

Media release

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Coronavirus: Clear majority in Switzerland support tracking infection chains via smartphones

The use of smartphone apps to combat the coronavirus outbreak has been widely discussed in recent weeks. By recording movement data, such an app could warn people if they have been in the vicinity of an infected person for a longer period of time. Just under two thirds (64%) of people of working age living in Switzerland support such an approach and 60% would also make their own movement data available for tracing infection chains via a smartphone. The Corona crisis seems to make people more open to digital technologies and new approaches.

People in Switzerland are usually very sceptical about invasions of privacy. The country has a long tradition of freedom, and many still remember the surveillance of citizens during the Cold War. "The outbreak of the coronavirus seems to be rapidly softening the scepticism among many people in Switzerland about the broad applications of digital technologies in healthcare," explains Michael Grampp, Chief Economist of the consulting firm Deloitte, commenting on the results of the survey of 1,500 people living in Switzerland over the Easter holidays.

Little opposition

64 percent of the respondents have a positive attitude towards the use of smartphone apps to combat the coronavirus outbreak, 30 percent support it unconditionally, 34 percent are somewhat in favour. Of the 36 percent who are sceptical, only a small part (14 percent of all respondents) categorically rejects the anonymised recording of movement data to combat COVID-19. 22 percent of the 1500 respondents would rather reject it.

People under the age of 30, so-called digital natives, show a slightly higher approval (68%) for the use of a smartphone app to record movement data. The approval rate is also above average for people working in the IT or telecom sector (78%). "Our survey results suggest that a more intensive engagement with digital technologies seems to help reduce reservations," continues Grampp.

Great willingness to participate

For Grampp it is particularly crucial that a large part of the Swiss population not only supports the use of such an app, but would also participate for the most part. "This is a sign that during a crisis the population is becoming more open to such technologies," says Grampp. Furthermore, there are hardly any relevant connections between the approval rates and the parts of the country or the urban and rural population. "Using smartphone apps to trace infection chains could help to speed up a return to a functioning economy and social life in Switzerland and to effectively prevent the spread of the virus," says Grampp.

Protection of privacy

Such an app should only save people's encounters, report later infections, and then sound the alarm. According to analyses published in recent weeks, this is easily possible without mentioning names or the need to gather and store personal data.

"It is important that such measures protect the privacy of the population from unlawful infringements," explains Adam Stanford, Head of Consulting at Deloitte Switzerland. The focus here is on established Bluetooth technology and proven encryption technologies. "Protecting privacy must be a top priority when developing and using an app to track contagion. The disclosure of the source code of such an app would also make sense," says Stanford.

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About the survey

Between the 10th and 15th April, we asked 1,500 people of working age (16 to 64) living in Switzerland about the effects of the Corona crisis. The survey was conducted online and is representative in terms of age, gender and region.

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