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 22 June 2021[1]. This iteration of the report provides an update on the information collected by BEREC regarding the status of networks in Member States (see section 1.2. below) based on a 'traffic light' illustration. During the entire reporting period (i.e. since BEREC first published a report on how the Covid-19 crisis is impacting internet capacity etc.), 34[2] NRAs have 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[3] for further details on some of the early measures applied by NRAs during the crisis.

1. Status of internet capacity

In general, while traffic on fixed and mobile networks have increased during the (approximate) sixteen months of the Covid-19 crisis, no major congestion issues have ever been reported by NRAs to BEREC.

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[1] Relevant information provided by NRAs in April and May 2021 is also taken into account in this report.

[2] 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, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, and TR.

[3] 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

For this report, which takes into consideration information provided during the second quarter (April-June) of 2021, 3 NRAs[4] have provided updates of substance (i.e. information highlighting changes in answers to the questions asked in the internal questionnaire BEREC uses for its information gathering exercise) on the status of internet capacity in their Member State, while 22 NRAs[5] have explicitly mentioned that either the situation remains stable or there is nothing new to report.

> ***Key updates since previous report***
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> - *In EL, a major update of the Greek Internet Exchange was concluded in April 2021.*
>
> - *In IT, while mobile and fixed traffic continues to be higher than pre-pandemic levels, there is a notable tapering off in the traffic increase.*
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> - *In PT, overall internet traffic was 68% above the volume reported the week before the pandemic was declared in the country (compared to +97% at the end of March 2021).*

1.1. Status of traffic

In general, three phases in the evolution of internet traffic have been observed during the crisis: a sharp increase in its early weeks, a subsequent stabilisation and, through the latter part of 2020 and 2021 thus far, a decrease from the peak (experienced early in the crisis).

For the second quarter of 2021, the following updates on the status of internet traffic have been reported:

In EL, a major update of the Greek Internet Exchange was concluded in April 2021[6].

In IT, the most recent information shows that while data traffic has significantly increased since October 2020, (due to new local and national restrictions), there has been no exceptional network congestion in either mobile or fixed access networks. Compared to the beginning of the crisis, the volume of mobile data traffic is up by 57% for mid-June 2021, while the volume of fixed data traffic is up by 41% during the same period, confirming the decreasing trend noted in recent weeks.

In PT, during April and May most operators reported a stabilisation or increase in their traffic when compared to previous months. No traffic exceeding the alert states of telecommunications systems and no significant congestions have been reported. There were no temporary or exceptional network congestions resulting in a significant deterioration of the quality of Internet access service for end users. Compared to the pre-Covid-19 period, there

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[4] NRAs from the following Member States have provided substantive updates during the data gathering exercises in April, May and/or June 2021: EL, IT and PT.

[5] NRAs from the following Member States having explicitly mentioned that there were no changes to the status of internet capacity in the first quarter of 2021: AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, HU, LT, LU, LV, ME, NL, NO, RO, SI, SK.

[6] https://www.gr-ix.gr/2021/04/07/gr-ixathens-new-platform/

has been a sustained increase in traffic and that continues with most mobile operators reporting a slight increase in traffic compared to the end of 2020. ISPs report that increases in traffic during working hours is linked to distance learning.

In PT (reporting as of mid-June 2021), overall internet traffic was 68% above the volume reported the week before the pandemic was declared in the country (compared to +97% at the end of March 2021). Mobile data traffic was 44% above the volume registered before the pandemic was declared (compared to +16% at the end of March 2021), while fixed data traffic (which represents 94% of overall internet traffic) was 69% above the volume registered the week before the pandemic was declared (compared to +103% at the end of March 2021).

1.2. Status of networks

Figure 1 below illustrates the results of a data collection exercise that BEREC launched in October 2020 regarding the status of networks across Europe. NRAs were asked to provide a response on the overall status of telecommunications networks in their respective countries, based on the following categorisation:

- Green: Networks are working well, Covid-19 is not creating issues for the availability or general quality of IAS. No exceptional traffic management measures justified.

- Yellow: Covid-19 is causing limited congestion issues affecting the general quality of IAS (e.g., with 1 or 2 ISPs or networks). Exceptional traffic management measures might be possible but would require close scrutiny of the NRA under OI Regulation.

- Red: Severe and/or widely spread network congestion issues due to Covid-19 affecting the general quality of IAS and exceptional traffic management measures are likely justified and/or used.

In the second quarter of 2021, 28 NRAs[7] have responded to this request (all of which have indicated 'status green'). In the case where an NRA did not respond, the map appropriately shows 'no data' for such countries[8].

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[7] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, ME, MT, NL, NO, PL, PO, PT, RO, SI and SK and TR.

[8] In this case, 10 countries: AL, BA, CH, ES, IS, LI, MK, RS, SE and XK. The map also includes a number of non-BEREC countries, which are clearly indicated as per the legend.
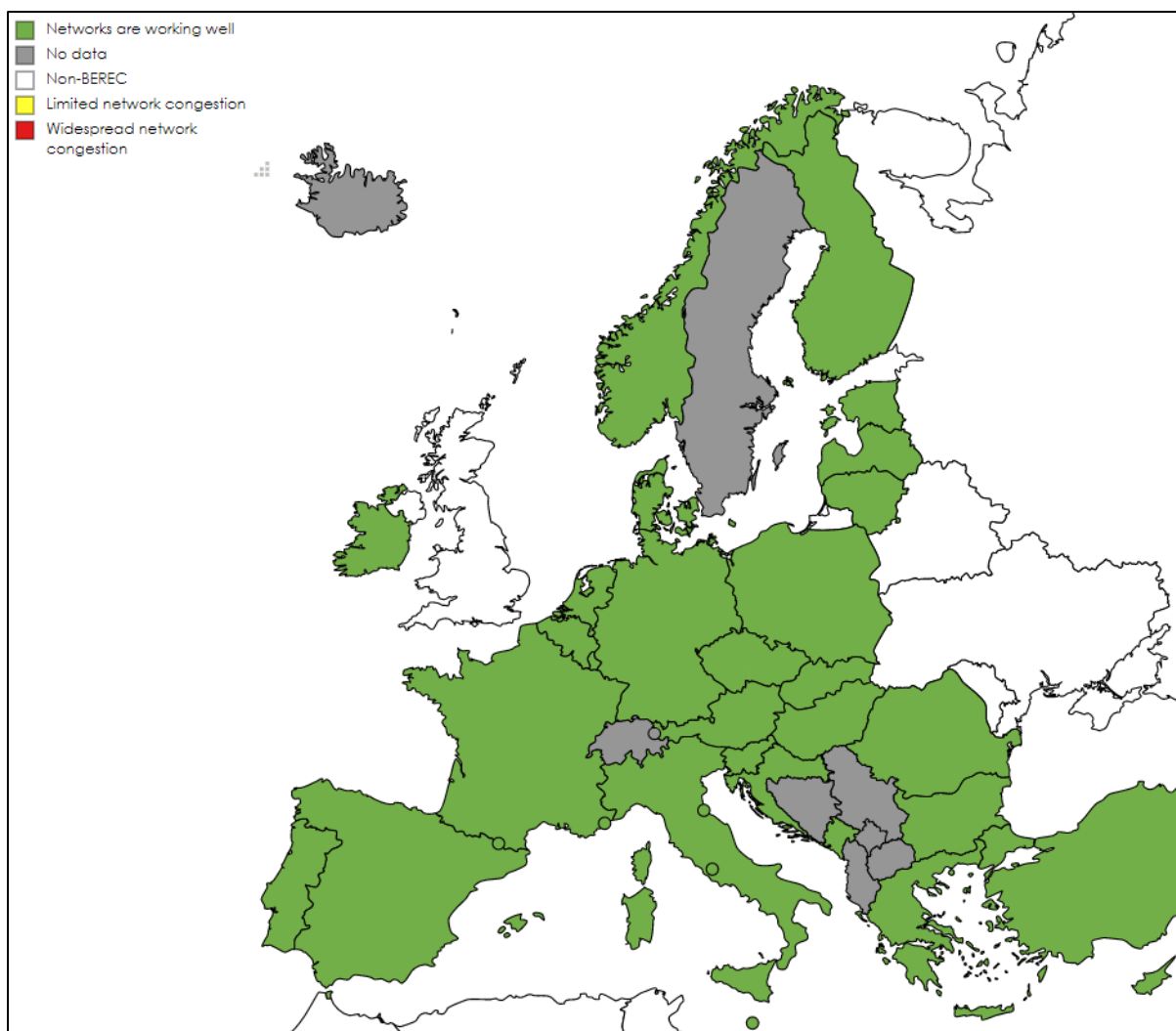
Figure 1: Status of networks (based on information submitted by NRAs up to, and including, 22 June 2021)

1.3. 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. No new information has been provided by NRAs during the second quarter of 2021.

1.4. Actions taken and communication by operators

No NRA has provided new information to be included in this section of the report.

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

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Key updates since previous report

- *PT submitted information related to measures implemented by the NRA, other public bodies and the operators.*

- *IT reported on measures related to disinformation.*

- *AT, DE, IT, PT and TR provided an update concerning their tracing applications.*

Between March and June the electronic communications networks remained stable, no major disruptions occurred and the NRAs continued to analyse the effects of the pandemic.

2.1.   Measures implemented by Ministries

PT reported that the micro and small size companies along with sole proprietorships affected by the crisis (with billing reductions by 25%) as well as the companies that, in order to control the pandemic situation, were closed by legal or administrative determination, may require their providers of electronic communications services to suspend their contracts without penalties, regardless of the existence of binding periods.

2.2.   Measures implemented by NRAs

On 28 May 2021 ANACOM published a report about the complaints received during the pandemic crisis, since the first declaration of a national emergency state, on 19 March 2020. In this period, ANACOM received around 92,000 complaints regarding electronic communications services. This report also highlights the weekly evolution of complaints and details the consumers' main problems using electronic communications services during the Covid-19 response. Following the conclusions presented in this report, the NRA issued a set of recommendations to electronic communications providers regarding customer support services, complaints handling, information disclosure and the needs of vulnerable end users[9].

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[9] Detailed information available at: https://www.anacom.pt/render.jsp?contentId=1663600&languageId=1.

2.3. Measures related to disinformation

On March 2021, IT published an Interim Report regarding the public consultation on the news media system [10], launched following the release of the AGCOM Report on "Journalism at the time of the Covid-19 emergency", including an extensive focus on disinformation. The public consultation benefited from the contributions of 19 stakeholders representing publishers, journalists, trade unions, professional associations, civil society organizations and academia.

2.4. Measures related to security of communications infrastructures

TR reported that, as a result of examination and malware analysis, signatures were created for mobile applications and malwares, and malware activities were detected accordingly. In this context, TR detected 750 fake conference applications and implemented the necessary procedures. A 'Covid-19 threat intelligence report' was published on the CERT Communications Platform (a secure communications platform among the national CERTs and sectoral and institutional CERTs) and shared with the relevant parties.

119 malware reviews and 569 malware information were shared in the report. Due to the increase in the use of remote working methods, 27,423 vulnerabilities have been detected by scanning remote management services and necessary warnings have been issued to the relevant public institutions. 2,075 harmful droppers and command & control centers related to Covid-19 were blocked.

2.5. Measures to monitor the spread of Covid-19

DE reported that, exactly one year after its launch, the Corona-Warn-App has been downloaded about 28.7 million times.

IT reported that more than 10.6 million users have downloaded the Immuni app in Italy as of 19 June 2021. After a significant increase in the number of downloads between November 2020 and January 2021, due to some relevant awareness campaigns, the spread of Immuni among the Italian population has remained essentially stable. The Immuni app can also be used to download the COVID-19 Green Pass – EU digital COVID certificate, along with three more online platforms (IO app, the Regional Electronic Health Record and the dedicated website dgc.gov.it).

PT reported that there were over 3.2 million downloads of the STAYAWAY COVID app and 3,137 codes activated by users on 28 May 2021.

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[10]   The   Interim   Report   is   available,   only   in   Italian   language,   at https://www.agcom.it/documents/10179/22074864/Documento+generico+05-03-2021/74d52b09-43ed-43fd-9571-2c4c2d93111b?version=1.0