Summary Report on the status of internet capacity in light of the Covid-19 crisis

In a joint statement with the European Commission on 19 March 2020 on how network operators can cope with the increased demand on network capacity, BEREC committed to setting up a special reporting mechanism to ensure regular monitoring of the Internet traffic situation in each Member State in order to be able to respond swiftly to capacity issues.

This report summarises the main findings of the fourth information gathering exercise by BEREC on 2 April 2020, updating the data collected on 31 March 2020, in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. At this point in time, a total of 30[1] national regulatory authorities (NRAs) have shared their data about the impact of the crisis on the telecommunications' networks and the actions taken so far.

10 NRAs[2] have reported that they observed no changes compared to the previous gathering exercise.

The status report will continue to be updated based on the regular inputs from NRAs, with the next iteration of the summary report expected on 8 April 2020.

Status of network capacity

General observations continue to be that overall traffic on fixed and on mobile networks has increased during the Covid-19 crisis, but that no major congestion issues have occurred. For more than one week, an increasing number of NRAs (AL, BE, DE, ES, FR, NL, PT and SK) explicitly reported a stabilisation in the overall traffic. Another two NRAs (IT, SI) continue to observe an increase in overall traffic. One NRA (IE) observes that the increase in data usage continues and confirms that voice traffic is stabilising.

Two NRAs (HU and PT) detect a higher congestion in fixed networks compared to the mobile networks due to the increase in traffic. One NRA (ES) has reported that occasional problems occur for completing calls in very dense areas during the first days.

Following Commissioner Breton's initiative, measures had been applied throughout Europe by some of the larger content providers, such as Netflix, YouTube, Amazon Prime and Facebook. Aside from this, three NRAs (FR, HU, IT) explicitly stated that content and applications are

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[1] The following NRAs have contributed so far to the information gathering exercises : AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK

[2] NRAs from the following Member States having mentioned that there are no changes: BE, DE, DK, FI, HR, HU, LV, SE, SK

limiting the bitrate transmission of their streaming services. Additionally, three NRAs (AL, FR, NL) explicitly observe the effects of the applied measures in a stabilisation of the traffic. Moreover, the launch of Disney's video streaming platform in FR is delayed by two weeks.

Regulatory actions taken

NRAs are monitoring the situation and are regularly collecting data from ISPs and other market players about the status of their networks. The frequency of collecting data varies from country to country, such as one (BG, CY, DE), two (FR) or three (BE) times a week, and once (HR) or twice a day (ES).

Besides periodical reporting, ISPs are also told to immediately notify their respective NRAs about any exceptional measure urgently put in place. This is particularly crucial for the application of any exceptional traffic management measure. To ensure this, several NRAs (AT, DE, DK, FI, HR, IT, LV, PL, SK) informed the market players about the available exception for traffic management during congestion in Article 3(3) c) of Regulation (EU) 2015/2120 as well as about their responsibilities in such an event.

Three NRAs (BG, DE, RO) have explicitly reported that they are in constant dialogue with their ISPs, allowing the NRA to be immediately notified if special measures need to be taken. One NRA (HU) mentioned that they are closely monitoring the situation and that there has been no need so far for taking any decisions. One NRA (EL) advised their ISPs to consult first with the Authority before taking any measures. One NRA (CH) received information from an ISP about measures implemented for resolving traffic management problems.

One NRA (IT) adopted a first package of measures aimed at tackling the increase in the consumption of electronic communications services and of the traffic on the networks and required operators to make every effort to manage and overcome the state of emergency. Two NRAs (AL, SI) explicitly reported that there has been no need so far for ISPs to change any traffic management practices, but ISPs are prepared to do so if need be (further elaborated under *Actions taken and communication by operators*).

One NRA (IE) proposed a mechanism for a temporary assignment of specific frequency spectrum bands as a measure to increase capacity for mobile networks.

In the case of CY, the NRA will evaluate the ISPs' data and determine if any further measures are required.

Given the national state of emergency, one NRA (RO) requested the providers of electronic communications services not to disconnect the services in the event of non-payment by the customers. Another NRA (ES) reported that such a measure was adopted by a governmental decision.

Actions taken and communication by operators

In some Member States, operators have implemented customer-friendly measures such as:

- increasing the amount of mobile data in the subscriptions for a limited period without any additional charge (AL, AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, HU, HR, IT, PL, PT);

- zero-rating temporarily additional services or offering services free of charge, such as educational content and platforms (AL, BG, HR, HU) or official websites dedicated to information related to Covid-19 (CZ);

- increasing the bit rate once the data cap is reached on mobile services (FR);

- distributing useful information to their customers by using different channels, such as updates on their websites, newsletters, press releases or SMS (AL, BE, BG, DE, DK, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SI ,SK);

- offering their services online due to closed retail shops (AL, LT);

- allowing online payment settlements (AL, IT).

Some operators have raised uncertainties related to the supply of spare parts as well as to the limited availability of their staff.

Although no EU Member State has faced a major traffic collapse (as it is explained in the section *Status on the network capacity*), some operators have increased their network's capacity (EL, IT, LT, LV, PT and SI) to cope with the sustained traffic's growth. In the case of three Member States (HU, IT and SI), these network's upgrades cover the links to the national exchange point. One NRA (IE) reported that operators re-assigned network resources to deal with capacity issues. In CY, the ISPs have upgraded the speeds provided to their subscribers.

Other operators have not taken any such measure but they are closely monitoring their network's capacity (as explicitly reported by EE, HR, HU, LV, MT and PT) to check if a network's upgrade is necessary.

If need be, some ISPs have plans to stream VoD or CUTV in SD resolution (SI) or to allow a smooth and swift resolution with minimal throttling (AL).

Further communication towards end-users

Some entities[3] (NRAs, governments or ISPs) have advised their end-users a reasonable use of the internet access services. Additionally, two NRAs (AL and PT) reported that they warned the end-users about an increase in fraud and in cyberattacks related to the current crisis.One NRA (FR) published guidance for teleworkers on how to use internet during this period. Another NRA (LT) issued guidance for operators on guaranteeing uninterrupted provision of e-communications services, as well recommendations for schools, teachers, and students on how to organize remote learning processes smoothly in order to avoid a "breakdown" of electronic communications networks.

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[3] AL, CH, ES, FR, IT, LT, PT, RO