Title
“Privacy under Pandemics: Do we really want to be tracked?“

Authors and affiliations and contact emails
Ole Christian Wasenden, Telenor Research (Telenor Group) and Norwegian University of Life Sciences,
ole-christian.wasenden@telenor.com

Eleonora Freddi, Telenor Research (Telenor Group) and FAIR, Norwegian School of Economics,
eleonora.freddi@telenor.com

Abstract
During the current Covid-19 situation, health authorities across the globe are gathering and using personal data to efficiently track and fight the spreading of the disease. Citizen are asked to trade privacy against better health or against a faster return towards a more normal society. We are interested in analyzing this trade off. In particular, we are going to investigate what influences attitudes towards the use of personal data during a health crisis, and whether these attitudes differ during and after a period like the one we are experiencing now. We are going to gather data on attitudes towards the health authorities using personal data e.g. through a tracking app or through data gathered from mobile operators. Information on concern and competence level with respect to privacy, as well as trust and paternalism will complement the analysis. We conducted an initial online survey in Norway and in Sweden in mid-April 2020 and we are planning to conduct a follow-up when the situation is normalized. Since the two countries have taken very different policy measures with respect to the fight against the virus Covid-19, we expect to see some differences in attitudes towards the handling of personal data between the two countries. In addition, we are also testing whether priming respondents towards the health gains of tracking people’s movement on one hand, and the need to protect personal data on the other hand, has an effect on people’s attitudes. We expect the priming to have a stronger effect when the situation is normalized. Preliminary findings indicate that priming respondents on the potential loss of privacy does not have an effect on their attitudes to the use of personal data to fight a contagious disease. Priming on potential health gains on the other hand, has an effect. This might indicate that respondents may exhibit some confirmation bias that causes people to search for information that supports what they already believe. Accordingly, the respondents might have been more receptive to information on the health gains during the ongoing health crisis and less inclined to consider information on for instance privacy.

Data description
We conducted an online survey experiment in Norway and Sweden in mid-April 2020. The sample is composed of 2400 respondents (1200 in each country) and it is representative of the population in terms of age and gender. All respondents agree to join a second round of the survey, which will be conducted after the Covid-19 situation in both countries will be normalized.

JEL codes for the project
D82, D83, D9, I18

Key-words
Covid-19, survey experiment, privacy, attitude, tracking mobile app, Norway, Sweden, public health