

Media Information

Privacy Protecting Proximity Tracing to fight Corona

Berlin/Geneva. April 1, 2020. – The Pan-European Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing (PEPP-PT) multinational initiative today announced to provide the complete framework for a digital tracing solution in full compliance with European privacy and data protection law. This will help managing the COVID19 outbreak in a socially, economically and humanly tolerable way. As the COVID 19 pandemic is spreading rapidly in Europe and around the world, the founders and members of the initiative are convinced that a social and economic collapse can only be avoided if potential infection chains can swiftly be identified, and singular infection cases and their exposed contacts can quickly be isolated. Achieving this objective is essential for managing testing- and health-system-resources at maximum efficiency and, thus, to facilitate a restart of social and economic life.

The scale and speed required by this endeavor can solely be achieved using digital processes. The natural starting point for such processes are mobile phones. Some Asian countries have already deployed such efforts successfully and have shown a restart of social life and economy very quickly after suffering from a major epidemic outbreak or have prevented such major outbreaks altogether. It is the mission of PEPP-PT, starting as of now, to assist respective national initiatives by supplying a set of ready-to-use, well-tested and properly assessed mechanisms and standards, as well as support services for interoperability, outreach and operation. PEPP-PT enables these national initiatives to focus on integration of digitally scalable tools into national processes, law, customs, and requirements. PEPP-PT offers a certification service for local initiatives so national authorities can release applications with a high level of trust, built on both their credibility and the certainty that European standards in data protection, privacy and security will be enforced at all time, and that cross-border interoperability is supported.

The core features of PEPP-PT will include well-tested proximity-tracing technologies; secure data anonymization; trustworthy protocols to enable contact between user and health-officials in a data protection conforming environment; APIs that can provide anonymized contact chains as well as risk-scoring to other applications; etc. PEPP-PT also publishes a reference implementation providing building blocks for creating local applications for proximity tracing as well as secure and scalable backend services that can deal with hundreds of millions of registered devices per country immediately.

Marcel Salathé of EPFL said: “There is one and only one possibility to achieve what is the prerequisite for a gradual return to a normal everyday life and that is to trace physical proximity and immediately isolate infected cases, and quarantine their contacts. This is the way everybody – relatively short term – can return to almost normal social and economic life.”

Thomas Wiegand of TU Berlin/Fraunhofer HHI added: “Our initiative was created to adhere to strong European privacy and data protection laws and principles. The technical mechanisms and standards we provide fully protect privacy and leverage the possibilities and features of digital technology to maximize speed and real-time capability of any national pandemic response. Our idea is to make the technology available to as many countries, managers of infectious disease responses, and developers as quickly and as easily as possible.” Chris Boos of Arago adds “We aim to be the foundation of a democratic response to what has other systems have achieved in ways not acceptable to a free society.”

“We are keen to welcome new partners into our team. Interested parties can use our onboarding document available at our website <https://www.pepp-pt.org/>. Individuals or Boards representing a government should also get in touch and we will put them in contact with the network of governments already committed to PEPP-PT”, said Chris Boos who is also on the digital council of Angela Merkel. “Please understand, that we are focused on security, data protection, and quality first, we will only be able to onboard new partners to PEPP-PT core teams step by step.”

The PEPP-PT team today includes renown scientists, technologists and experts from well-known international institutions as well as a number of companies with the expertise to cover the areas of communication, psychology, epidemiology, proximity-tracing, security, encryption, data protection, application development, scalable systems, supercomputing infrastructure and artificial intelligence. The PEPP-PT initiative will be financed through donations and has adopted the WHO standards for such financing to avoid any external influence.

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Media background

The PEPP-PT mechanisms will have these core features:

1. Well-tested and established procedures for proximity measurement on popular mobile operating systems and devices.
2. Enforcement of data protection, anonymization, GDPR compliance, and security.
3. International interoperability to support tracing local infection chains even if a chain spans multiple PEPP-PT participating countries.
4. Scalable backend architecture and technology that can be deployed with local IT infrastructure.
5. Certification service to test and ensure local implementations use the PEPP-PT mechanisms in a secure and interoperable manner.

On demand, PEPP-PT will supply support services for national initiatives:

1. Support in implementing and financing local installation and trust campaigns.
2. If a local trust-center is not possible in the desirable time or national resources are not available, PEPP-PT will, either temporarily or for the long term, supply a scalable infrastructure that follows strict European data protection and privacy standards.
3. A repository of software components, advertising campaigns, and best practices used successfully by PEPP-PT members and shared with the community.