

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 rapid expansion of the Delta variant of COVID-19 throughout Europe which is currently the dominant strain in the region. The EMA and ECDC strongly encourage those who are eligible for vaccination but have not yet been vaccinated to complete the recommended COVID-19 schedule on time ([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](#))

In addition, genomic surveillance is emerging as a vital necessity to achieve containment of the virus in this pandemic. It would facilitate greater early anticipation as well as initiation of effective strategies to mitigate outbreaks of the COVID-19 virus ([link](#)). However, the process is marred by a lack of data, lack of capacity, and inequities between countries. As a result, the concern arises of insufficient rates of sequencing across the globe. It is important to address the factors that hold back surveillance to prevent uncontrolled viral outbreaks ([link](#)).

Given the fact that there is great variability in access to vaccines across countries, it is important to improve vaccine production. There should be coordinated global effort to enhance vaccine production, and supply to low-income countries. Considering the duration of the effect of the vaccine, the countries need to act promptly to increase the supply and availability of vaccines. This includes [implementing the vaccine](#)

[waiver](#). Several countries have announced administering booster doses in September including France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Israel. WHO has called for the postponement of the administration of booster doses at least till the end of September to enable a more equitable global approach to vaccination: enabling at least 10% of the population of every country to be vaccinated (“sprint to September”) ([link](#)) ([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 virus variants, not only by rapid vaccination but also by increasing vaccine confidence and improving accessibility to vaccines to prevent further waves. Despite vaccination status, following public health and social measures is still necessary.

Europe is currently in [a third wave of the pandemic](#), fuelled by the Delta variant. Countries are struggling to find a balance to control the virus and to go back to the ‘normal’ everyday activity. Countries take several different approaches, with some taking more cautious strategies and others trying to ‘live with the virus’. It is a new phase in the pandemic for Europe and authorities should be careful in how they address the pandemic, keeping in mind the risk of a new wave during autumn (1).

By increasing the vaccination rate with the simultaneous introduction of the EU Digital Covid Certificate, lockdown restrictions were eased and testing requirements were modified across and within the countries. This has contributed to flattening the epidemic curve in few regions. However, despite the immunization program, there is a resurgence in the number of new cases due to the transmission of the Delta variant in Europe, requiring reimposition of strict measures in countries – Portugal, Spain, France, Greece, Cyprus.

According to IHME analysis, **50% of the population in Europe are immune to the Delta variant** and estimates an increase of 17% by early December. Unlike the previous week, the reported number of cases have been increasing in most of the regions in Central Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia regions except Poland and Czechia and the Russian Federation. Also in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Cyprus, and Malta, the speed of transmission is decelerating. Compared to the reported mortality the number of cases and hospitalizations are high in Europe which may further worsen by late October or early November. Considering the divergent transmission trends across the region, the strategic policies for the current situation are: a) increase the vaccine confidence thereby the vaccination rate; b) reimposing face mask and social distancing mandates irrespective of vaccination status concerning intensifying hospitalizations and deaths; c) excluding vaccination status, a comprehensive reporting of all major metrics-cases, hospitalizations and deaths should be maintained which helps in remarking the efficiency of the vaccine in individual countries (2).

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 over 4 million lives to date (4,303,515) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases are now above two billion (203,295,170). Individual WHO regions confirmed COVID-19 cases are as follows (3).

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

WHO Region	Confirmed COVID-19 cases
Americas	78,924,997
Europe	61,564,901
South-East Asia	39,373,171
Eastern Mediterranean	12,732,452
Africa	5,179,502
Western-Pacific	5,012,326

As per the WHO weekly epidemiological report, the European Region is contributing 30% of cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases worldwide. In the past 7-days, the number of new cases decreased by 7% and deaths increased by 16% compared to the previous week (4).

The following table shows a 7-day average of daily newly confirmed coronavirus cases, deaths and proportion of people fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in the countries of the WHO-Europe region reported on 09/08/2021 (table 2) (5) (6) (7).

Table2:

WHO Europe Region	Rolling 7-day average of daily newly confirmed COVID-19 cases/mill people	Rolling 7-day average of daily newly confirmed COVID-19 deaths/mill people	Share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19
Georgia	942.05	9.02	5.12%
Cyprus	597.16	2.90	53.78%
Israel	441.58	1.19	62.39%
Kazakhstan	425.02	6.33	23.34%
United Kingdom	406.76	1.32	58.46%
Montenegro	397.60	1.14	25.21%
Spain	381.28	1.47	61.53%
Monaco	345.82	0.00	N/A
France	331.41	0.68	50.54%
Iceland	325.69	0.00	N/A
Ireland	302.34	0.26	59.58%
Turkey	290.34	1.34	34.50%
Greece	270.33	1.51	51.73%
Portugal	223.24	1.50	61.09%
San Marino	197.84	0.00	N/A
Lithuania	165.93	0.73	48.21%
Andorra	164.55	0.00	N/A
Netherlands	160.78	0.39	N/A
Estonia	156.37	0.54	38.23%
Denmark	155.33	0.05	61.11%
Belgium	152.37	0.33	63.89%
Russia	150.47	5.25	19.01%
Malta	149.80	1.62	90.17%
Finland	128.66	0.18	38.97%
Kosovo	124.25	0.15	N/A
Switzerland	122.63	0.25	49.03%
North Macedonia	113.69	1.03	21.07%
Azerbaijan	112.36	0.59	22.27%
Kyrgyzstan	104.16	1.38	3.00%
Belarus	104.16	1.04	N/A
Italy	99.44	0.36	55.75%
Luxembourg	92.43	0.69	53.63%
Armenia	87.79	1.54	N/A
Norway	80.85	0.13	36.51%
Serbia	80.77	0.44	40.16%
Bulgaria	67.48	1.15	15.00%
Sweden	63.63	0.03	N/A
Slovenia	58.55	0.28	40.10%
Austria	58.05	0.17	53.96%
Croatia	45.31	0.24	37.09%
Albania	41.45	0.15	N/A
Latvia	40.67	0.23	37.43%
Moldova	40.37	1.03	13.36%
Germany	34.56	0.21	54.78%
Ukraine	32.43	0.96	5.62%
Uzbekistan	27.37	0.20	N/A
Bosnia And Herzegovina	23.16	0.22	N/A
Czech Republic	16.55	N/A	47.92%
Romania	12.04	0.21	25.69%
Slovakia	9.13	0.03	37.65%
Tajikistan	7.50	0.01	N/A
Hungary	5.40	0.15	56.91%
Poland	3.93	0.09	47.32%

United Kingdom:

On August 11, the UK reported 29,612 cases and 104 deaths related to COVID-19. In terms of vaccinations, **89.1% of the adult population has received the 1st dose whereas 75.3% is fully vaccinated** (8). England's R number estimate fell sharply to between 0.8 and 1.1 with cases dropping across all regions apart from Northern Ireland (9). However, the Public Health Agency (PHA) issued a warning. A wider Covid-19 vaccination booster campaign is due to start in less than four weeks (10).

Norway:

As of August 11, 69,00% of the population has received the first dose and 37,25% is fully vaccinated (11). On August 10, Norway reported 666 cases, the highest since May 22 (12). Starting August 12, Norway will recognise the NHS Covid app from England and Wales as proof of vaccination (13). A Norwegian study from Oslo University found that COVID-19 patients were significantly more likely to self-report memory problems 8 months after COVID-19 infection compared to healthy controls (14). According to the public health agency of Norway (FHI), only 1,137 fully vaccinated people have been infected with COVID-19. This represents 0.06% of all vaccinated people in Norway (15).

Sweden:

As of August 11, 80.4% of the population has received the first dose, while 56.7% has received the second one as well (16). In addition, the Swedish government signed an agreement with the US pharmaceutical company Novavax for 2.2 million vaccines if the vaccine is approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA). If so, the vaccines will be delivered mainly in 2022 and 2023 (17). A case of COVID-19 has been confirmed in a nursing home in Skåne in South Sweden (18). The island of Gotland saw an increase of 280% in cases in one week, from 25 to 95 (19). Several cases in Västmanland were found amongst individuals who had been fully vaccinated (20).

Denmark:

On August 10, 1,162 cases were reported, 103 have been hospitalised with COVID-19, while 12 are on life support (21). Odense University Hospital (OUH) and Hvidovre Hospital have stated that the summer covid-inpatients have mainly been unvaccinated 20-40 year-olds (22). **As of August 11, approximately 83.6% of the population has received one dose of the vaccine, whereas approximately 69.8% is fully vaccinated** (23). In addition, Denmark ordered 280,000 doses of the Novavax vaccine, said to be delivered between November and January if approved by EMA (24). Meanwhile, there is no longer a recommendation to keep a meter's distance in public spaces according to the Danish Health and Medicines Authority (25).

Switzerland:

Since late June, **the incidence has begun rising** after seeing a period of decline in April 2021. The new infections are attributed to the Delta variant. Among the unvaccinated young age group 10-29 years, the reported number of infections were high whereas the number of hospitalizations were low. However, the authorities are concerned for the burden on hospitals in autumn. The Federal Office of Public Health, Switzerland has **introduced a campaign for holiday returnees (those recovered from COVID-19 and/or unvaccinated) to get tested even if they are asymptomatic**. To date, 49.3% of the Swiss population is fully vaccinated (26)(27). Currently, the rate of vaccination has slowed down in Switzerland. Despite this, the authorities main efforts are towards maintaining transparency in actual information via campaigns, mobile vaccination centres instead of imposing mandatory vaccination or offering vaccine incentives (28).

Germany:

The 7-day incidence on 11th August is 25.1 per 100 thousand inhabitants which was 18.5 a week before (29)(30). The **current rise in infection rate is attributable to those who are not vaccinated** (31). The proportion of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19 is 55.6% (30). The analysis by Robert Kochs Institute regarding the effectiveness of vaccination against COVID-19 from January to July 2021 revealed that **vaccination has contributed to a marked decline in the number of cases, hospital admissions, ICU admissions, and prevented deaths** at 706,000, 76,600, 19,600 and 38,300 respectively (32). To encourage all the eligible population to get their vaccine jabs, the government has decided to **discontinue the free COVID-19 test for those unvaccinated from mid-October**. However, children and adults who cannot receive vaccine doses due to medical reasons are excluded from this rule (33).

Portugal:

As of 9th August, the incidence of COVID-19 at the national level is 336.1 per 100 thousand inhabitants and R(t) is 0.93 which was 394.6 and 0.94 7 days ago (34)(35). **98.3% of positive cases analyzed from 19-25 July were attributed to the Delta variant.** By 4th August, a few Lambda variant (C.37) cases were identified by genomic sequencing in the national territory (36). The government has initiated implementing a three-stage plan to lift COVID-19 restrictions. From early August, night curfew and limit on opening hours of restaurants and shops were abolished. The second stage plan is aimed for September – lifting mask mandates outdoors (however, compulsory at indoor meetings) will enter into force if 70% of the population is fully vaccinated (37).

France:

The epidemiological situation in France is still worsening compared to the previous week. As of 11th of August, the incidence is 236 per 100 thousand inhabitants (38). 93.3% of the total PCRs screened have recorded the mutation L452R which is characteristic of the Delta variant (39). The bed occupancy rate in intensive care is 34.5% of the capacity. The number of deaths saw a rising trend (51 daily death between 05 and 11 august). However, these data conceal a great disparity in the situation between regions and departments of France. High incidence and critical situation concerns the overseas islands (Guadeloupe: Incidence Rate (IR) 1892 and bed occupancy rate in intensive care: 174 %; Martinique: 1181, 227%; Guyana: 259, 200%; Reunion 396, 96%). In mainland France, the southern tourist areas from South Atlantic to East Mediterranean are more concerned than central and northern France. The IR in the south reached 600 (Alpes-Maritimes – Nice) compared to a maximum in Rhone (Lyon 299), and 60% bed occupancy rate in intensive care between 33% to 60% compare to 13% in Britain to 27,5% in Rhône area (Lyon) (38). A state of health emergency has been declared in the territories of Guadeloupe, Saint-Martin, Saint-Barthélemy, Martinique and La Réunion, with new confinement or curfew according to local regulations (40) .

Belgium:

Seven fully vaccinated residents of a nursing home in Belgium have died after being infected with the B.1.621 lineage of COVID-19. The residents were all in their 80s or 90s and some were in poor physical condition. In the nursing home, staff were also infected but experienced only mild symptoms. The lineage of COVID-19 was first detected in Colombia and was recently detected in the United States, but cases in Europe have been rare. In Belgium, B.1.621 accounts for less than 1% of known COVID-19 cases. The variant has yet to receive a Greek letter name under WHO's system (41). Hospitalizations in Belgium rose by 27% compared to last week and ICU patients have also risen by 29%. The number of cases is increasing with a reproduction rate of 1.18. The increase of cases is partly accounted for by travellers returning to Belgium. 71.3% of the Belgian population received the first dose of a vaccine and 64.1% are fully vaccinated (42).

Netherlands:

Due to the downward trend of COVID-19 cases in the Netherlands, no additional restrictions are needed. **Dutch households will receive a letter with which they can receive two free self-tests. In that way, people can get tested after their holiday reducing the chance of infecting others. It is also intended as an awareness campaign to be careful and get tested when having symptoms** (43). On August 10, 686 COVID-19 patients were hospitalized in Dutch hospitals, which is a slight decrease of 24. In contrast, patients are increasing at ICU's with 214 patients. Currently, more than 21.7 million vaccinations have been administered to Dutch citizens (44).

Romania:

There is a fourth wave underway in Romania. On August 11, the highest daily count of COVID-19 since the end of May was measured with 326 cases (45). The daily number of cases has been increasing in Romania over the past two weeks. **81.5% of those cases were among unvaccinated people and 92.6% of deaths were also among the unvaccinated** (46). To boost the vaccination number in the country, Romanian authorities agreed to offer meal vouchers of around 20 euros to those who get vaccinated. Romania is currently second-to-last in Europe with uptake of 31.7% of at least one vaccine dose (47).

Latvia:

The spread of the COVID-19 Delta strain has reached 95% of all cases in Latvia. The prevalence of the Alpha strain continues to decrease in Latvia (48). **The number of newly identified cases of COVID-19 increased by 24.9% over the past week. 86% of those cases had not been vaccinated or did not complete the vaccination course.** The increase of new cases has been identified in all regions in Latvia and the reproduction rate has been set at 1.14 (49). Catholic pilgrims that want to visit the yearly Aglona Festival, will need to present a vaccination certificate or a negative COVID-19 test. People attending church services must not exceed 1,000 visitors. Children under the age of 12 are exempted from these rulings but the church must be informed on how many children plan to attend (50).

North Macedonia:

Due to a surge in COVID-19 infections, public health measures to limit the spread of the pandemic will be tightened in North Macedonia. As of August 16, citizens must show proof of having received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine to attend outdoor events with more than 30 people and to enter hospitality venues. **All indoor events will be banned from August 16** (51). Concerns have risen that personal data protection rights will be breached with the new measures in place. By law, only policy and medical personnel are allowed to check medical documents, while the new measures force personnel from cafes and restaurants to check documents. No reply is yet provided to these concerns (52).

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 March 2020 until 9th August 2021:

Mediterranean Region:

Figure 1:

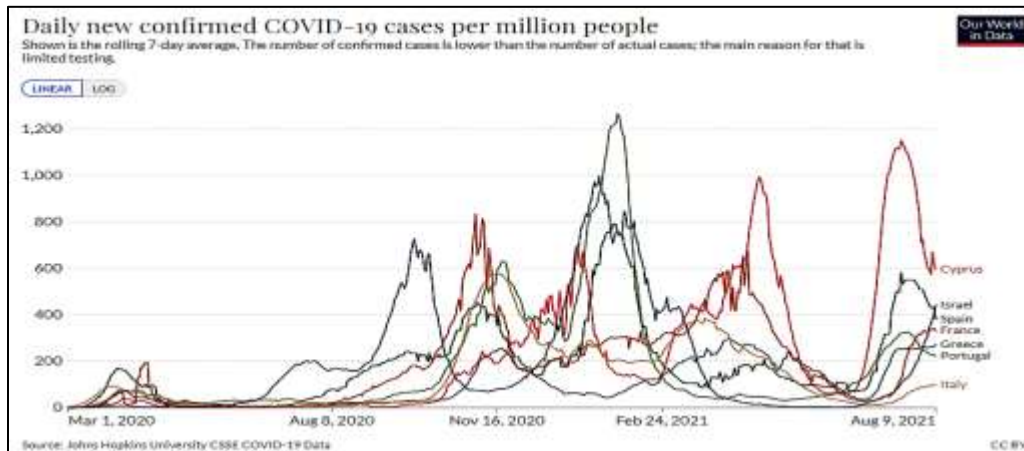
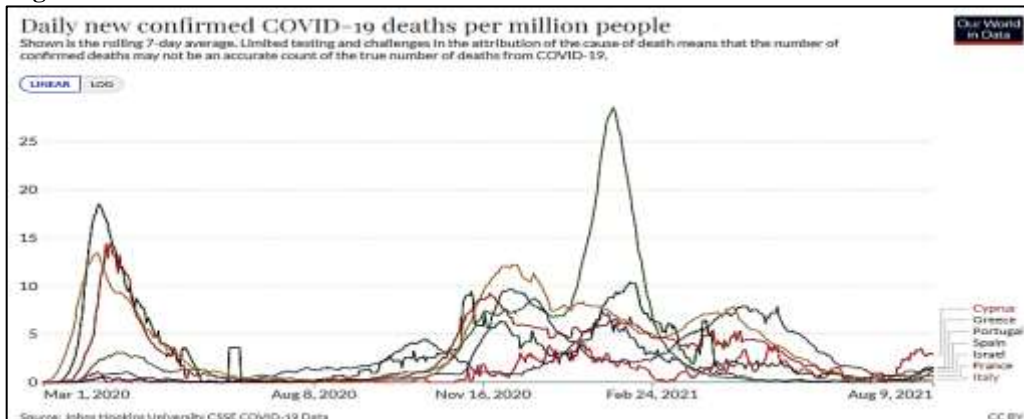


Figure 2:



South-East region:

Figure 3:

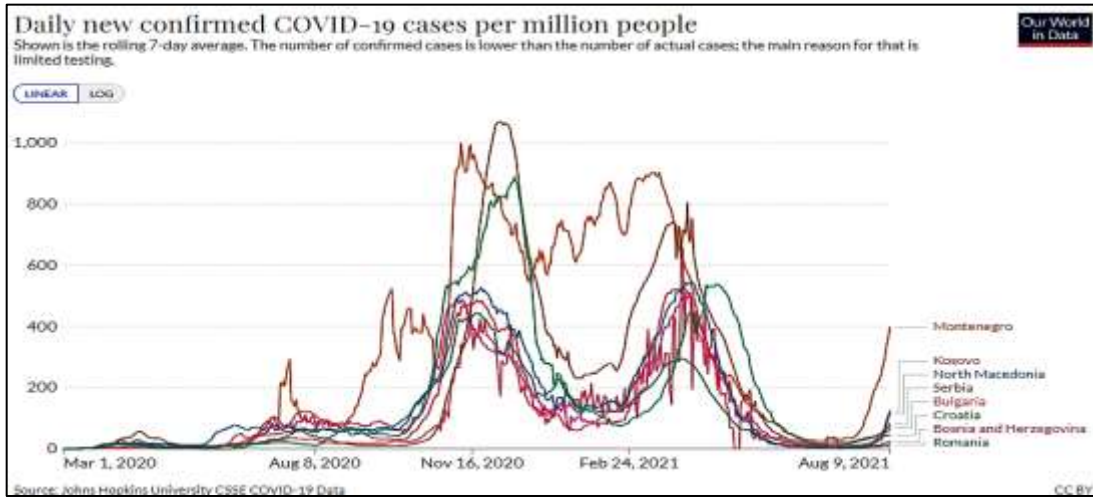
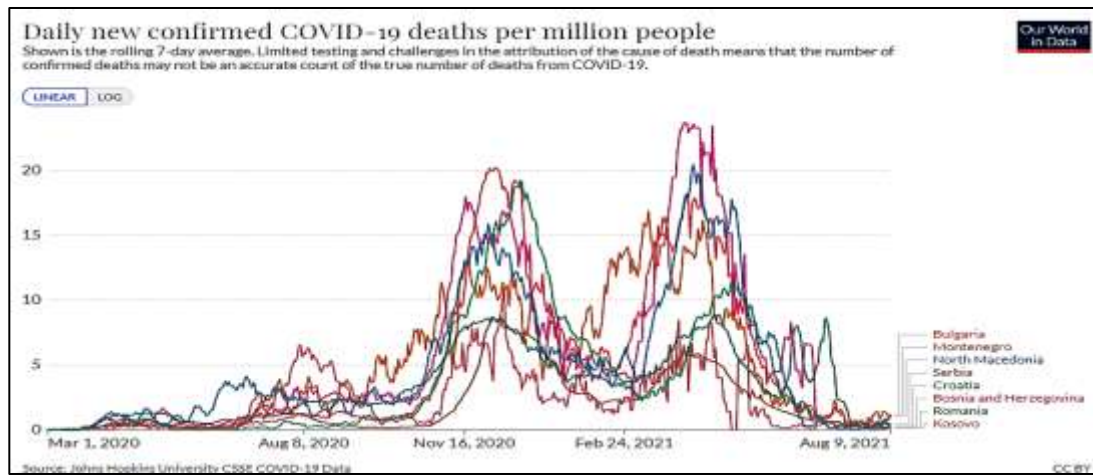


Figure 4:



Central Europe

Figure 5:

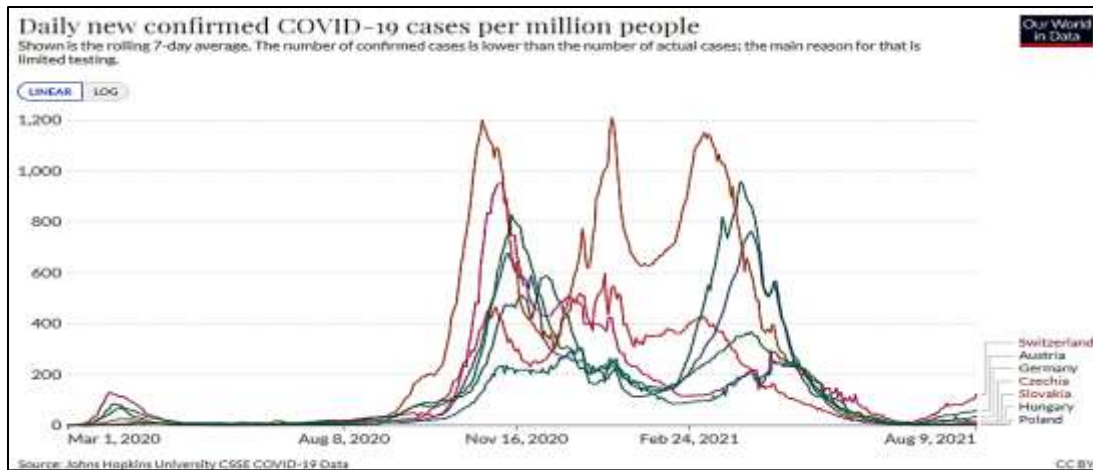
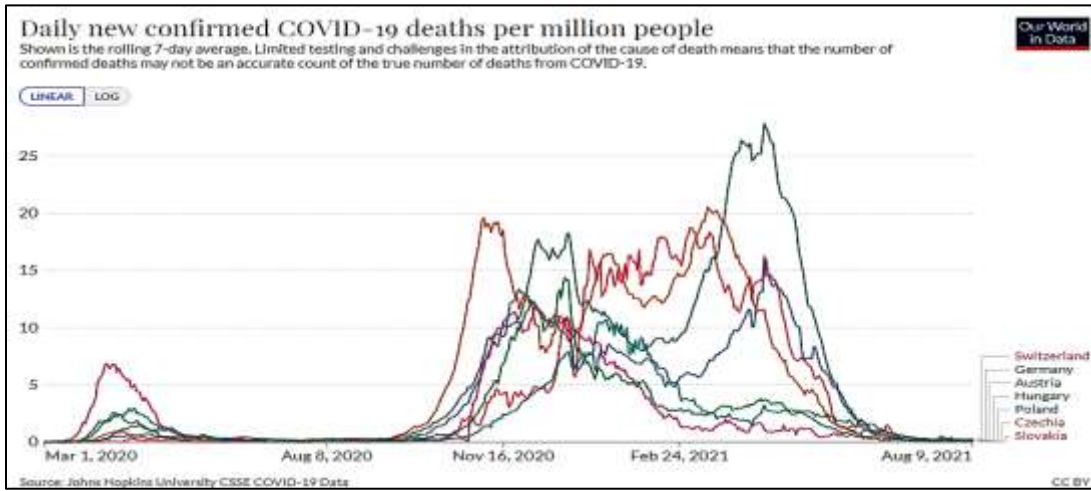


Figure 6:



Baltics and Nordic Countries:

Figure 7:

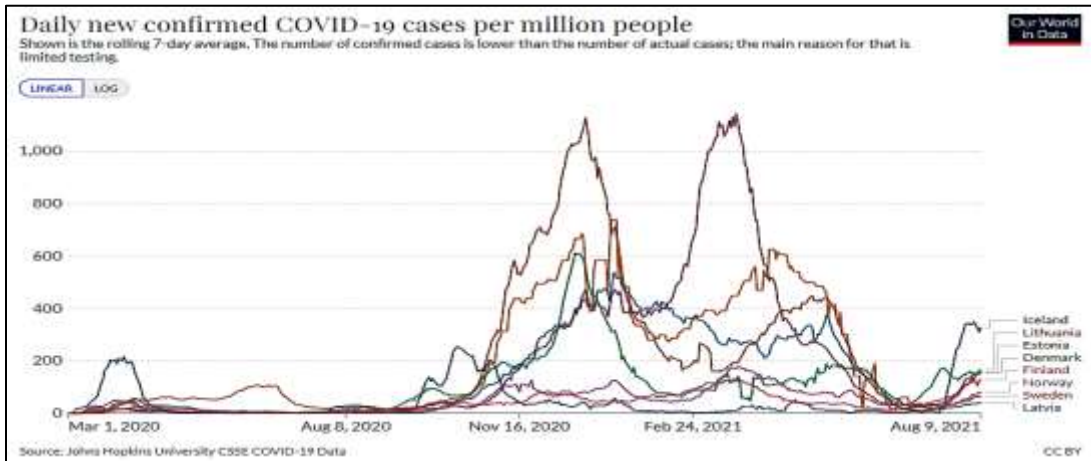
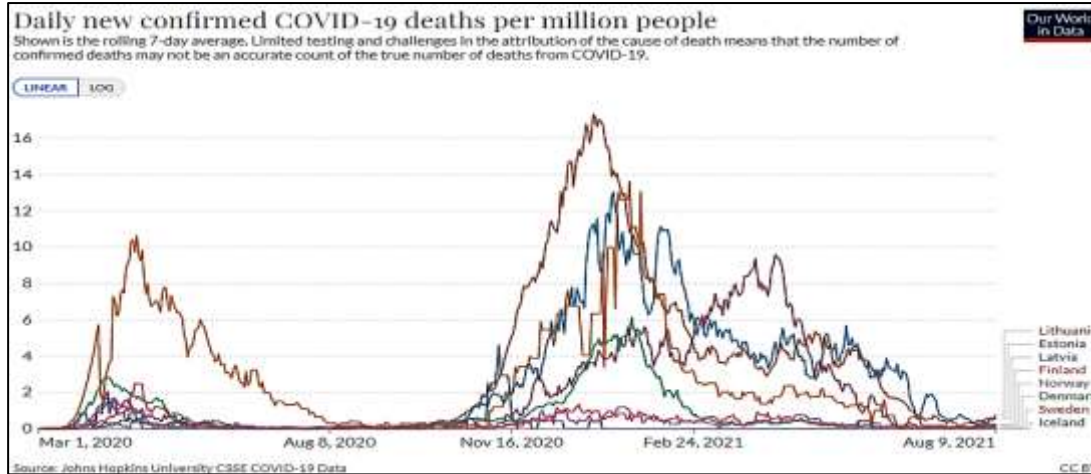


Figure 8:



North-western Europe:
Figure 9:

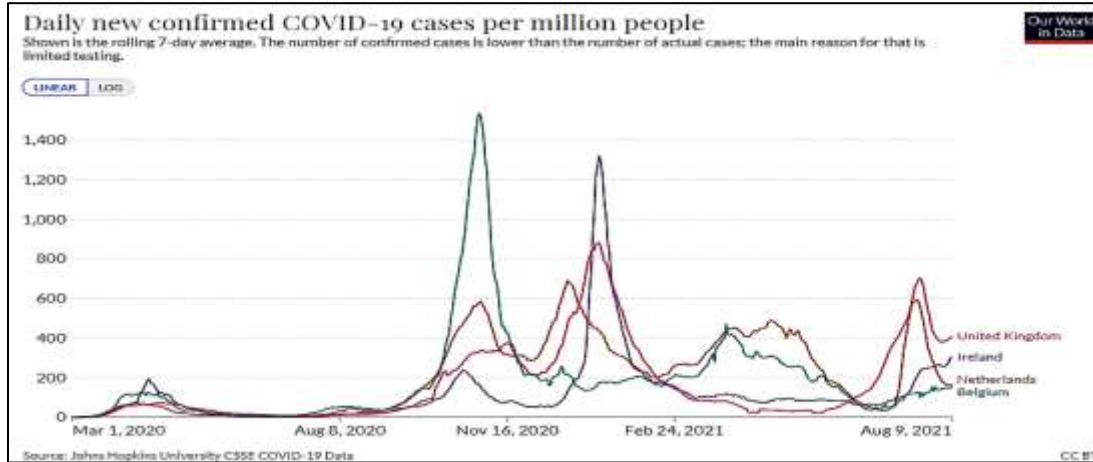
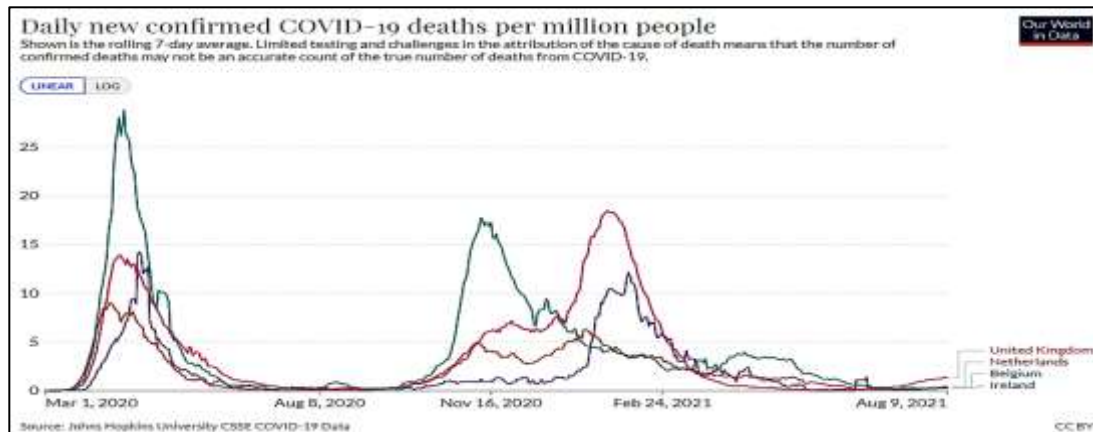


Figure 10:



Central Asia:
Figure 11:

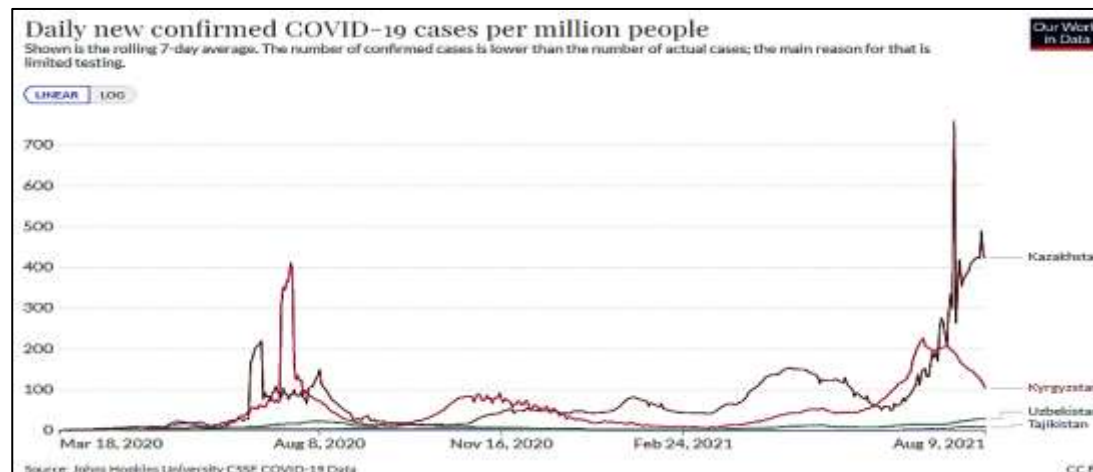
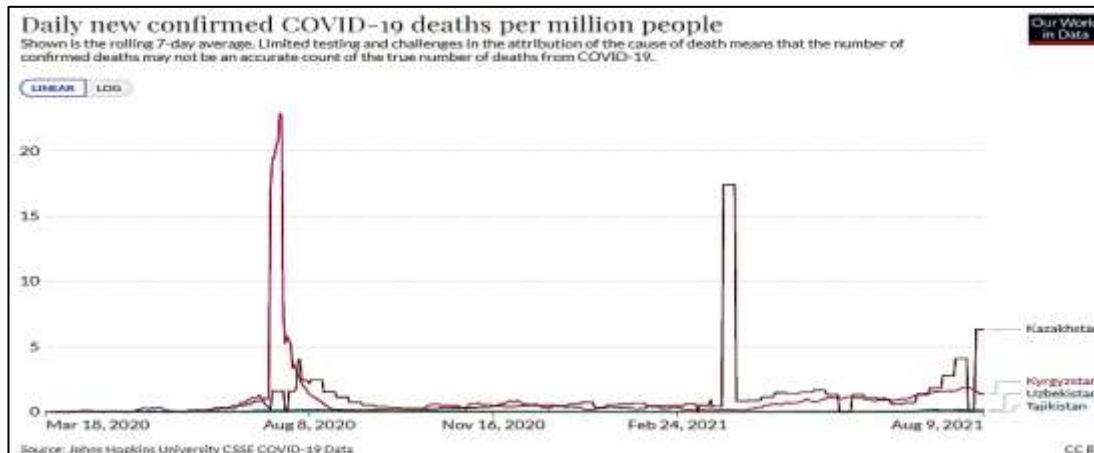


Figure 12:



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