GPL-3-free replacements of GnuPG
Contents

1 Introduction 2
2 Terminology and concepts 2
3 Use cases 2
4 Non-use cases 3
5 Requirements 3
6 Depending components 3
7   apertis-archive-keyring ................................. 4
8   APT ..................................................... 4
9   Flatpak ................................................... 5
10  gnome ..................................................... 5
11  OSTree .................................................... 5
12  volume-key ............................................... 5
13
14  Approach 5
15   RNP ..................................................... 6
16   rPGP ..................................................... 6
17   Sequoia .................................................. 7
18   golang.org/x/crypto/openpgp ........................... 8
19   gpgrv ................................................... 8
20
21  Evaluation Report 9
22   Debian upstream discussion ............................. 9
23
24  Recommendations 9
25
26  Risks 11

Introduction

In accordance to its Open Source License Expectations\(^1\), Apertis currently ships a very old version of GnuPG which is still released under the GPL-2.0 terms, before the upstream project switched to GPL-3.0.

This is problematic in the long term: the purpose of this document is to investigate alternative implementations with licensing conditions that are suitable for Apertis target devices.

The use cases for Apertis target images only depend on GnuPG for verification purposes, not for signing or encrypting. This is usually done through the gpgv

\(^1\) https://www.apertis.org/policies/license-expectations/
tool or through the libgpgme library which invokes the gpg tool and interacts with it via the --with-colons machine parsable mode\(^2\) or the Assuan\(^3\) IPC protocol. Newer GPL-3-licensed versions of GnuPG can be provided in the development package repository for any additional need outside that do not affect targets. Until Ed25519 support is officially implemented in APT, the upstream version is imported in Apertis and our infrastructure is reworked to use it rather than OpenPGP signatures, we will need GnuPG to sign and install packages on development images. This does not affect production devices as APT is not meant to be used there.

### Terminology and concepts

- **OpenPGP**: The OpenPGP protocol defines standard formats for encrypted messages, signatures, and certificates for exchanging public keys.
- **GnuPG**: GnuPG is a complete and free implementation of the OpenPGP standard.

### Use cases

- A developer wants to install an additional package on the Apertis APT-based image flashed on their device, and relies on OpenPGP signatures to assert trust in the remote package repositories.
- A user wants to install a Flatpak application from Flathub, which only provides OpenPGP signatures to assert trust on the provided application bundles.

### Non-use cases

- Sending emails encrypted with OpenPGP
- Creating OpenPGP signatures

### Requirements

The chosen approach to replace GnuPG on targets must:

- have a license that matches the Apertis Open Source License Expectations\(^4\), including its dependencies
- provide OpenPGP signature verification support
- require minimal changes in tools currently depending on GnuPG
- require minimal non-upstreamable changes

---

\(^2\)https://github.com/gpg/gnupg/blob/master/doc/DETAILS

\(^3\)https://www.gnupg.org/documentation/manuals/assuan/index.html

\(^4\)https://www.apertis.org/policies/license-expectations/
• have an active upstream community
• have a high code quality track

Depending components

GnuPG and the related components are currently used in Apertis for the following packages (based on apt-rdepends results):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>component</th>
<th>dependent package</th>
<th>source</th>
<th>repository</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gnupg</td>
<td>flatpak-tests</td>
<td>flatpak</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>libgpgme11</td>
<td>gpgme1.0</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>libvolume-key1</td>
<td>volume-key</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ostree-tests</td>
<td>ostree</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>python-apt</td>
<td></td>
<td>development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>devscripts</td>
<td></td>
<td>development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gnupg2</td>
<td></td>
<td>development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jetring</td>
<td></td>
<td>development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>libgpgme11</td>
<td>flatpak</td>
<td>flatpak</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>flatpak-tests</td>
<td>flatpak</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>libflatpak0</td>
<td>flatpak</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gmime-bin</td>
<td>gmime</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>libgmiime-3.0-0</td>
<td>gmime</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>libgpgmepp6</td>
<td>gpgme1.0</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>libvolume-key1</td>
<td>volume-key</td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>samba-dsdb-modules</td>
<td>samba</td>
<td>development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gpgv</td>
<td>apertis-archive-keyring</td>
<td></td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>apt</td>
<td></td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gnupg</td>
<td></td>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>devscripts</td>
<td></td>
<td>development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gpgv2</td>
<td></td>
<td>development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current packages using GnuPG or gpgv are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>component</th>
<th>dependencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>apertis-archive-keyring</td>
<td>gpgv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apt</td>
<td>gpgv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flatpak</td>
<td>gnupg, libgpgme11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gmime</td>
<td>libgpgme11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ostree</td>
<td>gnupg, libgpgme11(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volume-key</td>
<td>gnupg, libgpgme11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Currently OSTree in Apertis does not depend on GnuPG as it exclusively uses
Ed25519 signatures. However, the reintroduction of OpenPGP signature verification support may be requested in the future to be able to verify the provenance and install applications from third-party Flatpak repositories that only provide OpenPGP signatures.

**apertis-archive-keyring**

This package contains all necessary GnuPG cryptographic keys needed to sign all Apertis archives. The runtime dependency on gpgv can be removed with no ill effect.

**APT**

gpgv is used by APT:

- to assert trust on remote package repository indexes
- by apt-key which is deprecated\(^5\) and will be removed
- in build-time tests

Calls to gpgv are encapsulated in ExecGPGV function located in apt-pkg/contrib/gpgv.cc.

At the time this document is written, there’s a discussion in Debian mailing list regarding ideas to replace gpgv with sqv\(^6\). The emerging long term idea is to have the APT code link to the Sequoia cryptographic library underlying sqv, rather than the current approach of invoking an external process.

**Flatpak**

Flatpak application and library use both libgpgme11 and libostree.

GnuPG is used by Flatpak:

- during development to sign the package and summaries,
- and on target to verify the signatures.

Starting with Apertis v2022dev2, Flatpak is also able to use Ed25519 cryptography.

**gmime**

GnuPG is used by gmime to encrypt, decrypt, sign and verify messages with Multipurpose Internet Mail Extension.

---

\(^5\)[https://manpages.debian.org/testing/apt/apt-key.8.en.html](https://manpages.debian.org/testing/apt/apt-key.8.en.html)

\(^6\)[https://lists.debian.org/deity/2021/01/msg00088.html](https://lists.debian.org/deity/2021/01/msg00088.html)
OSTree

GnuPG is used by OSTree:

- during development to sign the commits,
- and on target to verify the commits.

Current version of OSTree in Apertis is also able to use Ed25519 cryptography.

volume-key

See Debian manpage\(^7\).

GnuPG is used by volume-key to encrypt or decrypt the file used to store extracted “secrets” used for volume encryption (for example keys or passphrases).

Approach

The following alternative replacements have been considered:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>library</th>
<th>License</th>
<th>language</th>
<th>comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RNP</td>
<td>BSD-2-Clause + BSD-3-Clause + Apache-2.0</td>
<td>C++</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rPGP</td>
<td>Apache-2.0 or MIT</td>
<td>Rust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequoia</td>
<td>GPL-2+</td>
<td>Rust</td>
<td>uses Nettle/GMP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>golang.org/x/crypto/openpgp</td>
<td>BSD-3-Clause</td>
<td>Golang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gpgrv</td>
<td>Apache-2.0 or MIT</td>
<td>Rust</td>
<td>only provides gpgv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RNP

https://github.com/rnpgp/rnp

Started in 2017.

RNP originated as an attempt to modernize the NetPGP codebase originally created by Alistair Crooks of NetBSD in 2016. RNP has been heavily rewritten, and carries minimal if any code from the original codebase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th># commits</th>
<th># contributors</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>gpgv replacement</th>
<th>C API</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>2700</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Used by:

- Thunderbird

\(^7\)https://manpages.debian.org/buster/volume-key/volume_key.8.en.html
• EnMail\(^8\) ruby gem

**rPGP**

https://github.com/rpgp/rpgp

Started in 2017.

Project description from rPGP site:

rPGP is the only full Rust implementation of OpenPGP, following
RFC4880 and RFC2440. It offers a minimal low-level API and does
not prescribe trust schemes or key management policies. It fully
supports all functionality required by the Autocrypt 1.1 e-mail en-
cryption specification.

...  
rPGP and its RSA dependency got a first independent security re-
view mid 2019. No critical flaws were found. We have fixed and are
fixing some high, medium and low risk ones. We will soon publish
the full review report.

Further independent security reviews are upcoming.

...  

**How is rPGP different from Sequoia?**

Some key differences:

• rPGP has a more libre license than Sequoia that allows a
broader usage
• rPGP is a library with a well-defined, relatively small feature-
set where Sequoia also tries to be a replacement for the GPG
command line tool
• All crypto used in rPGP is implemented in pure Rust, whereas
sequoia uses Nettle, which is implemented in C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th># commits</th>
<th># contributors</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>gpgv replacement</th>
<th>C API</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.7.1</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no, but possible via a Rust shim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Used by:

• Delta Chat, the e-mail based messenger app suite\(^9\)

---

\(^8\)https://github.com/riboseinc/enmail
\(^9\)https://delta.chat/
Sequoia

https://sequoia-pgp.org/
https://gitlab.com/sequoia-pgp/sequoia

Started in 2017.

Project status:

The low-level API is quite feature-complete and can be used encrypt, decrypt, sign, and verify messages. It can create, inspect, and manipulate OpenPGP data on a very low-level.

The high-level API is effectively non-existent, though there is some functionality related to key servers and key stores.

The foreign function interface provides a C API for some of Sequoia’s low- and high-level interfaces, but it is incomplete.

There is a mostly feature-complete command-line verification tool for detached messages called ‘sqv’.

Sequoia uses Nettle\(^\text{10}\) which is dual licensed LGPL-3.0 and GPL-2.0\(^\text{11}\), see COPYING.LESSERv3, COPYINGv3, and COPYINGv2 files in the Nettle source repository\(^\text{12}\). This is compliant with the Apertis Open Source License Expectations\(^\text{13}\) since Sequoia itself is licensed under the GPL-2.0 terms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th># commits</th>
<th># contributors</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>gpgv replacement</th>
<th>C API</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>library: 1.0.0</td>
<td>3948</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command line tools: 0.23.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Used by:

- Pijul, KIPA, Radicle, see https://sequoia-pgp.org/projects/

Sequoia is already packaged for Debian bullseye.

golang.org/x/crypto/openpgp

https://pkg.go.dev/golang.org/x/crypto/openpgp
https://github.com/golang/crypto/tree/master/openpgp

This package is part of the Go crypto package.

\(^{10}\)https://git.lysator.liu.se/nettle/nettle
\(^{11}\)http://www.lysator.liu.se/~nisse/nettle/nettle.html#Copyright
\(^{12}\)https://git.lysator.liu.se/nettle/nettle
\(^{13}\)https://www.apertis.org/policies/license-expectations/
Used by:

- Imported by a lot of Go projects, see [https://pkg.go.dev/golang.org/x/crypto/openpgp?tab=importedby](https://pkg.go.dev/golang.org/x/crypto/openpgp?tab=importedby)

**gpgrv**

[https://github.com/FauxFaux/gpgrv](https://github.com/FauxFaux/gpgrv)

Started in 2017.

**gpgrv** is a Rust library for verifying some types of GPG signatures.

It currently able to verify RSA, SHA1, SHA256 and SHA512 signatures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th># commits</th>
<th># contributors</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>gpgv replacement</th>
<th>C API</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.3.0</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Used by:

- APT

**Evaluation Report**

The [golang.org/x/crypto/openpgp](https://golang.org/x/crypto/openpgp) package only provides a Go interface and would then require substantial effort to be integrated in other places.

**gpgrv** doesn’t seem to be actively developed, with the last commit being on August 2020.

**RNP** and **Sequoia** provide C interfaces and CLI interfaces to encrypt, decrypt, sign or verify files. They have both received a lot of commits, and have many contributors.

**rPGP** does not provide any CLI interface and a C interface would require a Rust shim, but its licensing terms are much more flexible than the Sequoia ones. It is actively developed, but it has fewer commits and contributors than Sequoia.

Red Hat removed the OpenPGP support from Thunderbird in Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL), which uses **RNP**, due to not wanting to distribute [Botan](https://botan.randombit.net),

---

14[https://crates.io/crates/gpgrv/0.3.0]
15[https://botan.randombit.net/]

9
which has inadequate side-channel protection, see Red Hat bugs 1837512\(^{16}\) and 1886958\(^{17}\).

**Debian upstream discussion**

The Debian APT maintainers are discussing and planning the removal of the dependency on gpgv and potentially on OpenPGP as a whole.

For the replacement of gpgv Debian will likely not use RNP due to its Apache License, see here\(^{18}\), and expressed some interest in linking directly to Sequoia\(^{19}\).

However, the Debian APT maintainers expressed concrete interest in moving away from OpenPGP altogether\(^{20}\), by changing the signature mechanism to use Ed25519 instead\(^{21}\).

Adopting a solution which is aligned to the upstream goals would save maintenance effort in the long term.

**Recommendations**

The split between rPGP (more permissive license, more limited goals) and Sequoia (more active, GPL-2.0 only) is unfortunate since rPGP would be more suitable for us but is also more risky regarding long term maintenance, with Sequoia being more promising in this regard.

The problems to be addressed are:

1. the use of GnuPG via gpgv on the target reference images
2. the use of GnuPG via libgpgme on the target reference images

For gpgv there are two possible approaches:

1. use sqv from Sequoia to replace gpgv with basically no changes in the depending components
2. for GPL-2.0 applications, link to Sequoia directly as the APT maintainers said

For libgpgme the situation is more complex because the API surface is way bigger and there are no drop-in replacements. In addition Sequoia, by being GPL-2.0 licensed, is not suitable to be directly linked from GMime, OSTree and Flatpak which are LGPL-2.1 and provide libraries that are meant to be linked by applications that may be released under licenses incompatible with the GPL-2.0 or even proprietary. rPGP may be a better choice in this regard.

\(^{16}\)https://bugzilla.redhat.com/show_bug.cgi?id=1837512
\(^{17}\)https://bugzilla.redhat.com/show_bug.cgi?id=1886958
\(^{18}\)https://lists.debian.org/deity/2021/02/msg00011.html
\(^{19}\)https://lists.debian.org/deity/2021/02/msg00004.html
\(^{20}\)https://lists.debian.org/deity/2021/02/msg00023.html
\(^{21}\)https://wiki.debian.org/Teams/Apt/Spec/AptSign
The approach could then be:

1. ship `sqv` on target images and symlink it as `gpgv` so that it gets transparently picked up by APT
2. patch `apertis-archive-keyring` to install the `.asc` directly, avoiding any build-dependency on GnuPG
3. disable OpenPGP support from OSTree, replacing it with the use of Ed25519 signatures
   - this will drop the ability to assert trust when pulling from third party OpenPGP-signed repositories, which has never been a use-case of interest in Apertis
4. disable OpenPGP support from Flatpak, replacing it with the use of Ed25519 signatures
   - this will drop the ability to assert trust when pulling from third party Flatpak repositories, which is not a use-case of interest for Apertis target devices but at some point is likely to be desirable on the SDK, so we may consider re-introducing GnuPG support only there where the GPL-3 restrictions are not a concern
5. disable OpenPGP support from GMime
   - this will drop the ability to send/receive encrypted emails when using `evolution-data-server`, which has never been a use-case of interest in Apertis
6. disable key escrow support from `libblockdev` so we can drop the `volume-key` package as a whole with its dependency on `libgpgme`
7. move the `gpgme` source package to the `development` package repository
8. move the `gnupg` source package to the `development` package repository
9. re-align the `gnupg` source package to Debian

With the steps above it would be possible to stop shipping an outdated GnuPG version with limited effort and limited regressions. In particular, disabling OpenPGP support from Flatpak means that it would not be possible to verify the provenance of applications shipped by third-party stores which use OpenPGP like Flathub, and disabling it from GMime would mean that it could not verify or decrypt OpenPGP emails: both regressions have a very limited impact on the Apertis use-cases.

In the longer term, other activities can be undertaken to get rid of the downstream delta introduced above:

1. engage with the APT upstream maintainers to help them move away from OpenPGP signatures
2. engage with OSTree and Flatpak upstream maintainers to dynamically load `libgpgme` that it can be picked up on the SDK where installing GPL-3.0 components is not an issue and where it can be useful to install applications from third-party store like Flathub

https://wiki.debian.org/Teams/Apt/Spec/AptSign
3. engage with Flathub people to support Ed25519 signatures in addition to the OpenPGP ones

4. fully re-enable OpenPGP support in the components where it has been disabled by either:

5. porting them to use rPGP by engaging with the upstream maintainers about implementing minimal Rush shims

6. implementing a libgpgme backend that invokes Sequoia externally to avoid licensing issues, either by engaging with the libgpgme maintainers or the Sequoia maintainers by providing compatibility with the --with-colons machine parsable mode\textsuperscript{23}

**Risks**

Drop-in reimplementations may not be 100\% compatible and thus may cause subtle issues.

\textsuperscript{23}https://github.com/gpg/gnupg/blob/master/doc/DETAILS