

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?

We are concerned about the [disastrous explosion of the pandemic in India](#). We call on the international community to respond to needs identified by the public health authorities in India and offer every feasible support. The situation in India presents an extreme case of need that cannot be met within a country and why we need international health action agencies capable of responding to need, as set out in our [BMJ piece](#). It also shows the need for further efforts to promote [internationalism in vaccination programmes](#) for the protection of everyone.

ASPHER is concerned about the recognition of an increasing number of new variants of the SARS-COV2 virus. We believe there should be increasing 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: <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/01/28/we-need-an-equitable-and-coordinated-global-approach-to-covid-19-vaccination/>)

The current scenario 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. Improving accessibility to vaccine must be considered to prevent further waves. Despite vaccination status, the use of face masks and social distancing is still necessary.

https://www.aspher.org/download/726/aspher_statement_on_abolition_of_prevention_measures.pdf

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). 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 they have started (stepwise) lifting lockdown restrictions (UK, Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Israel, Portugal, France, Denmark, Belgium, Germany). However, the transmission of variants of SARS-CoV-2 in a few European countries is a rising concern (England, Wales, Scotland, Southeast Europe, and Central Asia) (2).

Recently, WHO with its expert scientific committee has ascertained **nomenclature system** for the variants (both Variants of Concern (VOC) and Interest (VOI)) by using Greek alphabet letters- Alpha (B.1.1.7), Beta (B.1.351), Gamma (P.1), Delta (B.1.617.2)-VOC, Epsilon (B.1.427/B.1.429), Zeta (P.2), Eta (B.1.525), Theta (P.3), Iota (B.1.526), Kappa (B.1.617.1)- VOI. The major purpose is to make them simple to pronounce for the general public and nonmedical experts and to avoid regional stigma (3).

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 three million lives to date (3,744,408) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has surpassed 0.1bill (173,674,509). Individual WHO regions confirmed COVID-19 cases are as follows (4).

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

WHO Region	Confirmed COVID-19 cases
Americas	68,779,760
Europe	54,770,591
South-East Asia	32,988,045
Eastern Mediterranean	10,353,336
Africa	3,593,021
Western-Pacific	3,188,992

As per the WHO weekly epidemiological report, the European Region is contributing 32% of cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases worldwide. The number of **new cases and deaths in the past 7 days reduced by 17% and 21% respectively** (5). Recent IHME analysis shows the declining trend in incidence and death rate is not uniform in all European regions. In Portugal and Kyrgyzstan, the spread of the virus is increasing and this could be related to the Delta variant. Considering the current scenario of variant transmission, IHME has emphasized imposing face mask mandates, to maintain social distance measures, and to improve vaccination particularly with mRNA rather than AstraZeneca in terms of its higher efficacy against the Delta variant (6)

The following table shows a 7-day average of daily new confirmed coronavirus cases, newly confirmed deaths and the percentage of people who received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine in the countries of the WHO-Europe region reported on 07/06/2021 (table 2) (7) (8).

Table 2

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 people who received at least one dose of vaccine against COVID-19
Georgia	194.88	5.77	4.35
Denmark	141.82	0.10	42.21
Sweden	135.64	1.02	N/A
Latvia	127.92	2.80	28.35
Netherlands	126.08	0.5	N/A
Slovenia	117.50	1.03	34.84
Belgium	114.27	1.06	44.78
Lithuania	113.35	2.26	41.16
Greece	107.73	2.82	38.58
France	98.84	1.13	41.90
Andorra	92.45	0.00	N/A
Belarus	90.45	1.03	N/A
Spain	89.02	0.86	42.88
Ireland	81.93	0.00	N/A
Turkey	74.91	1.23	21.33
United Kingdom	74.01	0.12	59.77
Luxembourg	73.94	0.69	40.06
Kazakhstan	66.24	0.20	11.97
Estonia	65.91	1.29	37.97
Cyprus	65.56	0.65	46.16
Russia	61.70	2.52	12.11
Switzerland	59.90	0.51	N/A
Kyrgyzstan	57.06	0.96	N/A
Portugal	55.21	0.15	40.55
Norway	51.38	0.03	33.61
Croatia	49.66	2.26	32.78
Montenegro	47.99	2.27	22.38
Ukraine	44.02	2.36	3.94
Italy	37.51	1.09	43.90
Austria	35.61	0.59	43.78
Germany	34.82	1.34	45.65
Czech Republic	31.15	0.75	39.62
Serbia	28.72	1.24	N/A
Armenia	26.13	1.21	N/A
Hungary	22.94	1.97	N/A
Bulgaria	22.70	3.17	12.15
Finland	20.45	0.08	47.58
Slovakia	19.10	1.86	33.59
Bosnia and Herzegovina	17.33	6.88	N/A
Monaco	14.56	3.64	N/A
Malta	11.65	0.00	74.51
Poland	11.49	1.57	38.82
Moldova	11.15	1.06	9.09
Azerbaijan	11.14	0.45	15.89
North Macedonia	10.01	3.09	N/A
Romania	8.73	4.20	23.17
Kosovo	7.17	0.15	N/A
Uzbekistan	6.95	0.03	N/A
Albania	3.42	0.05	17.14
Israel	1.82	0.10	63.21
San Marino	0.00	0.00	63.68
Iceland	0.00	0.00	55.15
Tajikistan	0.00	0.00	N/A

United Kingdom:

Weekly Covid-19 cases increased by 60% compared to the previous week in the United Kingdom. On average 6,048 new daily cases were recorded and it is the second time since March that the daily cases were above 6,000. **The increase of cases is due to the Delta variant, which spreads more rapidly compared to other variants circulating in the UK** (9). The death total remains low and fluctuates daily. The government has now decided to delay ending the lockdown, which was announced for June 21 until July 19 (10).

Belgium:

The Belgian government has announced that the COVID-19 passport to travel for the summer holidays can be used from July 1st. Travelling outside the EU will still be discouraged. Thereby, people will be allowed to return from green and orange listed countries to Belgium without undergoing quarantine. Travellers from red zones must possess a COVID-19 passport to visit the country. Germany, Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Denmark and Poland already implemented the passport on June 1st (11).

Romania:

Between 7th and 8th June, 202 new cases of infection with SARS-CoV-2 and 277 new deaths were reported in Romania (12). As of June 8th, 4mill people (20.79% of the total population) in Romania have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (13). **Romania's administered daily vaccine doses have declined to 49,467**. In the first months of the year, Romania featured among the top three nations in terms of administered vaccine doses. However, **Romania is now placed at the bottom of the EU's ranking, with only approximately 25% of the eligible population being vaccinated with one shot. The decline in vaccination speed is due to a lack of vaccination centres in rural areas and small cities, as well as lack of access to the internet in these areas to register for vaccinations** (14)

Bulgaria:

Between 8th and 9th, June 178 new infections with coronavirus and six new deaths have been registered (15). **All 28 districts in Bulgaria are in COVID-19 "yellow zones" with the infection rate falling between 20-59.9 per 100 thousand population which were in "red zones" for seven consecutive weeks until the beginning of May** (16). However, the anti-epidemic measures will be in place until the end of July. As of 8th June, 9.3% of people have fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in Bulgaria. **The government has announced the opening of outdoor vaccination units** (in 8villages of Stara Zagora district) **and remote vaccination points** (in the district of Stolipinovo) which begin to operate from the second week of June (17) (18).

Switzerland: The rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths in Switzerland are 54.50 and 0.30 per mill people respectively (table 1). By 6th June, 24% of people in Switzerland were fully vaccinated. **The majority of the high-risk category have completed vaccination and Switzerland has begun vaccinating the remaining adult population**. A vaccine certificate for those who are fully vaccinated, recovered and tested is available from 7th June. **With the increase in vaccination rollout and decline in the infection rate as well as the number of hospitalizations the government has announced further relaxation of measures** (which began on 27th April) – bars and restaurants are reopened with a limit of 6 people per table with an obligation to wear a face mask when leaving the table, outdoor support and cultural activities are allowed with maximum 50 people although outdoor sporting is not allowed, for private meetings up to 30 people indoor and 50 people outdoor are allowed, face to face classes can be resumed at universities, and obligation to work from home is lifted and is replaced with attending workplace on recommendation (19) (20).

Austria:

Austria will start on June 10th to relax several restrictions, including removing mandatory masks outdoors, the closing time for restaurants will increase to midnight and the number of people sitting at a table will be doubled from four to eight. Next lockdown relaxations are planned for July 1st, including abolishing closing times for restaurants and bars (21).

Finland:

The moving 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths in Finland are 19.39 and 0.08 per million people respectively (table 2). **To date, 8,343 COVID-19 variant cases were reported.** Amongst which, **the dominant variant is Alpha-6,883 followed by Beta and Delta variants at 1,367 and 141 respectively** (22). By 9th June, 43.8% received the first dose of vaccine and 11.5% the second dose (23). A **study was conducted in spring by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare about the type of protection offered by the COVID-19 vaccine particularly the virus variants at two nursing homes** (among those who are fully vaccinated, vaccinated with only one dose and unvaccinated). The level of neutralizing antibodies (which offer protection against so-called variants) among the residents who received the first dose of vaccine was not significant compared to those who received two doses. This shows **the level of protection offered by the vaccine could be lower in residents among nursing homes compared to the other personnel.** The results also **emphasize the importance of receiving a second vaccine dose to have the best possible effect not only against the original virus, but also the variants** (24).

France:

From June 9, France enters its third phase of easing COVID-19 restrictions. The nationwide curfew will be pushed back from 9 pm to 11 pm, outdoor terraces can open to full capacity, and indoor dining will be permitted again. Thereby, France's new health pass will be implemented on June 9, enabling access to activities with large crowds. The pass shows if you are fully vaccinated, tested positive in the last 6 months, or have a negative PCR test (25)

Sweden:

The weekly epidemiological report (from 31st May to 6th June) shows the infection rate is declining. To date, **the Alpha variant is prevailing in Sweden and the Delta variant was identified in several regions. Regional infection control measures were tightened at Värmland and Blekinge regions due to high incidence** (such as restricting the matches and competitions within the same municipality or with neighbouring municipalities while other regions are not allowed to participate. Summer trips, camps and tournaments were called off until 27th June). **Sweden also plans to enhance monitoring of the transmission of the Delta variant nationwide** (26)(27). As of 11th June, 49.9% of the population have received at least 1 dose of vaccine and 25.2% have been vaccinated with two doses (28).

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 since the beginning of the pandemic until 7th June 2021:

Mediterranean Region:

Figure 1

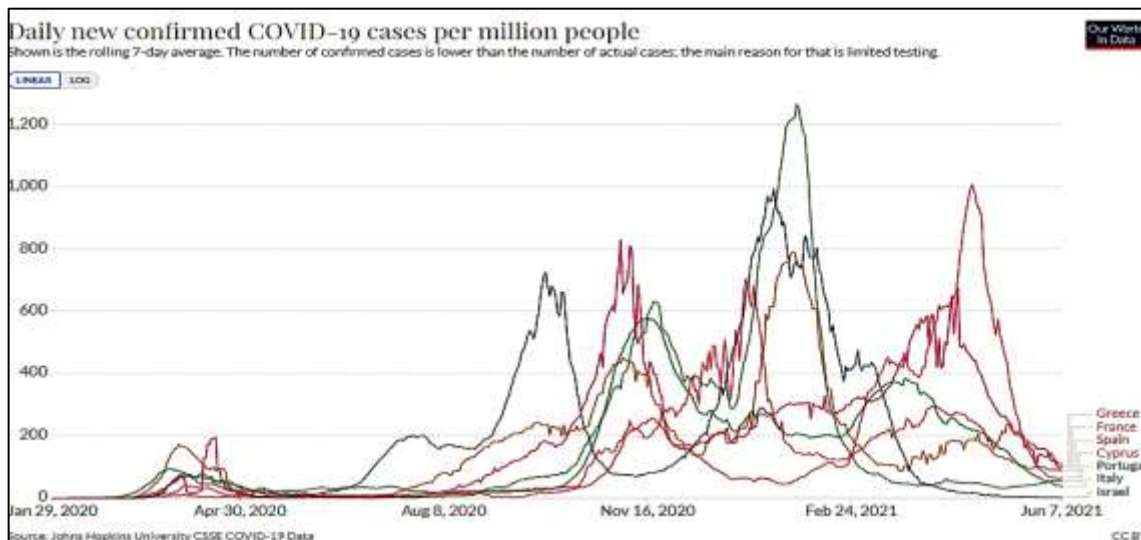
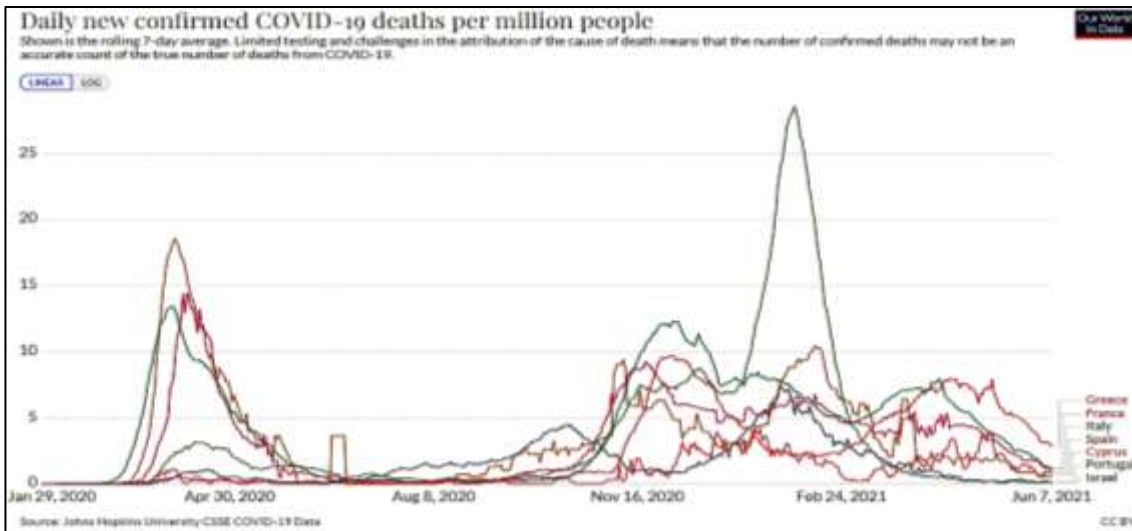


Figure 2



South-East Europe:

Figure 3

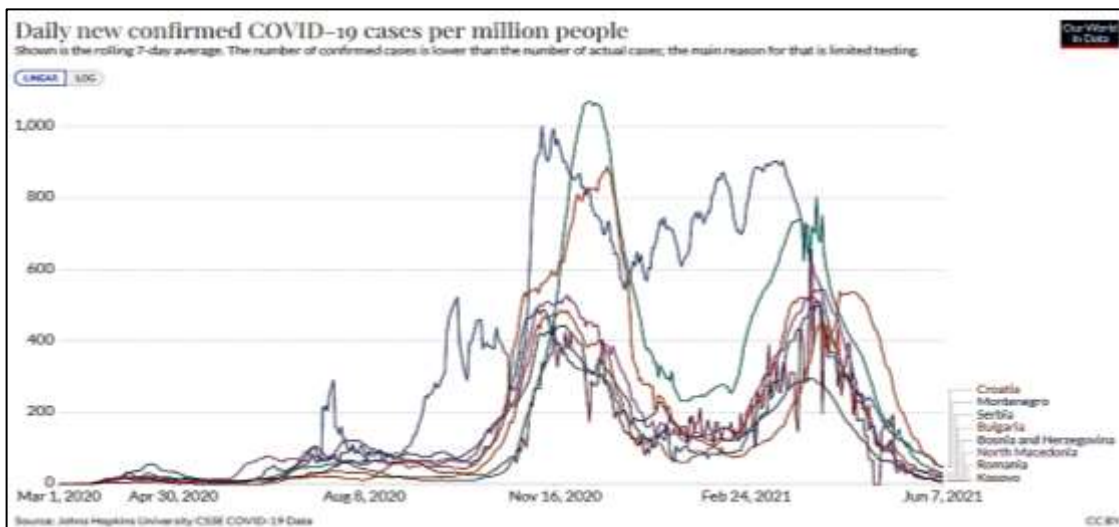
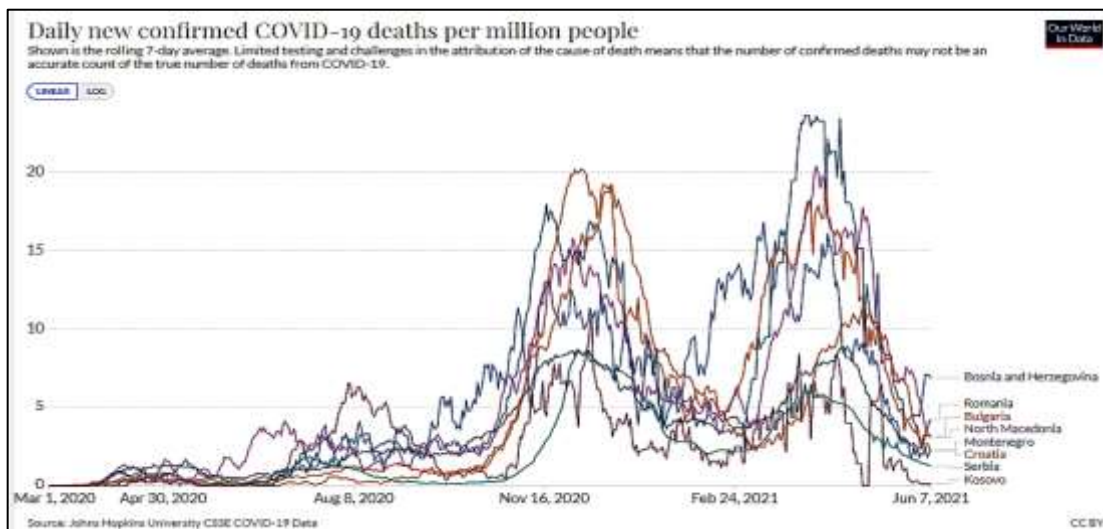


Figure 4



Central Europe:

Figure 5

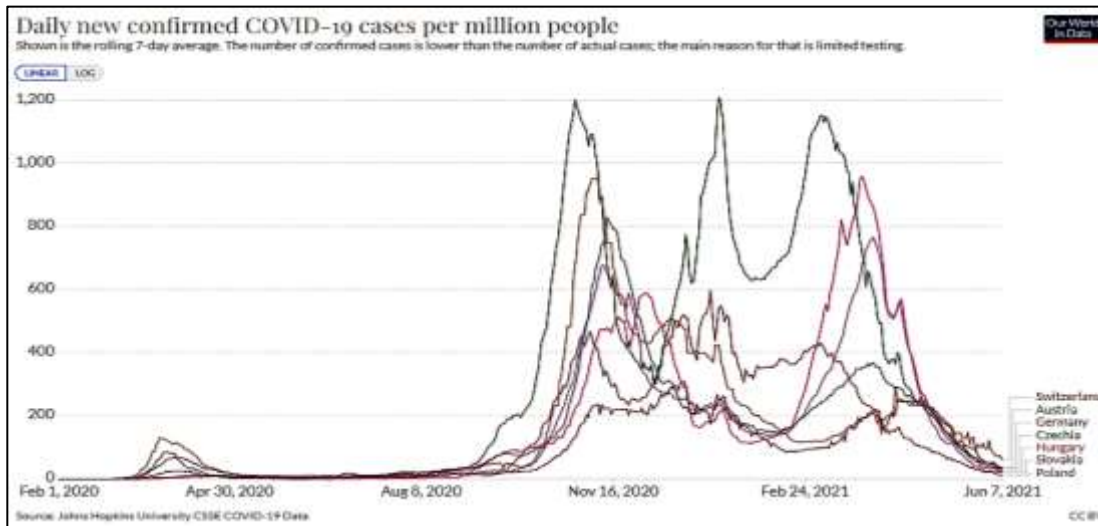
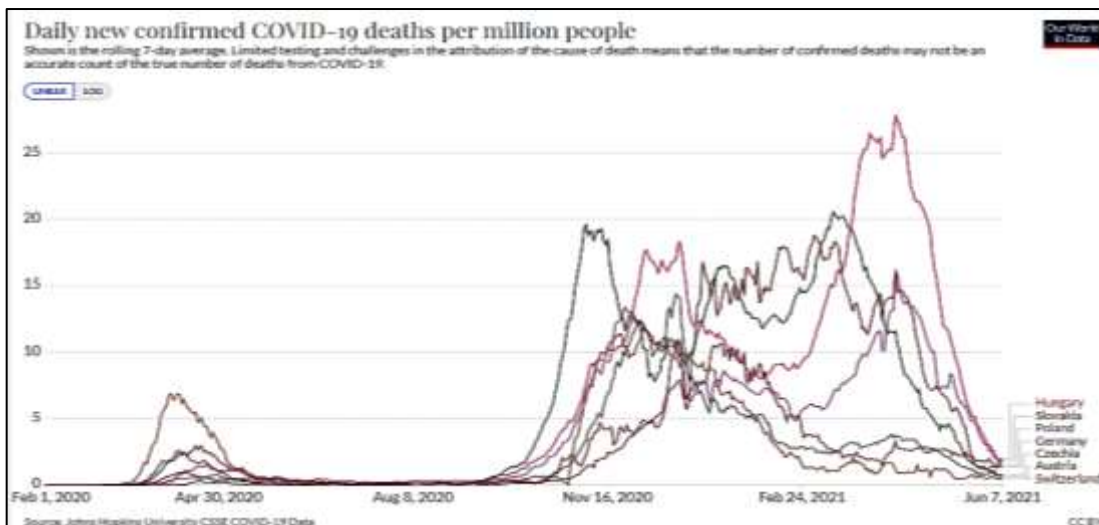


Figure 6



Baltics and Nordic countries:

Figure 7

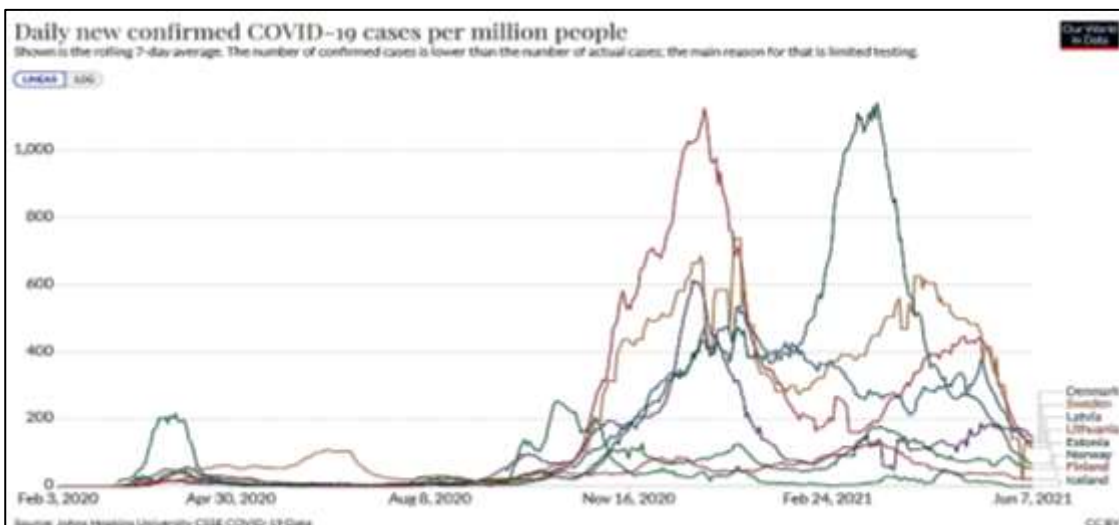
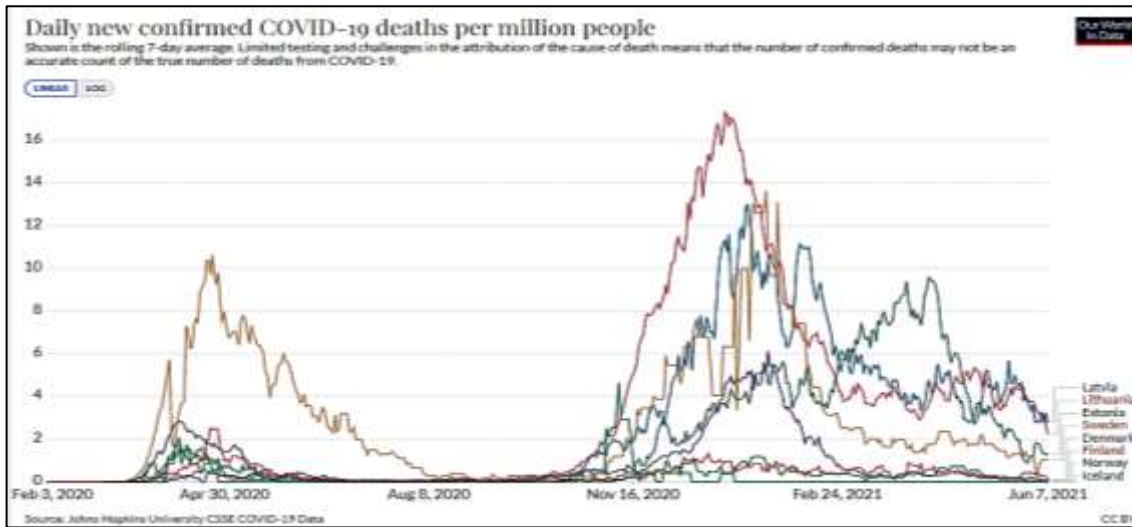


Figure 8



Northwestern Europe:

Figure 9

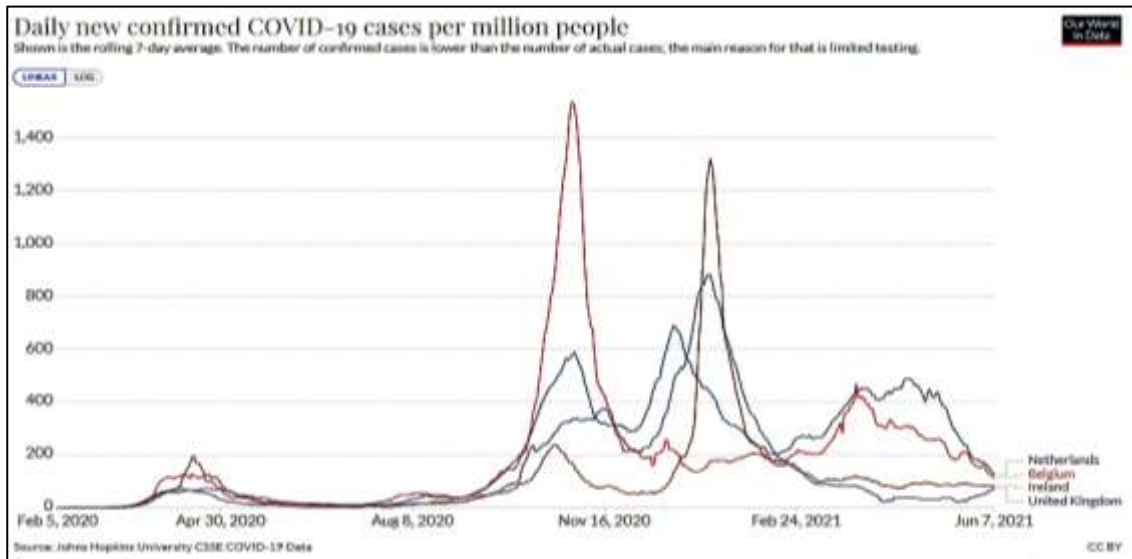
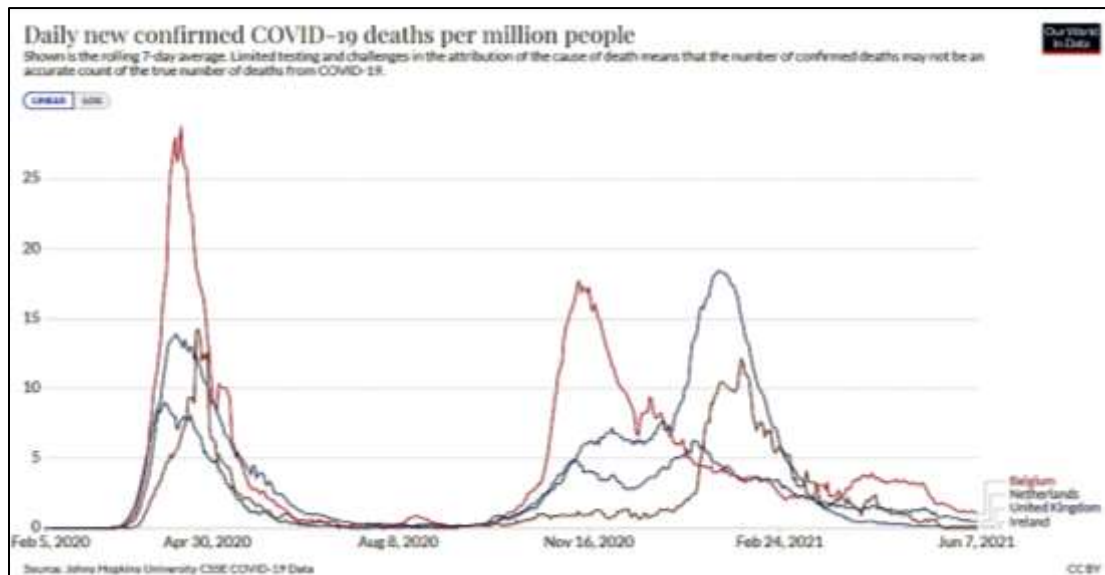


Figure 10



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