

Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and
Energy, Bundesnetzagentur

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Report on utilisation of telecommunications networks – internet still working even in crisis situation

Telecommunications undertakings are subject to particular legal requirements regarding the maintenance of telecommunications services, including during times of crisis.

As physical contact between people has been increasingly restricted, companies and authorities are making use of home working arrangements and schools are turning to online education. Consequently, there has been a jump in the use of telephone services, video conferencing and streaming technology. The Bundesnetzagentur has therefore been working closely with representatives from across the telecoms industry (network operators and associations) to identify any potential network overload at an early stage and to find constructive solutions to avert it.

The Bundesnetzagentur is not currently aware of any network overload in Germany as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. On the contrary, the talks have indicated that the telecoms networks are stable at the moment and network operators have taken all preparatory steps to keep their networks running as well as possible during the crisis. **Network operators are now providing daily reports to the Bundesnetzagentur, which confirm these findings.**

However, the rapidly changing situation makes it impossible to rule out that the network could become overloaded. To prepare for such an eventuality, the Bundesnetzagentur has developed **guidelines** with solutions and measures **for permissible traffic management**. For example, the European net neutrality Regulation allows data-intensive services in a data traffic category, such as streaming services, to be slowed down if needed. It is also possible to reduce the bandwidth of tariffs or individual tariffs, provided that this is done for all applications equally within the tariff. These guidelines are “dynamic”, ie they can be adjusted to the

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ongoing situation in dialogue with the telecoms sector and further measures permitted within the framework of the net neutrality Regulation can be added if necessary. The Bundesnetzagentur is making every effort to work closely with network operators under these special circumstances and to engage in constructive communication with them to find reliable solutions to maintain the stability of the networks throughout the crisis.

At the same time, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy is holding talks with streaming providers focusing on the possibility of reducing video quality to reduce the load on the network should problems for the network become likely. Some major streaming service providers (Netflix, Amazon, Google with its YouTube service, Facebook) have already offered to scale down the data volume with which they feed their streaming services into the network across Europe, which is expected to provide a significant reduction in load.

Finally, to clarify the situation, it should also be pointed out that much of the disruption internet users are currently experiencing is caused by factors that are not related to the network, such as inadequate server capacity for working from home or internet access that does not have adequate data transmission rates for upload and download. Such problems are not caused by any (potential) overloading of the networks.