BEREC Summary Report on the status of internet capacity, regulatory and other measures 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 of network capacity, BEREC committed to 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. Furthermore, BEREC is collecting information on other measures implemented by National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) as well as on other initiatives by public and private parties throughout Europe.

This report focuses on, and summarises, the main updates of an ongoing monthly information gathering exercise, and includes the most recent data provided to BEREC by its constituent NRAs as of 28 July 2020. 32[1] NRAs shared their data about the impact of the crisis on electronic communications networks and the actions taken so far in their respective Member States.

Please refer to the previous iterations of this summary report[2] for further details on some of the early measures applied by NRAs during the crisis. The summary report will continue to be updated based on regular input from NRAs with the next iteration expected to be released on 28 August 2020.

1. Status of internet capacity

In general, traffic on fixed and mobile networks have increased during the Covid-19 crisis, but no major congestion issues have occurred.

7 NRAs[3] have provided updates of substance on the status of internet capacity in their Member State since the previous information gathering exercise (23 June 2020), while 8 NRAs[4] have explicitly mentioned that either the situation remains stable or there is nothing new to report. Please refer to previous iterations of the internet capacity summary report for further details on some of the early measures applied by NRAs during the crisis.

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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, ME, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK.

[2] The previous iterations of the summary report can be found at: https://berec.europa.eu/eng/document_register/search/?reference_number=&title=summary+report&contents=&category_id=&date_from=&date_to=&search=1

[3] NRAs from the following Member States having provided updates since the previous data gathering exercise: BE, BG, CY, FR, IT, PL, PT.

[4] NRAs from the following Member States having explicitly mentioned that there were no changes since the previous data gathering exercise: AT, DE, FI, HU, NL, RO, SE, SI.

Key updates since previous report

- *CY, FR, IT, HU, PL, PT and SI have provided updates on the evolution of internet traffic on fixed and mobile networks*

- *FR has discontinued the periodic information gathering from operators, while BE has initiated again a collection of traffic data from operators on a weekly basis*

1.1. Network issues raised by NRAs

In general, three phases in the evolution of internet traffic have been observed during the crisis: sharp increase, stabilisation and a decrease from the peak.

The following updates on the status of internet traffic have been reported:

CY and IT have recorded a slight increase of data traffic in fixed and mobile networks during the week of 29 June-5 July 2020, compared to the week of 22-28 June 2020.

FR, HU and SI have explicitly reported that the status of internet traffic remains stable and that there is thus no change since the previous month. FR has also registered a stabilisation of traffic at interconnection points since the end of the general lockdown in mid-June 2020. Additionally, FR has mentioned that most popular OTT platforms (streaming video and gaming platforms) restored normal transmission bandwidth of their delivered contents.

In July, the operators in PL have registered a stabilisation or a slight decline in their overall traffic flow compared to the previous month. Similarly, data traffic has been slightly decreasing over the same period in PT.

Some NRAs (CY, FR, HU, IT, PL, PT) have explicitly mentioned that they have not observed any congestion issue since the previous reporting period. Thus, there was no need to apply any exceptional traffic management measures contained in the Regulation (EU) 2015/2120.

1.2. Regulatory actions taken

NRAs are monitoring the situation and are collecting data from ISPs and other market players about the status of their networks, but are doing so with different regularity.

CY and PL are still collecting data once per week from providers to determine the requirement of taking any further measure.

In BE, the NRA has asked the largest operators to send again a weekly overview of the network traffic, given the entry into force of stricter measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, such as teleworking.

In BG, following the suspension of the periodic data gathering by the NRA in June, no reports have been provided by the operators on any significant changes in traffic or any major incidents in July.

In the case of FR, operators only have to report to the NRA if the status of their networks deteriorates.

In PT, the NRA published statistics regarding the use of its measurement tool until the beginning of July, revealing a decline in the number of tests on the speed of Internet access services. Additionally, the same NRA continued to publish statistics on the number of complaints of the electronic communications sector. An increase in the number of complaints is observed. The NRA also released an update of its practical guide already issued in May.

1.3. Actions taken and communication by operators

In FR, Internet service providers stopped their exceptional measures to support customers during the Covid-19 situation.

2. Other measures taken by NRAs, public institutions and market players

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Key updates since previous report

- *IT reported on the recent NRA´s publications related to the pandemic including online disinformation and PT reported on a publication to counter misinformation*

- *BE reported that stricter measures were introduced by the National Security Council, and also about a recent attack against a base station*

- *AT, DE, IE, IT and HR provided an update concerning their tracing applications*

- *PT reported about the status of their tracing application and also about the continuation of the public consultation procedure related to spectrum allocation*

- *IE also reported on the temporary assignments for spectrum rights*

2.1. Measures implemented by NRAs

The role played by the communications sector during the Covid-19 emergency in IT has been investigated by AGCOM in its Annual Report 2020, specifically in the ad hoc study on "The impact of coronavirus in regulated areas". Furthermore, IT has just released a special edition of AGCOM Communication Monitoring Markets System entitled "Covid-19 monitoring", providing the results of a monitoring on revenues and volumes in the electronic communications, postal and media sectors over the first 5 months of the year.

2.2. Measures implemented by public institutions

BE reported that on 27 July, the National Security Council announced stricter measures to limit the spread of COVID-19. Working from home is again highly recommended and even obliged where possible in one province.

2.3. Measures to monitor the spread of Covid-19

BEREC has asked NRAs if there are any tracing applications/solutions in place in their Member State in order to monitor the spread of Covid-19. Information provided earlier to BEREC is available in the previous iterations of this summary report.

An update on the issue of tracing applications/solutions, as of 28 July, has been provided to BEREC by AT, DE, HR, IT, IE and PT. In AT a civil society platform has been recently created to decide on the further development and promotion of the already existing "Stopp Corona-App". DE reported that the app, which is now available in most of the European countries and in several languages, was recently updated and so far there have been 16.2 million downloads. In IT the number of downloads of "Immuni" has reached 4.2 million.

IE reported that on 6 July the Irish Health Service Executive launched a contact tracing app based on the Apple-Google decentralised model. The application has been downloaded by 1.445 million users. PT is also in the phase of preparing to launch an application.

The app 'Stop COVID-19' has been introduced in HR on 27 July 2020. The purpose of the app is to inform the user if/when it has been in epidemiologically relevant contact with the app of a person confirmed to have COVID-19 disease and to give instructions and recommendations for further action. The app is free and users independently decide whether to download the app to their mobile device.

2.4. Measures relating to attacks against telco facilities

BE reported that a second attack against a base station occurred on 14 July.

2.5. Measure related to spectrum management

PT reported that the public consultation procedure on the draft regulation of the auction for allocation of frequency user rights for 5G and other relevant bands proceeded and it ended on 3 July. In CZ a public consultation on the 5G auction also went ahead and was closed on 7 July. IE reported that in March 2020, networks saw overall voice traffic increasing by 30-60% while data traffic grew by 20-25% at that time. Therefore IE put in place a licensing framework for the temporary assignment of additional spectrum rights of use in the 700 MHz Duplex and 2.6 GHz Band; and liberalised spectrum rights of use in the 2.1 GHz Band, as this band is otherwise currently licensed for 3G-use. The initial temporary licences were issued for a period of three months (April – July), which have now been extended for a further three months (July – October). Any further extension of these temporary licences will be considered, subject to the receipt of a joint or common request from the mobile operators and the prevailing circumstances.

2.6. Measures related to disinformation

IT reported further data concerning disinformation. in the third release of AGCOM Online Disinformation Observatory[5], since the end of April, the percentage of coronavirus posts/tweets out of the total appears to be higher for sources of disinformation than for sources of information.

PT published a "Mobile networks and health - facts, data and challenges" guide, where it clarifies the possible effects of mobile networks, especially the 5G, on health, in order to counter misinformation.

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[5] https://www.agcom.it/documents/10179/4691489/Allegato+14-7-2020/718e2d6d-3ee3-4752-9a58-4e184d4d2924?version=1.0