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 ongoing, twice-weekly information gathering exercise, and includes the most recent data provided to BEREC by its constituent NRAs as of 16 April 2020. 31[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.

24 NRAs[2] have reported no changes since the previous information gathering exercise (as of 14 April 2020). The status report will be continuously updated based on regular input from the NRAs, with the next summary report to be issued on 22 April 2020.

Key updates since previous report

- For the sake of readability, the summary report has been streamlined and shortened, mainly by the removal of some of the measures reported at the early stages of the special monitoring mechanism. The complete list of measures reported since the start of the special monitoring system can still be found by consulting earlier versions of this report. Key metrics are maintained in this report.

- In CY and HR, the traffic level has stabilized during last week.

- Several NRAs seem to observe a slight decrease from the peak traffic of early April.

- NL and RO have explicitly reported an increase of traffic in the IXPs during the crisis.

- In RO, a special decree is in force.

Status of network capacity

Generally, overall traffic on fixed and mobile networks has increased during the Covid-19 crisis, but no major congestion issues have occurred. For more than one week, more and

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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, LV, LT, LU, ME, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, SE.
2 NRAs from the following Member States having either mentioned that there are no changes or not provided an update since the previous iteration of the report: AL, BE, BG, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, ME, MT, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK

more NRAs (AL, AT, BE, BG, CY, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, HU, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI and SK) are reporting a stabilisation in overall traffic.

Three NRAs (BG, IT and RO) have detected a slight decrease of overall internet traffic from the peak reached after the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. This trend shows a third phase in the overall traffic evolution during the crisis: sharp increase, stabilisation and, now, a slight decrease from the peak. Another NRA (NL) has reported the same slight decrease from the peak but only for mobile traffic.

Three NRAs (NL, RO, SI) have expclicitly reported an increase of traffic in the IXPs (Internet Exchange Points) since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis.

Following Commissioner Breton's initiative, measures to reduce traffic have been applied by both small and large content and application providers throughout Europe. Positive effects on network traffic of such measures have been reported by NRAs (AL, FR, HU, NL).

Regulatory actions taken

NRAs are monitoring the situation and are regularly collecting data from the ISPs and other market players about the status of their networks. The frequency of collecting data ranges from daily (ES, ME) to once (BG, CY, DE, EL, HR, LT, IT, ME, MT, SI), twice (FR, HU, PL) or three (BE, LU) times per week. One NRA (RO) reported that because of a relatively stable situation, ISPs are requested to report overall information once every fortnight. However, any major incidents must be reported as soon as possible. Besides the periodical reporting, ISPs are also asked to immediately notify the NRAs about any exceptional measures that are put in place. This is particularly relevant for the application of any exceptional traffic management measure.

One ISP reported to its NRA (NL) that a network freeze and exception process is in place.

Following the adoption of a first package of measures aimed at overcoming the state of emergency, one NRA (IT) has reported that the current situation has not required any decision regarding the traffic management. Five NRAs (AL, HR, FR, NL and SI) expclicitly 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 needs be.

Please refer to previous reports for further details on some of the early measures applied by NRAs during the crisis.

Actions taken and communication by operators

In several 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, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, HU, HR, IT, ME, NO, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI);

- zero-rating temporarily additional services or offering services free of charge, such as educational content and platforms (AL, BG, EL, HR, HU, MT) or official websites dedicated to information related to Covid-19 (CZ, NO);

- providing free mobile bundles comprising of free data and minutes to front line staff in the public health care sector and enforcement agencies (MT, PT);

- increasing the bandwidth once the data cap is reached on mobile services (DE, FR);

- increasing the upload speed to facilitate studying and working from home (ME) or upgrading speeds in general (CY);

- offering some TV content free of charge (AL, BG, EL, EE, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, ME, MT, PT, SI);

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

- offering their services online due to closed retail shops (AL, LT, RO) or having a limited number of shops opened (BE, BG);

- allowing online payment settlements (AL, BG, IT, ME), providing alternative payment methods (RO), or extending invoice payment due date for the elderly (PL);

Some of the technical measures taken by operators are as follows:

- increasing network capacity (EL, IT, LT, LV, ME, NL, PT and SI) to cope with the sustained traffic growth;

- upgrading network equipment (RO), capacity expansion (HR, HUand RO) and also traffic (re)balancing, mainly on fixed networks (NL);

- capacity expansions of base stations in mobile networks (NO);

- simplifying procurement processes (RO).

Please refer to previous reports for complete list of measures reported.

Further communication towards end-users

No new information has been reported since the previous version of the summary report. Please consult earlier versions of the summary reports for further information on actions taken for this purpose.