Apps – Key messages for media and citizens

KEY MESSAGES FOR MEDIA

- Contact tracing apps can play a key role in all phases of crisis management to help interrupt the transmission chain of the virus. Most Member States have decided to launch mobile apps to complement manual contact tracing of the spread of coronavirus.
- If interoperable and sufficiently used, contact tracing apps can help monitoring the spread of the virus, particularly in hotspot areas, and help authorities to detect potential clusters and outbreaks, as highlighted in the Commission's Communication on "Short-term EU health preparedness for COVID-19 outbreaks" of 15 July.
- While many member states have successfully implemented national contact tracing and warning applications, it is now time to make them talk to each other. Travel and personal exchange are the core of the European project and the Single Market. The gateway will facilitate this in these times of pandemic and save lives.
- In the fight against the coronavirus, most Member States have launched a national contact tracing and warning app, or planned to do so. The setup of the interoperability gateway service by the Commission follows the agreement by Member States on technical specifications to ensure a safe exchange of information between national contact tracing and warning apps based on a decentralised architecture. This covers almost all national contact tracing and warning apps launched in the EU.
- To ensure interoperability of contact tracing apps also cross-border, Member States with the support of the Commission, have developed common guiding principles (published in May) and, technical specifications (published in June). These are based on the joint EU toolbox on tracing apps and the Commission guidance on data protection (both published in April). Implementing Decision 2020/1023 was adopted on 15 July to lay down modalities for the processing in the European Federation Gateway Service.
- The Federation Gateway, a digital infrastructure that ensures the communication of information between national apps' backend servers, will ensure that apps will work seamlessly when users declare that they traveling to another participating country. Users thus only need to install one app and will still be able to report a positive test or receive an alert, even if they travel abroad.
- The gateway will efficiently receive and pass on relevant information from national apps to minimise the amount of data exchanged and thus reduce users' data consumption. Information will only be stored in the gateway for a maximum period of 14 days. No other information except for arbitrary keys, generated by the national apps, will be handled by the gateway. The information exchanged is fully

pseudonymised, encrypted, kept to the essential, and only stored in the gateway for a maximum of 14 days. The gateway does not process any data that would allow the identification of individual persons.

- The Commission is responsible for the development and operation of the gateway, and sub-contracted those tasks to SAP and T-System. The gateway will be operated from the Commission's data centre in Luxembourg.
- Tracing apps are voluntary, secure, interoperable and respect people's privacy. Apps should use arbitrary identifiers, no geolocation or movement data should be used. All apps have to be temporary only, so they will be dismantled as soon as the pandemic is over.

KEY MESSAGES FOR CITIZENS

Background information

- **Why using tracing and warning apps?**

Tracing and warning apps can help break the chain of coronavirus infections, nationally and across borders, and save lives by complementing manual tracing. In the fight against the coronavirus, most Member States have launched a national contact tracing and warning app.

- **How does it work?**

The contact tracing and warning app informs an app user if he/she has been near a person who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, for a prolonged period and close enough. This encounter would be considered a high risk exposure.

The app can be voluntarily downloaded by the user on his/her smartphone. The app uses Bluetooth technology to measure the distance and duration of the encounter between people who have installed the app (usually more than 15 minutes within less than 2m). The device produces a random key, which is generated each day for each user who has chosen to use the app. The keys generated by the user's device during the last 14 days are uploaded on the backend server of the national competent authority. These keys are then sent to the devices of all other app users with whom the user has been in contact with.

If people using the app test positive for the corona virus, they are provided a code by their public health authority that they can introduce in the app, allowing them to inform other users who have been previously in contact with them about the risk of infection, thanks to the exchange of the random keys between devices. Indeed, these keys are retrieved when somebody signals infection to the virus to allow then to find those keys that were in proximity to the user keys in the last 14 days before the code was downloaded and notify them of being in such proximity.

The identity of the user who was diagnosed with COVID-19 is never revealed to the exposed users, or any other user.

- **How does it work with the Google and Apple exposure notification feature?**

Almost all smartphones used in the EU rely on Android or iOS, the mobile operating systems owned by Google or Apple. Google and Apple have updated their systems with an 'exposure notification' feature that supports certain a type of contact tracing apps. These apps have to be run by public health authorities and are designed so detecting a potential exposure to the virus happens on the phone, rather than on a central database.

So most Member States public health authorities have therefore decided to design tracing and warning apps that are supported by Android and iOS.

Health authorities are in contact with Google and Apple regularly to ensure that any technical problems with apps are resolved quickly.

A recent update to iOS and Android included 'Exposure Notification Express' which allows – if a public health authority chooses to use it- a basic exposure notification feature to work on Android 6.0 and iOS smartphones, without the need to install the authority's custom-built app. No EU country is currently considering using this feature. This does not affect in any way the functioning of the apps.

- **How does the common EU approach to apps protect personal data?**

The apps should be downloaded and activated voluntarily by the users. Personal data are pseudonymised to avoid identifying the personal identity of the user nor his/her geographical location. In addition, MS must ensure short retention period of the data in their back end server.

- **How do tracing and warning app work across borders in Europe?**

The virus does not stop at borders, and therefore the Commission and Member States are working to ensure that these apps can help break cross-border infection chains by augmenting the information available to manual contact tracing systems, as well as their reach. Member States and the Commission are working on the **interoperability** of the national Apps, to allow citizens to use one single app wherever they are in Europe, while continuing to benefit from the tracing service and still being able to report a positive test or to receive an alert.

They have put in place the legal and technical framework to allow the creation of a **European Federation Gateway Service (EFGS)** for contact tracing and warning applications. The EFGS is a digital infrastructure that allows the national backend servers to exchange information between themselves, while minimising the amount of data exchanged and thus reduce users' data consumption. The gateway only handles the minimum necessary data, i.e. the randomly-generated keys and associated data, which does not allow identifying a user on its own. The information exchanged between national backends is pseudonymised, kept to the minimum necessary, and stored for a maximum period of 14 days in the EFGS, preventing the identification of individual persons nor his/her geographical location.

The Commission has sub-contracted the development and set-up of the gateway to SAP and T-System. The gateway will be operated from the Commission's data centre in Luxembourg. It will be operational and ready to support Member States by the end of September, with first national apps being planned to be connected throughout October.

- **How will we know that the apps are working?**

Member States are committed to monitoring and evaluating the apps and their contribution to the fight against the pandemic. The Commission, with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, is assisting Member States to identify a series of assessment criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the apps. Some of those criteria could include, for example, the uptake of the app as a percentage of population and number of users notified of potential exposure.

Key messages

- Tracing and warning apps can help break the chain of coronavirus infections and save lives by complementing manual tracing and subsequently help reduce the spread of the virus.
- The virus does not stop at borders, and therefore the Commission and Member States are working to ensure that these apps can help break cross-border infection chains by augmenting the information available to manual contact tracing systems, as well as their reach.
- The contact tracing and warning app informs an app user if he/she has been near a person for a prolonged period who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Users have the control over the use of tracing and warning Apps: their use is promoted on a voluntary basis; the user has to enter a code in the system if she/he has tested positive; users have to activate the Bluetooth system in order for the app to detect proximity with other users.
- Users' personal data are protected: only pseudonymised and data are transferred between Apps and between Apps and national backends. Data exchanged in the EFGS are kept to the minimum necessary, and only stored for 14 days in the gateway.
- The Member States and the Commission coordinate efforts to allow the cross border interoperability of the national Apps and allow citizens to use one single App able to receive exposure notifications and to communicate positive tests wherever they are in Europe.
- The Commission set up a common digital infrastructure to ensure the communication of information between national app servers, called European Federation Gateway Service (EFGS), which is expected to be operational as of end of September 2020. In an initial stage, around 10 Member States will be ready to use it, which are expected to join gradually throughout October, and will soon be followed by other Member States.
- We are closely monitoring the effectiveness of the apps in contributing to the fight against the pandemic.