

ASPHER Report: COVID-19 Situation Reporting across Europe

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This is ASPHER's weekly surveillance report. We hope it is complementary to other resources such as ECDC and Our World in Data, where the reader can go for more detailed information. Please give us your feedback: is the presentation helpful to you and your colleagues? What other information would you like to see in it?

ASPHER is concerned about the recent developments that are taking place in the United Kingdom. On July 19, also known as “Freedom Day”, England lifted their COVID-19-related restrictions. We believe this experiment is dangerous and easing the measures taken to mitigate the spread of infection and protect lives is premature. We support the [declaration](#) published at *The Lancet* and supported [by more than 1,200 scientists around the world](#). Other countries have also followed a similar approach, with The Netherlands abolishing COVID-19 related measures, which was associated with an increase in the incidence of the disease and the subsequent need to reimpose many of the restrictions ([link 1](#), [link 2](#)).

ASPHER is also concerned about the rapid expansion of the Delta variant of COVID-19 throughout Europe. According to a threat assessment brief by ECDC, 70% of all new cases of COVID-19 in the EU-EEA will be of the Delta variant by early August and up to 90% by the end of that month ([link](#)). Full two-dose vaccination still seems to be protective, whereas having only received one dose, one is less well protected against infection ([link](#)). We believe there should be international collaboration and capacity in the surveillance of the variants of the virus, surveillance of the outcomes of vaccination, resistance to infection and timespan of immunity. There needs to be coordinated global effort towards anticipating new variants and adapting vaccinations to meet mutating changes of the virus. (see also: [link](#))

Political decision making continues to be arbitrary, nationalistic and inconsistent. ASPHER continues to be concerned at the failure to achieve international consensus and action on travel restrictions, mass gatherings and other prevention measures. This is particularly evident in the management of the EURO2020 football tournaments where hundreds of positive cases have now been linked to people who attended football venues. Freedom is all good however, it matters more to weigh the public health risk by the (local) authorities. Unlike EURO2020, the summer Olympic Games in Tokyo will take place without spectators and overseas fans are barred from attending the venue given the rise in the number of new cases and concerns over the more infectious Delta variant ([link](#)).

ASPHER considers the G7 agreement on global vaccine supply to be inadequate [and a failure of international leadership](#). The promise of 1 billion doses this year is less than the 2 billion already committed to COVAX by October 2021, and less than 1 fifth of the global supply needed. ASPHER has signed the [open letter of the European Society of Medicine](#) calling for the world’s 700 million over 65s to be vaccinated.

The current situation demands international consensus on a long-term strategy to minimize the transmission of variants, not only by rapid vaccination but also by increasing vaccine confidence and improving accessibility to vaccines to prevent further waves. Despite vaccination status, the use of face masks and social distancing is still necessary. ([link](#))

The COVID-19 pandemic has entered its second year since the time WHO declared the coronavirus outbreak as a global pandemic on 11th March 2020 (1). The battle against the current pandemic is continuing with emerging virus variants challenging the usefulness of the vaccine and delaying the end of the pandemic. From the experiences of initial lockdown, countries have learned to develop strategies to sustain economic stability by imposing strict regulations instead of complete lockdown. Continuing the non-pharmacological interventions alongside vaccine rollout, most of the countries have significantly reduced the number of deaths and the infection rate. Consequently, began stepwise lifting lockdown restrictions (UK, Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Israel, Portugal, France, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Belgium, Germany, Czechia, Austria). With the increase in transmission of the Delta variant, now there is an increase in incidence in few European countries forcing them to reimpose strict measures (Portugal, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, France).

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapid spread of the virus in almost all countries has resulted in considerable disruption of public health at a global level. The pandemic has cost above 4million lives to date (4,101,414) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has surpassed 190millions (190,860,860). Individual WHO regions confirmed COVID-19 cases are as follows (2).

Table 1: Cumulative number of confirmed COVID-19 cases since 30/12/2019

WHO Region	Confirmed COVID-19 cases
Americas	75,085,849
Europe	58,219,039
South-East Asia	36,968,057
Eastern Mediterranean	11,890,644
Africa	4,636,239
Western-Pacific	4,060,268

As per the WHO weekly epidemiological report, the European Region is contributing 31% of cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases worldwide. In the past 7-days, the number of new cases rose by 21% and the change in number of new deaths to the previous week is 0 (3).

IHME analysis shows, in many regions- the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Netherlands, France, Luxembourg, the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan infection transmission is high due to the Delta variant which led to an increase in the number of cases also hospitalizations. In Central Asia and the Russian Federation, the number of deaths is increased. The transmission is high among particularly among the young age group reported in many regions. Given the current vaccination rate and high transmissibility of the Delta variant, it is likely that there could be a further peak in infection rate during late autumn or winter. Considering the Delta variant driven surges and increase in hospitalizations and mortality among unvaccinated, IHME emphasizes the governments to undertake all the efforts to improve vaccine confidence and rate of vaccination, to follow strict measures in the event of mass gatherings, indoor dining at restaurants and bars which may end in an increased number of positive cases and to mandate social distancing and face mask (despite vaccination status) (4).

The following table shows a 7-day average of daily new confirmed coronavirus cases, newly confirmed deaths and share of people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in the countries of the WHO-Europe region reported on 20/07/2021 (table 2) (5) (6) (7).

Table2:

WHO Europe region	Rolling 7-day average of Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases/mill people	Rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths/mill people	Share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19
Cyprus	1136.09	1.45	57.26%
United Kingdom	698.99	0.76	68.33%
Netherlands	583.97	0.13	N/A
Spain	531.81	0.35	64.07%
Malta	465.58	0.00	87.72%
Georgia	403.66	4.05	N/A
Andorra	391.97	0.00	N/A
Portugal	319.99	0.64	64.97%
Kazakhstan	291.45	11.66	26.33%
Monaco	280.30	0.00	N/A
Greece	256.16	0.84	52.74%
Ireland	220.98	0.35	N/A
Kyrgyzstan	204.45	1.60	N/A
Russia	166.13	5.24	22.74%
Denmark	165.42	0.07	68.86%
Luxembourg	155.87	0.46	N/A
France	146.73	0.25	N/A
Belgium	127.49	0.07	67.45%
Israel	112.76	0.20	66.43%
Belarus	97.35	1.03	N/A
Turkey	89.65	0.55	46.30%
Switzerland	65.94	0.05	N/A
Iceland	65.72	0.00	N/A
Finland	58.48	0.05	64.63%
Armenia	53.95	1.11	N/A
Montenegro	53.68	0.46	26.08%

Italy	45.81	0.18	60.82%
Estonia	43.18	0.11	45.67%
Austria	36.35	0.08	57.43%
Norway	32.44	0.00	59.93%
Lithuania	32.12	0.16	48.37%
Sweden	29.28	0.07	59.85%
Croatia	29.06	0.42	38.95%
Serbia	25.07	0.25	N/A
Ukraine	23.60	0.62	6.35%
Slovenia	22.54	0.00	42.28%
Czech Republic	21.70	0.11	50.77%
San Marino	21.05	0.00	N/A
Latvia	20.30	0.76	38.84%
Azerbaijan	19.46	0.09	25.56%
Moldova	17.99	0.53	N/A
Germany	16.26	0.22	59.80%
Uzbekistan	15.85	0.12	10.96%
Bulgaria	12.42	0.62	15.09%
North Macedonia	7.41	0.00	N/A
Albania	6.55	0.00	21.18%
Bosnia And Herzegovina	5.49	0.26	N/A
Hungary	4.92	0.13	N/A
Slovakia	4.87	0.23	40.63%
Tajikistan	4.75	0.10	N/A
Kosovo	3.99	0.00	N/A
Romania	3.32	0.19	25.42%
Poland	2.40	0.17	47.15%

Cyprus:

In Cyprus health ministry reported 991 new cases and one new death between 20th and 21st July. Currently, the number of **people with COVID-19 in hospital are 231, of which 59 are in serious condition, and 23 patients are intubated out of 36 in the Intensive Care Unit. Among those hospitalized, 90% are not vaccinated** (8). Considering the current epidemiological situation, the **council of ministers has endorsed certain regulations which are in force from 20th July as follows-** all camping trips are prohibited, SafePass is an obligation at both indoor and outdoor gatherings of more than 20 people (until the end of July), also it is mandatory for public transport, banks, to visit nursing homes or other elderly care homes (those who go out of the residence must provide negative test report while returning to care home) (9). **Hotline service (in force since 19th July) is another initiative by the Ministry of Health to improve the vaccination rate there by the epidemiological situation.** With ensured continuous availability, the service can be used by the citizens to reschedule/cancel slots at their convenience (10). **The effort to encourage vaccine intake among below 30year age olds, by the government is supported by few private and public organizations. Thereby, a new website (www.besafe.gov.cy) has been developed which provides information regarding the type of incentives offered** (11).

Spain:

Between 19th and 20th, July, 27,286 new cases and 29 new deaths have been recorded (12). Particularly in the region of Catalonia, Navarre and Castella Y Leon the incidence is high. To age, **a high infection rate is noted among 20-29year age olds followed by 12 to 19 years. The**

number of hospitalizations rose by 16% to the week before (13). The proportion of Delta variant cases continue to increase (43%, similar to the Alpha variant) (14). **A majority of new cases reported were among those who are unvaccinated (83.1%), and 11.4% are partially vaccinated people and a least 5.5% of new cases attributed to fully vaccinated people** (15). With the exponential rise in infection rate, the local governments introduced anti-epidemic measures such as night curfew, the high penalty for those involved in street drinking parties, limiting the opening hours and the number of people at restaurants and bars. The rule of compulsory face mask outdoors is called upon by some regional authorities (16). To date, 51.71% of people are fully vaccinated in Spain (17).

France:

With the increase in transmission of the Delt variant in France, the infection rate increased dramatically. **18,181 new cases and 33 new deaths were reported between 19th and 20th July (which were 4,151 and 20 respectively on the day before)** (18). Sequencing of positive samples from 11th to 17th July revealed an 80.2% attributable to the Delta variant (19). **The government has announced a mandatory COVID heath pass for accessing leisure and recreational venues from 21st July.** From early August similar obligations may enter into force to enter shopping, restaurants, bars, public transport and to visit nursing homes (20) (21). **A mandatory face mask outdoors is already in place in few regions where the infection rate is high** (22). By now, 42.46% of France population are fully vaccinated (23).

Austria:

The overall incidence in the past 7-days is 26.8 per 100 thousand residents. **In Salzburg, a very high incidence, more than double the nation's average is noted (61.4/100 thousand people) which can be linked to the Kaprun cluster (Baumbar nightclub) (24)(25).** 40 patients are in intensive care units apart from 82patients in a normal ward (26). **From 22nd July a proof of immunization or a negative PCR test report is mandatory to enter night catering. A 3-G rule (Vaccinated, tested, recovered) is already being implemented in most of the regions** (27). Pharmacies in few regions (Vienna, Vorarlberg, Salzburg) are going to offer PCR tests at no cost. So far, 46.44% of people are fully vaccinated in Austria (28). Now Vienna is offering a choice of the vaccine while online registration. **In Styria, a huge vaccination campaign is planned for the next week and it is possible to receive the jab without any prior appointment. A similar three-day (20 to 22 July) vaccination drive is proceeding at a primary care centre in Lower Austria** (29) (30). Targeting the remote areas, **a vaccination bus has been arranged which will travel through remote communities in Salzburg from 22nd July** (24).

Ireland:

Almost 7,700 COVID-19 cases have been notified in the last seven days, which is an increase of 88% compared to last week. The incidence rate has increased in every county of Ireland and is mainly due to the extremely transmissible Delta variant of the virus (31). **Current cases are mainly among younger people who contract the virus at social gatherings and drive it into workplaces and family gatherings. Ireland will not introduce new measures but relies on the public being vaccinated and adhering to the public health advice of distancing.** Currently, 79% of adults are partially vaccinated and over 65% is fully vaccinated (32).

Netherlands:

The surge of COVID-19 cases after easing restrictions at the end of June has stabilised. Yet, there is still an average of 10.000 infections daily during the past week, which the Dutch government called worrisome. **Most new cases are among those aged 20 to 29 and hospitalizations have been increasing slightly. No new restrictions will be necessary, but the Dutch government**

decided to reinstate the work from home advice as much as possible and placing new emphasis on the importance of proper ventilation at home and public indoor spaces (33).

Ukraine:

Ukraine starts the 5th stage of its COVID-19 vaccination campaign on July 21. **The country received more vaccines and is creating more vaccination points and mobile immunization teams.** Currently, 4.1 million vaccine shots have been administered and the vaccination campaign makes vaccination open to all citizens (34). **The Delta variant has reached Ukraine and Ukraine's daily COVID-19 cases rose sharply, reaching 598 positive cases on July 20 versus 182 cases on July 19 (35).**

United Kingdom:

As of July 20, 88.1% of the adult population has received the 1st dose whereas 69.1% is fully vaccinated (36). The United Kingdom has decided not to vaccinate most children and teenagers against the novel coronavirus until there's enough data to make sure it is safe for that age group (37). **Meanwhile, a study at King's College London indicates an increase in daily new symptomatic cases in partly or fully vaccinated people.** The numbers also suggest the number of new cases in the vaccinated population is set to overtake the unvaccinated soon (38). On July 19, England virtually lifted all restrictions related to COVID-19. More than 1,200 scientists as well as government advisers from New Zealand, Israel and Italy warned against these relaxation measures citing concerns over vaccine-resistant variants developing (39)(40). The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) recommended that the government takes measures as early as the beginning of August to avoid overcrowding the National Healthcare Service (NHS) (41). Lastly, COVID-related staffing shortages have been applying pressure on the supply chain leaving retail shelves empty (42).

Finland:

As of July 21, Finland has vaccinated 64.1% of the population with the first dose and 28.4% fully (43). According to a professor of neurology at the University of Turku and Chief Physician, at least 10% of covid-19 patients develop long-term symptoms in Finland (10,000 in total so far). In young people, in particular, more than half of sufferers have recently reported symptoms lasting more than six months (44).

Norway:

As of July 21, 31.30% of the population is fully vaccinated and 60.21 % has received the first dose (45). The Delta variant is now officially the most commonly detected in Norway (46). Despite that, Chief Medical Officer Preben Aavitsland of the Norwegian Institute of Public Health stated that there is little reason to worry but did not exclude the possibility of another lockdown in autumn if the situation worsens (47).

Sweden:

As of July 21, 74.3% of the population has received the first dose, while 46.9% has received the second one as well (48). A new study published at The Journal of Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine (JAMDA) found that the mortality rate of Swedish long-term care facilities residents affected with COVID-19 was seven times higher than matched controls without COVID-19 (49). The Swedish Public Health agency now recommends anyone who has travelled abroad get tested for COVID-19 when they return to Sweden (50).

Denmark:

As of July 7, approximately 77.4% of the population has received one dose of the vaccine, whereas approximately 53.7% is fully vaccinated (51). 90.2 per cent of the positive corona

samples analysed over the last week were of the Delta variant (52). In addition, 16.1% of patients are believed to have been infected abroad (53). The Danish Health and Medicines Authority now recommends vaccination against COVID-19 for women who are pregnant or who are breastfeeding (54).

Set of graphs: Rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases and daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths in sub-regions of Europe from the beginning of 1st January 2021 until 20th July 2021:

Mediterranean Region

Figure 1:

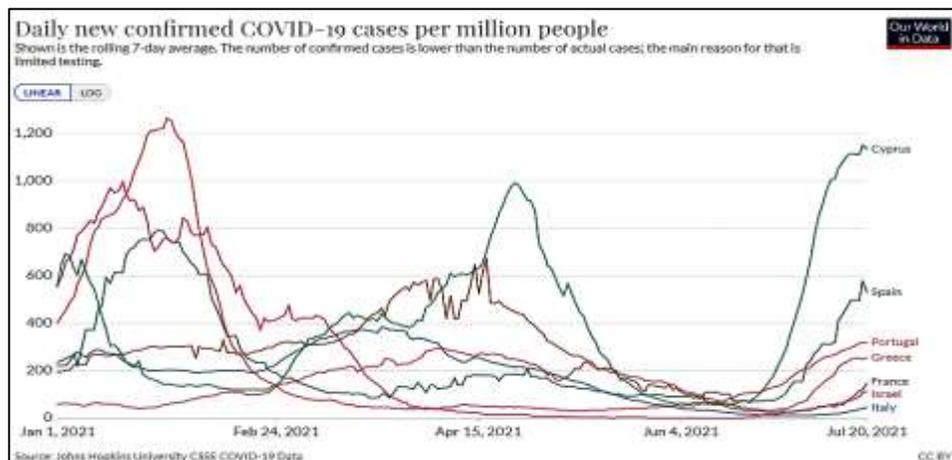


Figure 2:

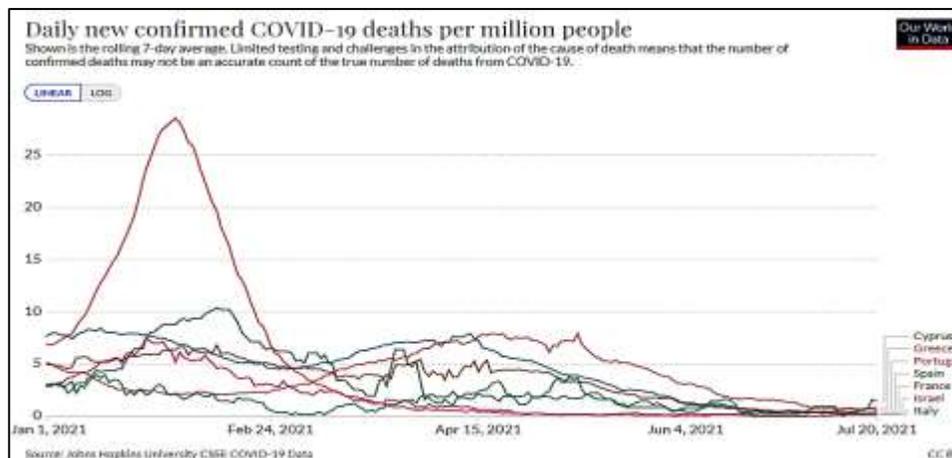


Figure 3:

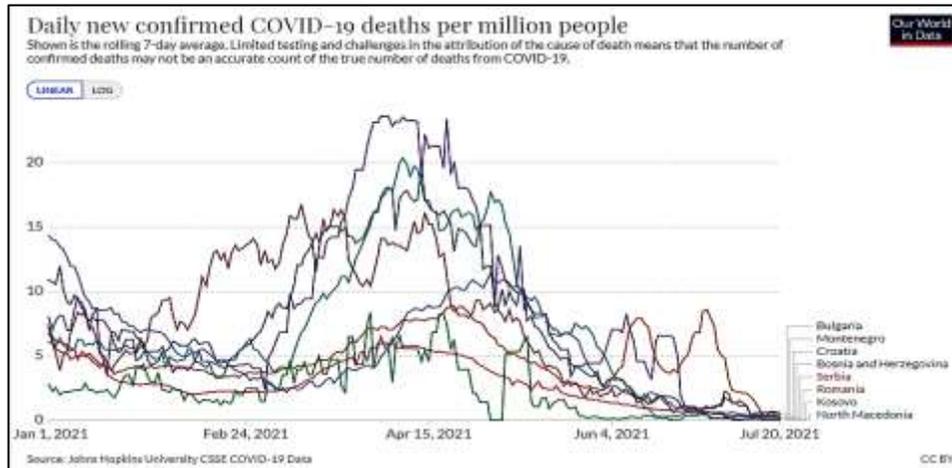
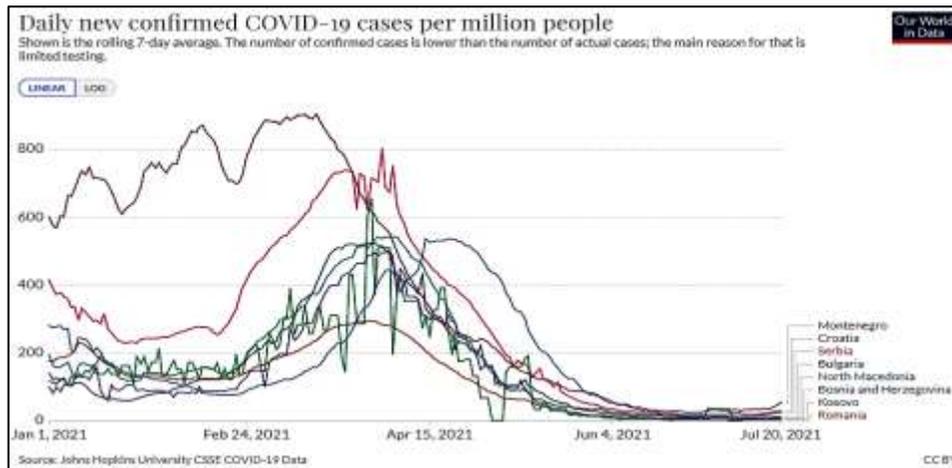


Figure 4:



Central Europe

Figure 5:

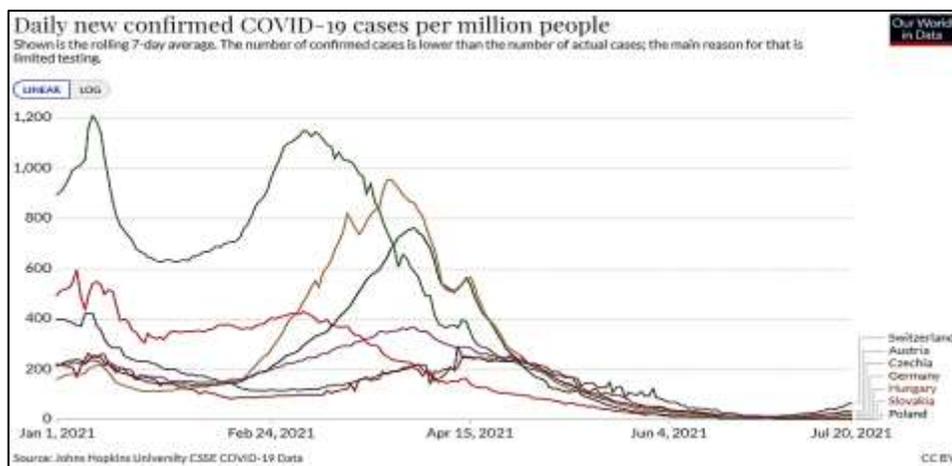
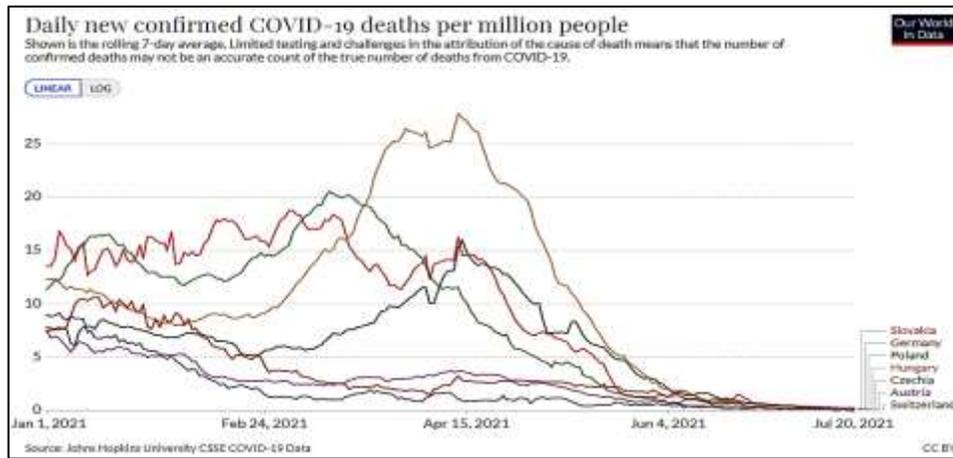


Figure 6:



Baltics and Nordic Countries

Figure 7:

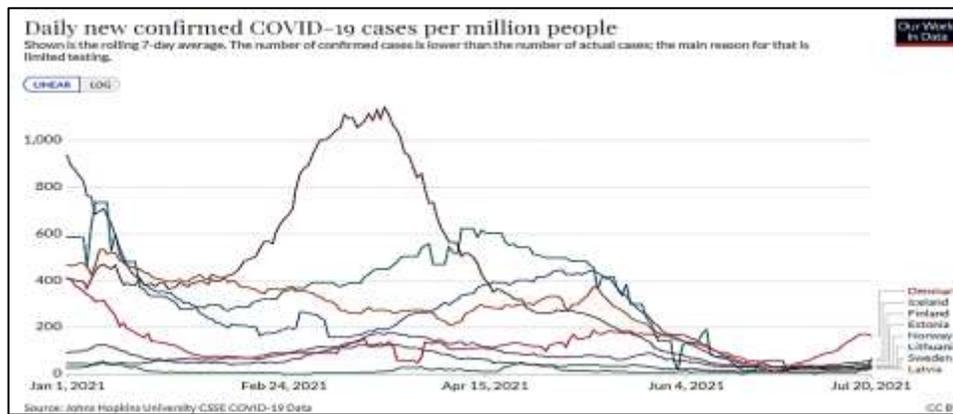
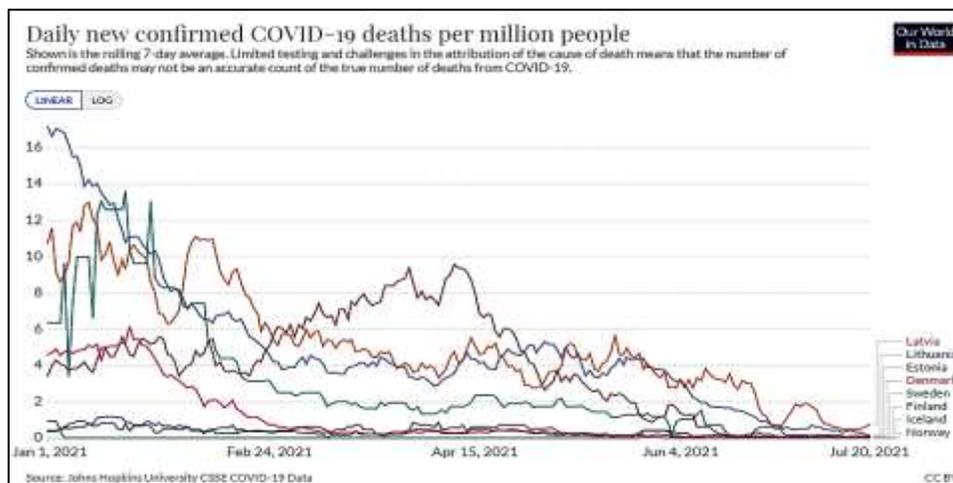


Figure 8:



North-western Europe

Figure 9:

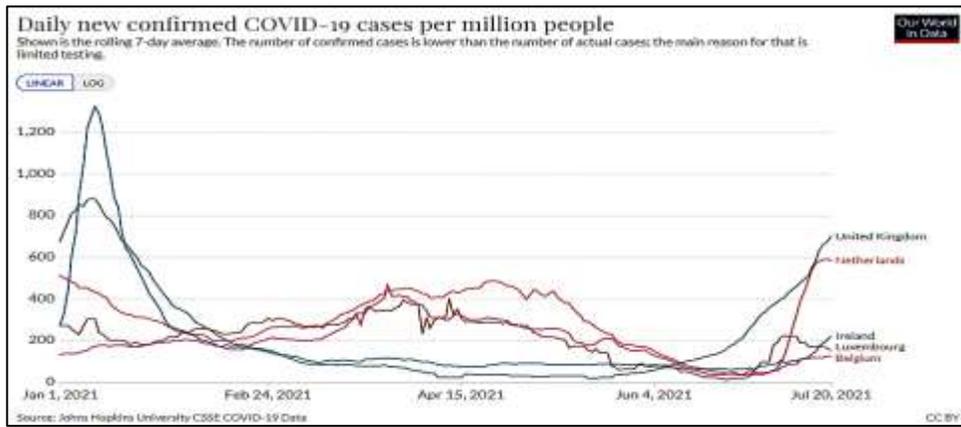
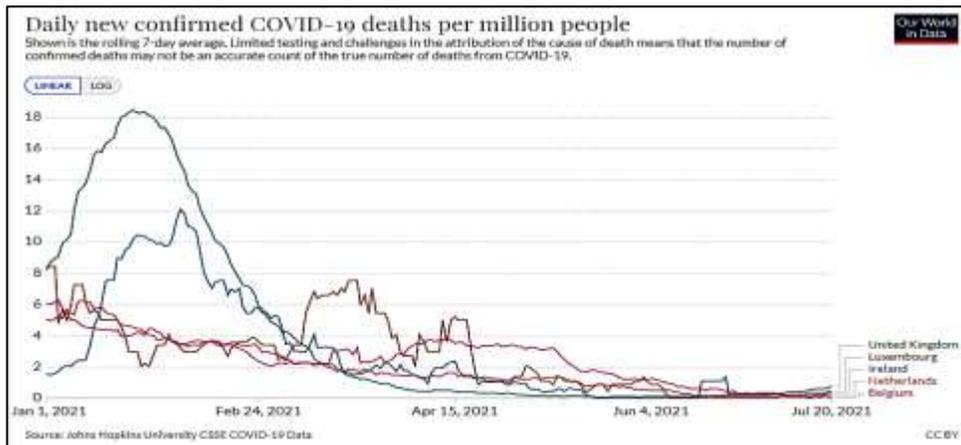


Figure 10:



Central Asia

Figure 11:

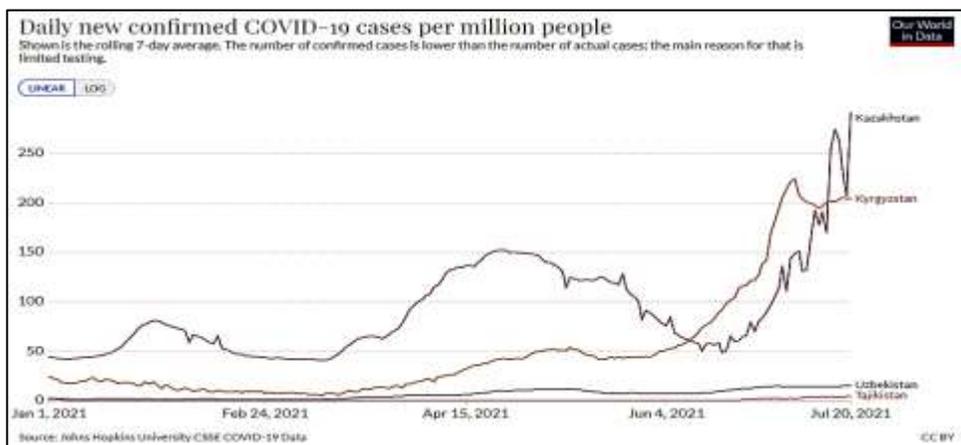
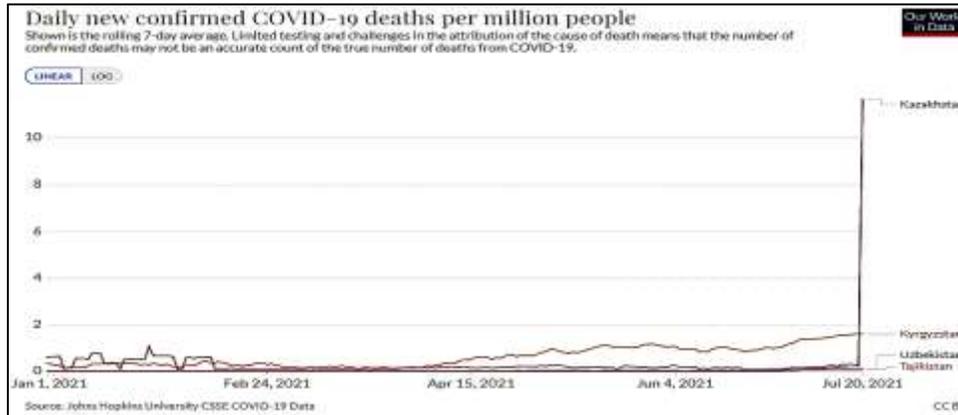


Figure 12:



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