



20TH EHEALTH NETWORK 8 NOVEMBER 2021, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

COVER NOTE

5.3 Discussion on contact tracing apps and EFGS

1. Issue at stake

22 contact tracing and warning applications (apps) have been rolled out across the EU and the European Federation Gateway Service (EFGS) has managed to connect 19 apps. With the EFGS in stable operations, the key question at stake is how Member States see the future of national apps and the EFGS itself from a strategic point of view. Given the fact that digital proximity tracing is still an emerging technology in the fight against COVID-19, methods for assessing and monitoring its effectiveness remain unclear.

2. Summary

In April 2020, the eHealth Network adopted an EU toolbox, which set out the foundations of a common pan-European approach to contact tracing and warning apps. The eHealth Network adopted the interoperability guidelines in May 2020 and in June 2020 the interoperability specifications for a European Federation Gateway Service (EFGS). The EFGS was deployed by the end of September 2020. The EFGS has since October 2020 managed to connect 19 national contact tracing apps (out of 22)¹. One Member State (CZ) has stopped their contact tracing app at the end of October 2021, but many Member States have indicated they do not plan to discontinue their apps yet.

The rollout of these apps and of the EFGS has been achieved in a record time, and is an excellent example of European cooperation in the area of digital health. However, the choice of using decentralised privacy-preserving technology limits significantly (central) app-related data collection needed for proper performance monitoring and digital contact tracing effectiveness assessment. For this reason, the Commission is launching a study to collect evidence and evaluate the effectiveness of the common approach, coordination and support actions at EU level, including the epidemiological impact of these apps.

The mandate of the ECDC will be strengthened under the European Health Union and broadened to include digital contact tracing and their interoperability. The activities on the EFGS are planned to transition to the ECDC by March 2022. With the EFGS in stable operations, it is important to start preparing the future of the EFGS and the apps.

3. Format of procedure in the meeting

For discussion on the future of contact tracing apps and the EFGS. Member States will be invited to provide their input, to share lessons learned and to identify possible follow-up actions from the Coordinated Actions group on contact tracing apps and the EFGS.

¹ DE, IT, IE, LV, HR, DK, ES, NL, PL, BE, FI, AT, NO, SI, CY, CZ, MT, LT and EE. There is currently one additional Member State (PT) that as requested to join the EFGS in the short term. Two other Member States (FR and HU) have deployed apps that are not interoperable with the EFGS.