

# Europe tests gateway for tracing apps to work across borders

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In this April 27, 2020, file photo, passengers wearing face masks arrive in the main train station in Frankfurt, Germany. Germany launched a coronavirus tracing app Tuesday, June 16, 2020, that officials say is so secure even government ministers can use it. Smartphone apps have been touted as a high-tech tool in the effort to track down potential COVID-19 infections. But governments in privacy-conscious Europe have run into legal and cultural hurdles trying to reconcile the need for effective tracing with the continent's strict data

privacy standards. (AP Photo/Michael Probst, File)

Six European Union countries and the bloc's executive Commission have begun testing a virtual "gateway" to ensure national coronavirus tracing apps can work across borders.

The trial starting Monday will allow national computer systems that run tracing apps in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Latvia to communicate with each other via a central hub.

If the tests succeed, travelers from each of the six countries will be able to use their own apps while abroad in the other five to ensure they're notified if they have been in close contact to another user who tests positive.

Tracing apps were touted as a potentially game-changing tool to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but most have been beset with [privacy concerns](#), [technical problems](#) or users' apathy.

Among the most popular apps is the one developed in Germany, which has been downloaded 18 million times in a country of 83 million. So far an estimated 3,700 people in Germany have confirmed in the app that they tested positive, alerting other users they were in close contact with over the previous fortnight that they might have been exposed.

Getting apps to work across borders has posed a headache because of differing national data protection rules and tracing systems in place. But officials say that the large number of people traveling across the EU for work and leisure makes communication across national apps essential.

"Travel and personal exchange are the core of the European project and

the single market," Thierry Breton, the EU Commissioner for the single market, said in a statement. "The gateway will facilitate this in these times of pandemic and will save lives."

Operators hope the gateway, consisting of a server located in Luxembourg, will be fully functional next month.

Other countries that use the same decentralized system for their apps—designed to ensure maximum user privacy—will be able to join later. France, which has opted for a system where data is stored centrally, will likely not become part of the network.

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