

# **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<sup>1</sup> information gathering exercise, and includes the most recent data provided to BEREC by its constituent NRAs as of 30 March 2021<sup>2</sup>. 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.), 33<sup>3</sup> 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<sup>4</sup> 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 Covid-19 crisis, no major congestion issues have ever been reported by NRAs to BEREC.

---

<sup>1</sup> While the monthly information gathering exercise has continued in the first three months of 2021, BEREC will only publish the summary report on a monthly basis if there is a sufficient amount of new information from NRAs. Failing that, the standard publication periodicity will be on a quarterly basis.

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by NRAs in January and February 2021 is also taken into account in this report.

<sup>3</sup> 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, and SK.

<sup>4</sup> 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](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 first three months of 2021, 4 NRAs<sup>5</sup> have provided updates of substance (i.e. information highlighting changes in answers to the questions asked in the questionnaire BEREK uses for its information gathering exercise) on the status of internet capacity in their Member State, while 22 NRAs<sup>6</sup> have explicitly mentioned that either the situation remains stable or there is nothing new to report.

#### **Key updates since previous report**

- *In IT, while traffic has fluctuated (due to local and national restrictions since October 2020), there has been no exceptional network congestion in mobile and fixed access networks.*
- *In PL, compared to the pre-Covid-19 period, there 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.*
- *In PT, overall internet traffic was 97% above the volume reported the week before the pandemic was declared in the country.*
- *In MT, as an acknowledgment of the stabilising situation, the NRA halted the requirement for operators to report on network status after June 2020, but continued its own monitoring through consumer complaints (social media etc.), which have reverted to pre-Covid-19 levels, thus highlighting the steady status of networks.*

### **1.1. Status of networks**

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 now into 2021, a decrease from the peak (experienced early in the crisis).

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

In IT, the most recent information shows that while traffic has fluctuated (due to local and national restrictions since October 2020), there has been no exceptional network congestion in mobile and fixed access networks. Compared to the beginning of the crisis, the volume of mobile data traffic is up by 58% for mid-March 2021, while the volume of fixed data traffic is up by 86% during the same (almost 12 month) period.

---

<sup>5</sup> NRAs from the following Member States have provided substantive updates at least once during the data gathering exercises in January, February and March 2021: IT, MT, PL, and PT.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

In PL, during February and March most operators reported a stabilisation or slight 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 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, at the end of the first quarter of 2021, overall internet traffic was 97% above the volume reported the week before the pandemic was declared in the country. Mobile data traffic was 13% above the volume registered before the pandemic was declared, while fixed data traffic (which represents 96% of overall internet traffic) was 103% compared to early 2020.

## 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 first three months of 2021, 26 NRAs<sup>7</sup> 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<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, ME, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK and TR.

<sup>8</sup> In this case, 11 countries: AL, BA, CH, ES, FI, 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.

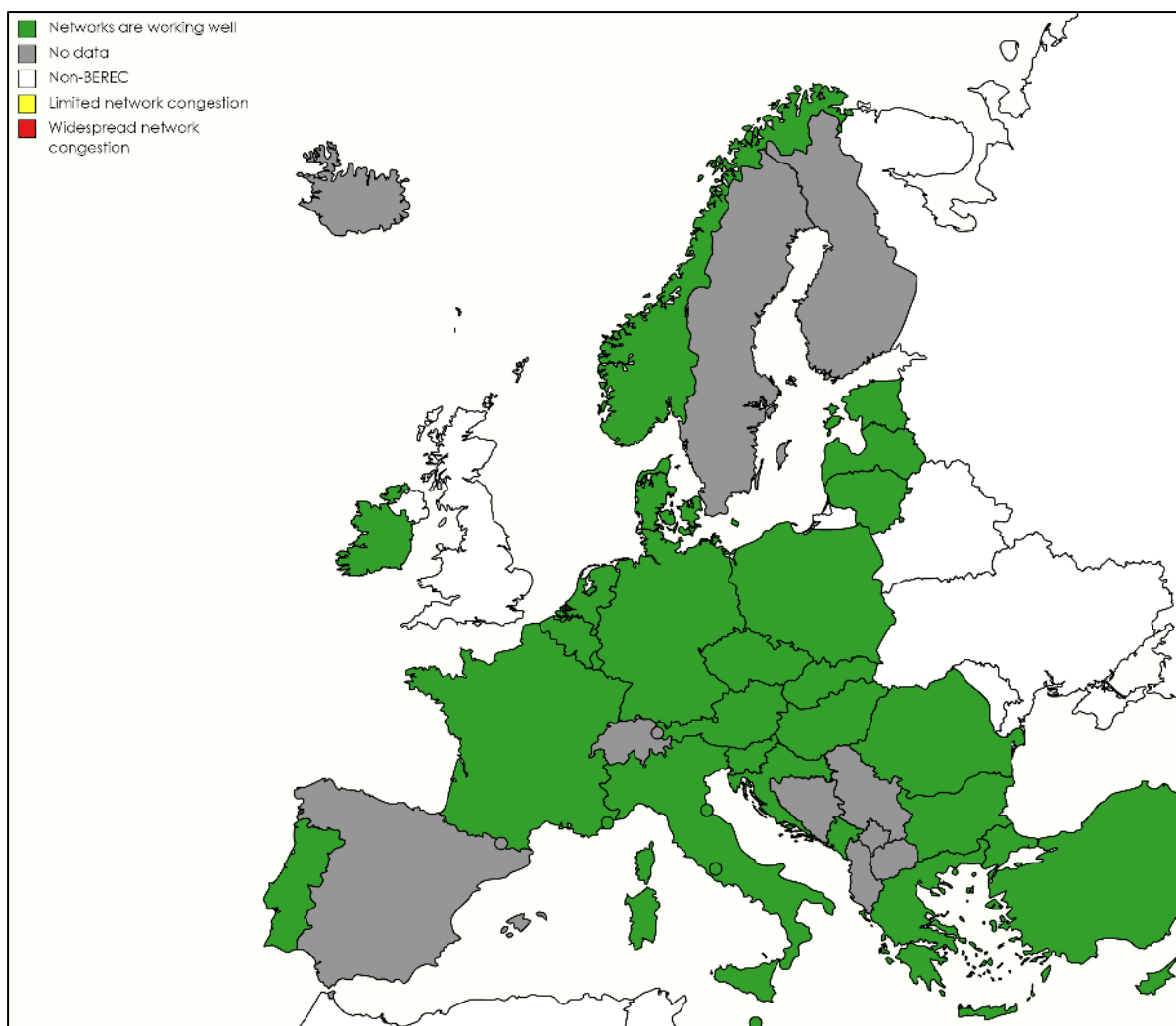


Figure 1: Status of networks (based on information submitted by NRAs up to, and including, 30 March 2021)

### 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. Two NRAs provided updates of substance, in this respect, during the first quarter of 2021.

In MT, despite the crisis, the information provided by operators showed that there had been no material impact on networks. Thus, regular reporting to the NRA on the issue was stopped during the summer of 2020. The NRA continued to collect information about user experience primarily through its own channels for consumer complaints and other means such as social media. The level of complaints received are stable and on a par with complaints received before the start of the crisis.

In PT, the NRA has republished information about good practices regarding the usage of electronic communications networks and services<sup>9</sup>.

#### **1.4. Actions taken and communication by operators**

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

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.anacom-consumidor.pt/-/covid-19-boas-praticas-para-uma-utilizacao-eficiente-da-internet>

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

### *Key updates since previous report*

- *BE, PT, TR and IT submitted information related to measures implemented by the NRA, other public bodies and the operators*
- *IT and PT reported on measures related to disinformation*
- *AT, DE, IT, PT and TR provided an update concerning their tracing applications*

Although health-related statistics worsened between January and March 2021, the electronic communications networks remained stable, no major disruptions occurred and the NRAs continuously analysed the effects of the pandemic.

### **2.1. Measures implemented by the NRA**

PT updated that a report on the impact of the pandemic on the use of communication services was published on 11 March 2021. During the first quarter of 2021 the NRA assigned the right of use of the short number 2424 to the Shared Services of the Ministry of Health (SPMS) to be used exclusively for sending SMS to the population in the context of the implementation of the national plan of vaccination against Covid-19.

IT has investigated the role played by the communications sector during the Covid-19 emergency in its Annual Report 2020, specifically in an ad hoc study entitled 'The impact of coronavirus in regulated areas'<sup>10</sup>. The study covers the emergency measures adopted by the NRA in March to support the Government action in the first phase of crisis management, and then moves on to the examination of market scenarios and a broader overview of the communications sector. In three special editions of the Communication Monitoring Markets System, with a focus on the first nine months of 2020, entitled 'Covid-19 monitoring' the NRA has highlighted all the measures taken in the media and online platforms sectors during the Covid-19 emergency and has updated the data about revenues in the NRA's areas of competence (telecommunications, media, online, and postal sector), and about fixed and mobile network traffic.

TR updated that a new service called e-contract termination which allows the termination of subscriptions through the e-Government gateway entered into force. The regulation eliminated the need for contact between consumers and operator employees. With e-contract termination, thousands of consumers terminated their contracts without physical contact. Operators have quickly developed the software and hardware required for this e-contract

---

<sup>10</sup> Also available in English at [www.agcom.it](http://www.agcom.it)

termination process. In addition, the NRA highlighted that safety certificates for base stations are issued remotely by means of electronic facilities during the pandemic.

## **2.2. Measures implemented by other public bodies**

PT reported that due to the increase in Covid-19 infection cases, a new lockdown began on 15 January 2021. The new law<sup>11</sup> was approved in order to establish exceptional and temporary measures to respond to the Covid-19 epidemic with respect to the electronic communications sector.

Regarding consumer protection, a set of measures, similar to those applied between March and September 2020, were reinforced from 1 January 2021 onwards, covering the first half of the year. According to these measures, providers are not permitted to suspend their services to consumers who failed payment and are unemployed or had their household income decrease by 20% or more or were infected with Covid-19. Consumers that are unemployed or had their household income decrease by 20% or more can also terminate their electronic communications contracts without penalties during this period.

## **2.3. Measures implemented by operators**

BE reported that since mid-January 2021 the largest operators send a monthly overview of the network traffic instead of a weekly overview.

PT reported that one network operator announced the reinforcement of its network capacity, in view of the expected increase in fixed data traffic due to the new lockdown.

## **2.4. Measures related to disinformation**

IT reported that in an analysis of the news media system conducted by the NRA, a specific survey concerning the impact of the epidemic on the journalistic profession was launched last summer. The results of this survey were included in the General Report of the AGCOM Journalism Observatory Third Edition, entitled 'The journalistic profession in the Covid-19 emergency challenge'. The report was released at the end of November for a public consultation open to any news media system stakeholder. The NRA has set up an inter-institutional group with the Italian Data Protection Authority to jointly assess online platforms initiatives from a holistic point of view, covering both the right to information and the right to privacy.

PT reported that the NRA has warned against the increase in fraud and cyber-attacks related to Covid-19 on 12 February 2021.

---

<sup>11</sup> Decree-Law no. 14-A/2021 of 12.02.2021 (<https://data.dre.pt/eli/dec-lei/14-A/2021/02/12/p/dre>)

## **2.5. Measures to monitor the spread of Covid-19**

AT reported that by the end of March 2021, 1.4 million downloads of the Stopp Corona App were registered.

DE reported that more than 11.1 million test results have been transmitted via the app, and around 310,000 positive test results have been shared by users, which represents around 60% of all positive tests results that could have been shared by the users. The next major update, likely in April 2021, is expected to include a feature that allows the user to actively check-in at locations, such as restaurants or shops, for improved contact tracing. As of 26 March 2021, 26.5 million downloads have been registered.

IT reported that in light of the update to the app, available from the end of 2020 and implemented in the following weeks thanks to the collaboration of every Italian Regional Health Service, every user can now upload their data independently, by communicating the CUN code associated with the medical report to the dedicated call centre, if they test positive by molecular swab. The 'unlocking' operation using the CUN code is on a voluntary basis and allows Immuni to warn people that the positive user has come into contact with them within the previous 14 days. As of 16 February 2021, more than 10.3 million downloads were registered.

PT reported more than 3 million downloads of the STAYAWAY COVID app, as well as 13,769 codes generated by the Ministry of Health Services and 3,062 codes activated by users as of 2 February 2021.

TR reported that there have been more than 10 million downloads of the application in the Google Play Store as of 30 March 2021.