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 21 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.

7 NRAs[2] have reported changes to the situation in their Member State since the previous information gathering exercise (as of 16 April 2020). The status report will continue to be updated based on regular input from NRAs, with the next summary report to be published on 24 April 2020.

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

Key updates since previous report

- *One NRAs (BG) is reporting a drop in the overall internet traffic, approaching the level of the overall Internet traffic before the Covid-19´s crisis outbreak. One NRA (DK) report that multiple operators report a gradual decrease in overall internet traffic, some operators report a more significant decrease pointing towards normalization.*

- *Six NRAs have detected a solid increase in the interconnection traffic.*

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, a growing number of NRAs (AL, AT, BE, CY, DE, EE, ES, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, SI and SK) have been reporting a stabilisation in overall traffic.

Two NRAs (BG, RO) have detected a decrease of overall internet traffic from the peak reached after the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. One NRA (DK) has received reportings from multiple

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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 reported a change since the previous data gathering exercise: BG, DK, FR, IT, LT, MT, PL.

operators that the decrease in overall internet traffic has been significant. This trend shows a third phase in the overall traffic evolution during the crisis: sharp increase, stabilisation and, now, a decrease from the peak. More specifically, another NRA (NL) has reported the same decrease from the peak but only for mobile traffic.

One of these NRAs (BG) point out that this downward trend is more intense. Consequently, overall internet traffic is beginning to revert to average internet traffic levels of before the start of the Covid-19 crisis. Six NRAs (BG, DK, NL, PL, RO, SI) have explicitly reported an increase of traffic in the IXPs (Internet Exchange Points) since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. One NRA (DK) has reported that multiple operators have performed upgrades in the IXPs in order to cope with traffic increases.

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 explicitly 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, SK) 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, four NRA (CY, IT, LT, MT) have reported that the current situation has not required any decision regarding the traffic management. Five NRAs (AL, HR, FR, NL and 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 needs be.

Actions taken and communication by operators

In several Member States, operators have implemented customer-friendly measures, for example:

Additional data and free-of-charge services:

- 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, IT, LT, 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/or enforcement agencies (MT, PT, LT) as well as for the people without internet access (FR);

- providing free mobile minutes and text messages (DK) and increasing amount of mobile data (DK, FR) to customers who are currently outside the country;

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

Information and convenience:

- 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, DK, EE, ES, HR, EL, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, ME, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI);

- providing consultations on how to set-up remote school/work equipment at home using internet access services (LT);

- 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, MT), providing alternative payment methods (RO), or extending invoice payment due date for the elderly (PL);

- conveying information regarding national Covid-19 guidelines to customers on behalf of the police

- Social support and charity to Covid-related funds and projects (LT).

Some technical measures taken by operators include:

- 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, FR);

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

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

- upgrading network equipment (RO) and traffic (re)balancing, mainly on fixed networks (NL).

Further communication towards end-users

No new information has been reported since the previous version of the summary report.