

ASPHER Report: COVID-19 Situation Reporting across Europe

Week of July 5th 2021

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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, particularly in England](#), and now also in Portugal. The frequency of the infection is increasing by around 70% weekly and hospitalizations are also increasing. Full two-dose vaccination still seems to be protective. [We believe there should be an international collaboration, capacity and standards in the genomic 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.

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 situation seen recently in India presented 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.

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

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, social prevention measures and mass gatherings. This has been 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.

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, governments began stepwise lifting of 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, there is now an increase in incidence in a few European countries forcing them to reimpose strict measures (Portugal, Spain, Greece).

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 nearly 4 million lives to date (3,985,022) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has surpassed 180 million (18,934,913). 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	73,013,453
Europe	56,122,101
South-East Asia	35,398,817
Eastern Mediterranean	11,207,055
Africa	4,224,102
Western-Pacific	3,668,621

As per the WHO weekly epidemiological report, the European Region is contributing 31% of cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases worldwide. The number of **new cases and deaths rose by 30% and 6% respectively** (3).

According to IHME analysis, the daily number of reported cases increased (after a continuous declining trend since mid-April). An increase in the transmission is noted in the following regions-Portugal, Spain, Cyprus, Israel, the Russian Federation, four nations of the United Kingdom, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. In the Russian Federation and

Central Asia, the infection rate is high among those who were previously infected and, in the UK, it is seen mostly among those who have been vaccinated. This shows the immune escape (proved in various studies) and high transmissibility of the Delta variant. IHME emphasizes effective policy strategies to the authorities to consider: a) improving vaccination coverage; b) a dose of vaccination with mRNA to those who received AstraZeneca and Johnson and Johnson, which proved to be less effective against the Delta variant; c) to increase the surveillance system capacity especially genetic sequencing to detect virus mutations; d) to continue social distancing measures and wearing of face masks irrespective of 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 05/07/2021 (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	596.84	0.96	42.79%
United Kingdom	370.17	0.27	49.90%
Spain	225.59	0.44	41.77%
Kyrgyzstan	221.68	1.40	N/A
Georgia	215.30	3.51	2.68%
Portugal	211.86	0.43	37.86%
Luxembourg	179.60	0.00	36.23%
Russia	156.00	4.51	12.27%
Kazakhstan	144.14	0.14	11.67%
Belarus	93.49	1.09	N/A
Ireland	88.30	0.32	N/A
Greece	78.08	0.81	38.55%
Andorra	66.56	0.00	N/A
Denmark	63.46	0.10	37.19%
Belgium	60.21	0.27	N/A
Turkey	59.55	0.55	18.93%
Netherlands	57.13	0.13	N/A
Monaco	50.96	0.00	N/A
Israel	37.45	0.00	59.85%
Norway	36.68	0.05	28.94%
Armenia	36.40	0.82	N/A
Finland	36.12	0.10	N/A
France	34.93	0.45	34.08%
Kosovo	34.93	0.22	N/A
Latvia	31.28	1.89	30.69%
Montenegro	30.48	2.27	22.44%
Sweden	28.06	0.17	N/A
Estonia	24.12	0.11	31.37%
Ukraine	21.35	0.87	2.05%
Croatia	20.18	0.59	28.63%
Switzerland	17.12	0.17	N/A
Malta	16.82	0.00	77.10%
Moldova	14.91	0.35	7.00%
Czech Republic	14.58	0.17	32.98%
Uzbekistan	14.43	0.09	N/A
Italy	12.62	0.42	33.86%
Serbia	12.55	0.42	N/A
Slovenia	12.16	0.07	33.87%
Lithuania	11.39	0.00	40.04%
Bulgaria	10.38	1.75	11.87%

Azerbaijan	8.52	0.11	14.28%
Austria	7.82	0.19	37.64%
Germany	6.88	0.41	39.02%
San Marino	4.21	0.00	66.25%
Slovakia	4.03	0.10	30.58%
Hungary	3.25	0.10	52.50%
North Macedonia	2.74	0.14	N/A
Bosnia And Herzegovina	2.44	0.39	N/A
Tajikistan	2.44	0.07	N/A
Poland	2.34	0.40	37.00%
Romania	2.32	4.92	23.91%
Albania	1.19	0.00	14.59%
Iceland	0.00	0.00	N/A

Cyprus:

The daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases are increasing in Cyprus. As of 6th July, 827 new cases were reported (787 on the previous day) (8). **Most of the recently infected people belong to the age group below 40 years and 55% of new infections were reported among the under 25 years age group. Also, the number of hospital admissions started rising.** Compared to the previous outbreaks, the number of deaths and hospitalizations are lower (9). **To boost vaccination, the Council of Ministers have established certain measures categorizing them into 5 pillars and the first target is to encourage vaccination among youth** by providing incentives to employees in both private and public sectors. **Pillar 2** - The Ministry of Health authorized incentives for vaccination to people (particularly age 18-30 years) at private organizations and businesses. **Pillar 3** - From 9th July, it is mandatory to present SafePass at both indoor and outdoor gatherings (of above 20 people). **Pillar 4** - Raising the information campaigns for public awareness concerning vaccination especially among young age groups. **Pillar 5** - Strict control and supervision for following the health guidelines and protocols. **From 1st August, the provision of free rapid antigen testing will be lifted** except for minors (12 to 15 years) and people aged 16 and above suffering from serious health conditions who cannot take vaccine (10).

Greece:

As of 6th July, Greece reported 1,797 new coronavirus cases (more than double from the previous day-801cases) (11). With the increase in the number of new cases and detection of the Delta variant in a few parts of the country, the government decided to improve vaccination instead of country-wide lockdown by announcing **mobile vaccination units at a tourist destination and offering a freedom pass incentive** (pre-paid card worth €150) for travel and entertainment for those aged 18-25 years upon receiving the vaccine jab (12). **Greece's vaccination committee also recommends vaccination for 15-17 year olds with parental consent** (13). Another initiative by the government to halt the spread of the virus is **to undergo a self-test (with PCR or rapid test) once a week on the day before attending the workplace for employees in the private sector** (for the month of July) (14). Also, the government imposed new restrictions at cinemas, theatres, hospitality sector by marking COVID-free (vaccinated or recovered) or mixed (unvaccinated with rapid or PCR test report) at the entrance of the venue (15).

Poland:

The rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed cases and deaths in Poland are low at 2.34 and 0.40 per million people respectively (table 2). On 1st July, the government **abolished the rule of receiving the second jab at the same vaccination centre as the first and now people who received the first dose of vaccine can choose any place to receive their second dose so it does not interrupt individual's holiday plans.** Lottery prizes are also made available for fully vaccinated adults. The government has created a competitive atmosphere among local

governments by announcing prizes if the community exceeds more than 67% vaccine coverage. To improve vaccine confidence among those unvaccinated the National Health Fund took the initiative by giving them a call and explaining the importance of receiving a vaccine against COVID-19. During the interview, the individuals have the opportunity to register for vaccination at their convenience. The limit on the number of employees reported for vaccination by employers is lifted and now any number of employees or their family members can be enrolled by employers (16). **The country is also preparing for the fourth wave because of emerging virus variants by maintaining temporary hospitals which helped save many lives during the third wave (17).**

Netherlands:

17 million vaccinations have been administered in the Netherlands, from which 38% of the population is fully vaccinated. **The Dutch government is considering bringing back several measures to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus after a surge in cases since the restrictions were lifted on June 26 (18). There have been outbreaks from cafes and discos which sometimes lead up to 180 positive cases in one night, even though they were obliged to show proof of a negative test or vaccination (19).** It will become apparent in the upcoming week if the tightening of the rules will be needed. It is not clear which measures would return (18).

Belgium:

After recent declining trends, the average daily confirmed cases have increased 78% in Belgium since the previous week with an average of 628.1 cases per day in the past 7 days as compared to 353.1 in the previous week. **Testing has increased for holiday travel, but there is an increasing positivity rate for tests amongst close contacts and suspected cases.** Hospitalizations have increased 19% with an average of 17.9 per day as compared to 15.0 the previous week. However, the overall number of occupied beds has decreased from 274 on 1 July to 250 on 8 July, with occupied ICU beds decreasing from 126 to 95 in the same time period. Deaths are down 8%, averaging 3.3 per day over the last 7 days as compared to 3.6 the previous week. **The Delta variant has now become the dominant strain of the virus in circulation with 50.5% of the samples sequenced followed by Alpha (42.5%) and Beta (1.0%) and Gamma (4.5%)** Belgium's vaccination campaign, which sent personalized invitations by post or sms to all Belgian residents, has been successful in vaccinating **80.2% of the adult population with one dose and 48.4% of the adult population with two doses of vaccine.** Brussels lags behind the rest of the country with only 57.67% of the adult population having received at least one dose of vaccine. **Belgium has lifted mandatory use of masks outdoors as of 1 July** except for specific conditions such as open air markets. The governmental committee on Covid (CODECO) is expected to meet again on 16 July. (20)

Lithuania:

As the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus is spreading rapidly, the **Lithuanian authorities have announced they will reinstate entry restrictions for arrivals from abroad. In this way, the spread of the variant will be decreased and Lithuania's public health will be protected.** People coming from green zone countries will have to execute a COVID-19 test before arrival and people coming from the yellow zone will have to conduct both a test before and after arrival. Persons arriving from a red or grey categorized country will additionally have to do a 10-day quarantine in Lithuania (21).

Bulgaria:

Only 14.5% of Bulgarian adults are fully vaccinated, meaning that the country is behind other European countries. Several people don't want to get vaccinated due to mistrust of the authorities, fear of the vaccine, and 400,000 people already built resistance against the virus.

Thus, the country is considering offering incentives to encourage people to get vaccinated, including providing people vouchers after a second jab of the vaccine (22).

United Kingdom:

The infection rate of the virus shows the same increasing trend as it did in previous weeks. From June 30 to July 7, an increase of 42.8% in people testing positive has been observed. **As of July 7, 86.4% of the adult population has received the 1st dose whereas 64.6% is fully vaccinated (23). Starting July 19, masks will no longer be mandatory in public spaces or transport, although they will still be recommended.** Nightclubs will be allowed to reopen, while gigs and festivals will be allowed to take place. **Distancing rules will end with the exceptions of when self-isolating and at airports.** Many businesses will be allowed to reopen (24).

Finland:

From June 30 to July 7, there were 958 confirmed cases in Finland, compared to the 947 of the previous week. **On July 7, Finland has vaccinated 60.8% of the population with the first dose and 21.4% fully (25). Nearly 300 covid-19 infections have been linked to the European Football Championship, among Finnish fans returning from St. Peterburg (26).**

Norway:

As of July 7, 29.10% of the population is fully vaccinated and 52.75 % has received the first dose (27). **On July 5, the health minister announced that full re-opening will be delayed due to the spread of the Delta variant,** which is on track to become the most dominant strain in the country this month (28).

Sweden:

From June 30 to July 6, there have been 2100 confirmed cases in Sweden (29). **As of July 7, 65,4% of the population has received the first dose, while 42.3% has received the second one as well (30). According to a survey by the Public Health Agency of Sweden, 16-19 year-olds are as willing to get vaccinated as most adults (31).**

Denmark

As of July 7, approximately 67.8% of the population has received one dose of the vaccine, whereas approximately 42.7% is fully vaccinated (32). Almost all Danish athletes that will travel to Japan for the Olympics are vaccinated (33).

Spain:

The rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed cases rose to 225.59/million people from 94.85 the previous week (34). The newly reported cases are among 12-29 year age olds and 30% of all cases are attributed to the Delta variant (35). To halt a further surge in the transmission of infection, **local authorities are implementing measures – nightlife venues are closed in Catalonia from this weekend and in many other municipalities.** Only the venues with outdoor areas are allowed to operate. Asturias and Navarre and Balearics regions have introduced **mass testing of young people.** In the region of Castilla y León, the lockdown restrictions are slowed down (36).

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 21st June 2021:

Mediterranean Region:

Figure 1:

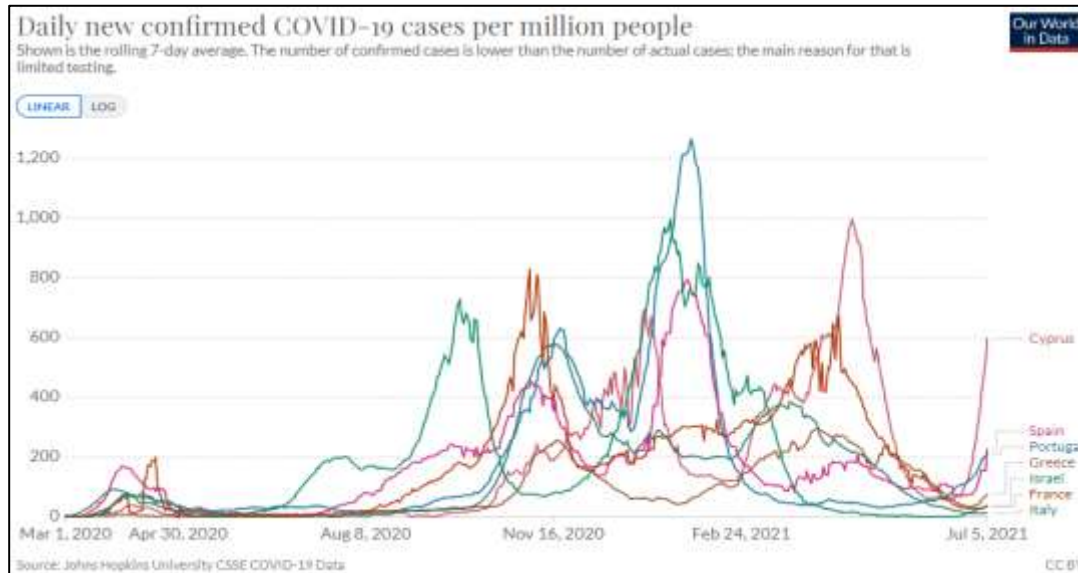
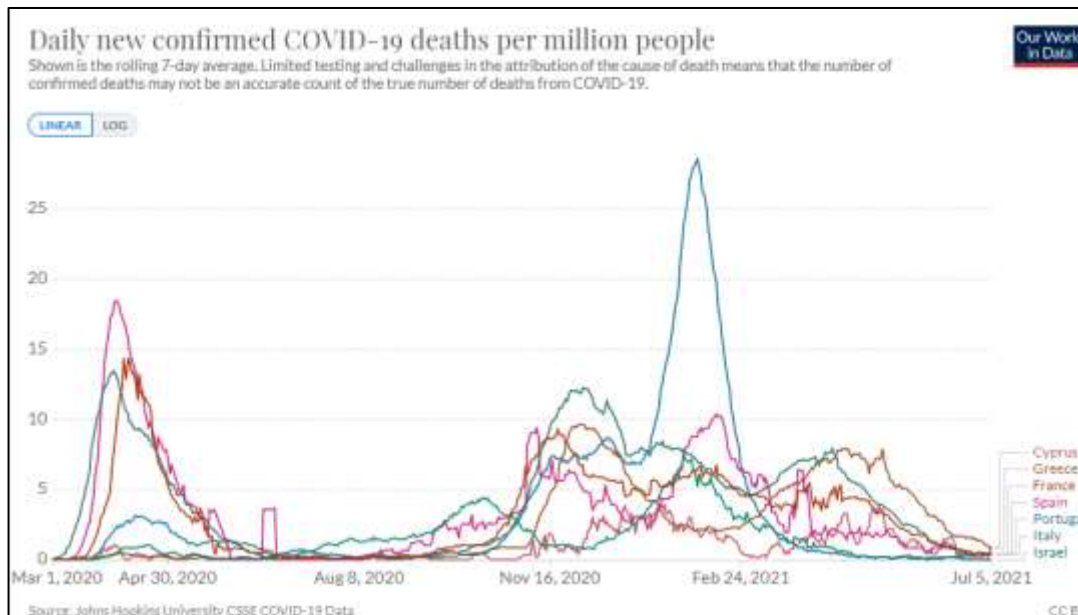


Figure 2:



South-East Europe:

Figure 3:

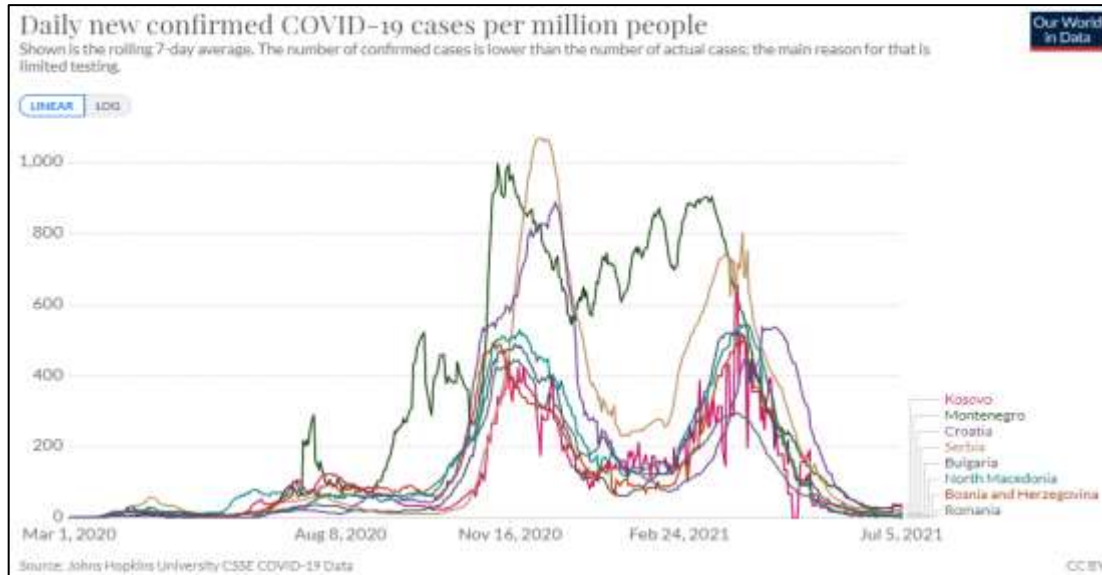
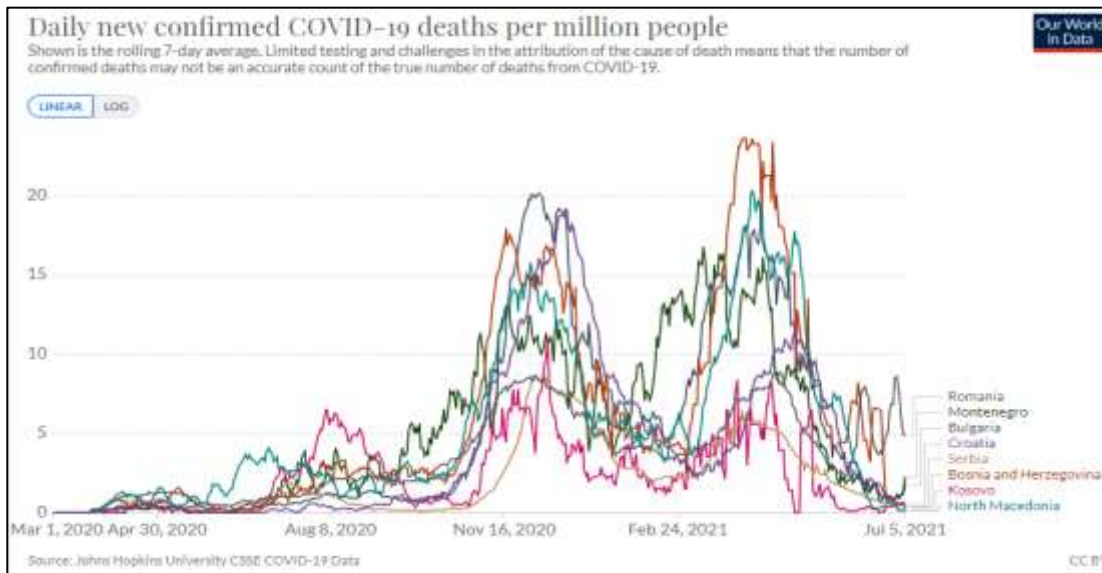


Figure 4:



Central Europe
Figure 5:

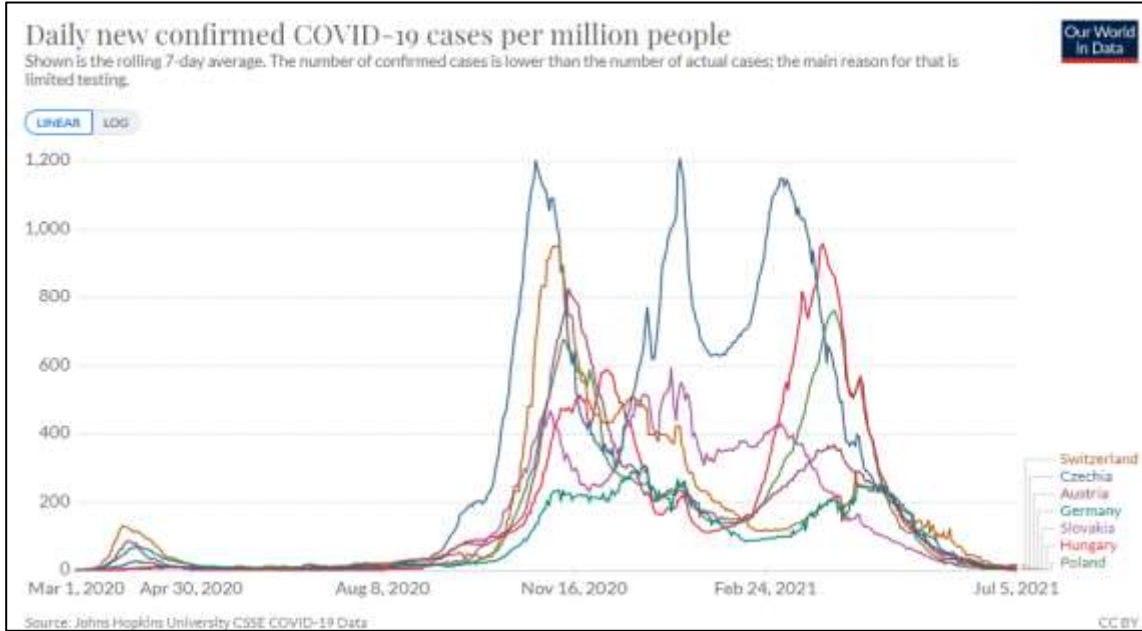
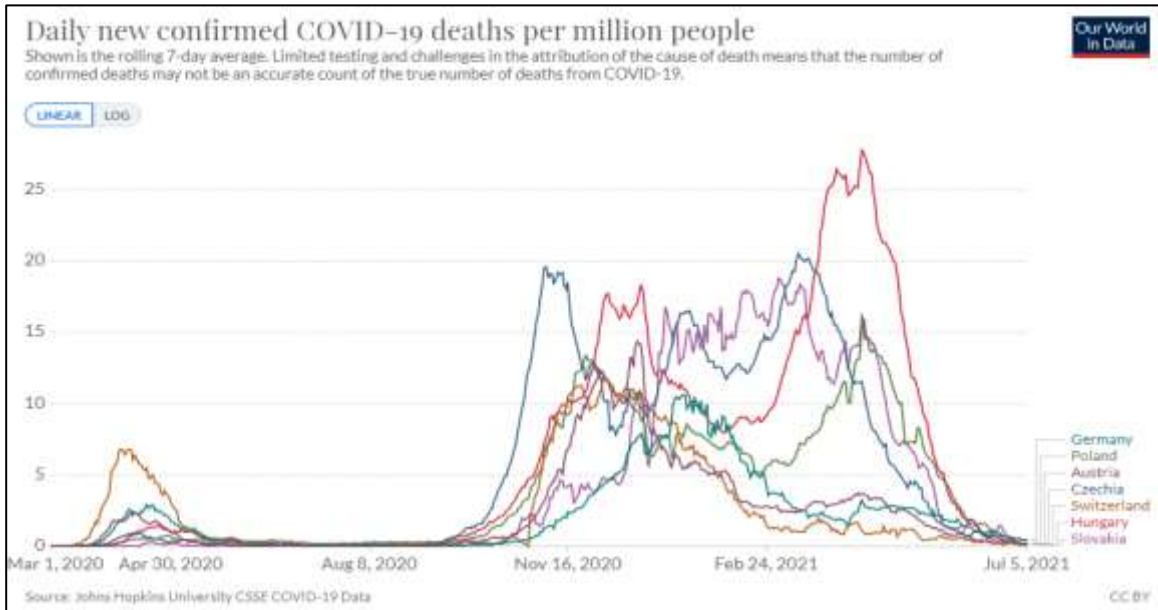


Figure 6:



Baltics and Nordic Countries:

Figure 7:

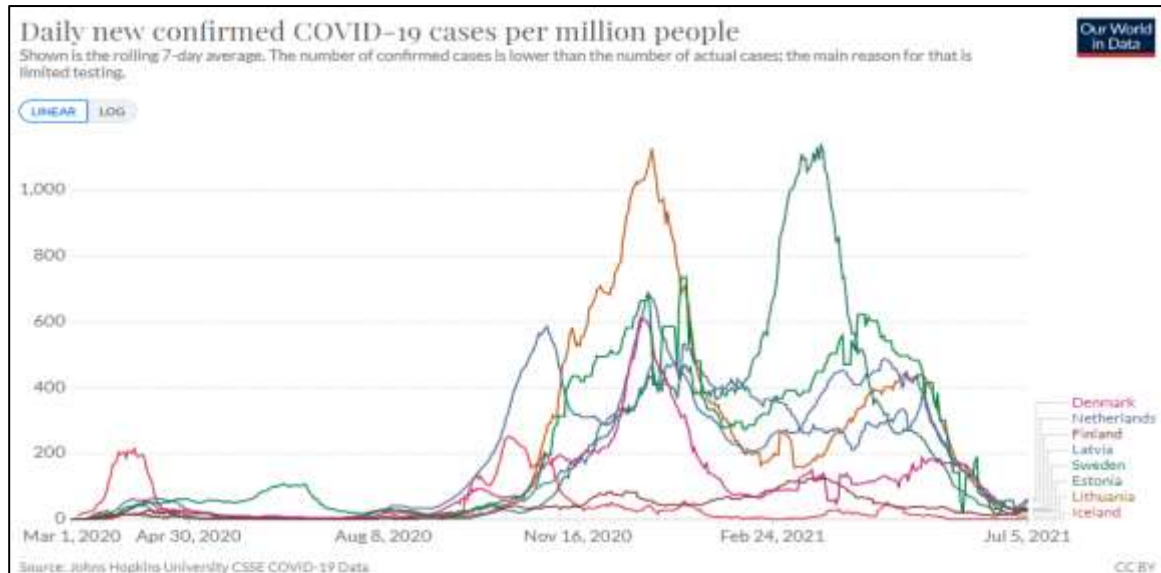
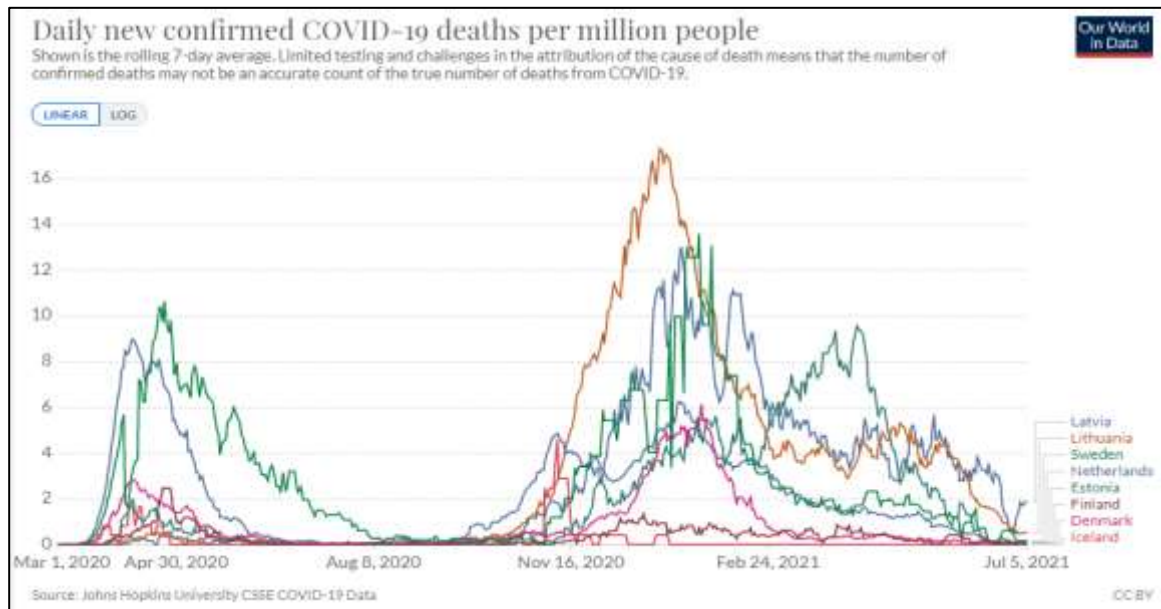


Figure 8:



North-western Europe:

Figure 9:

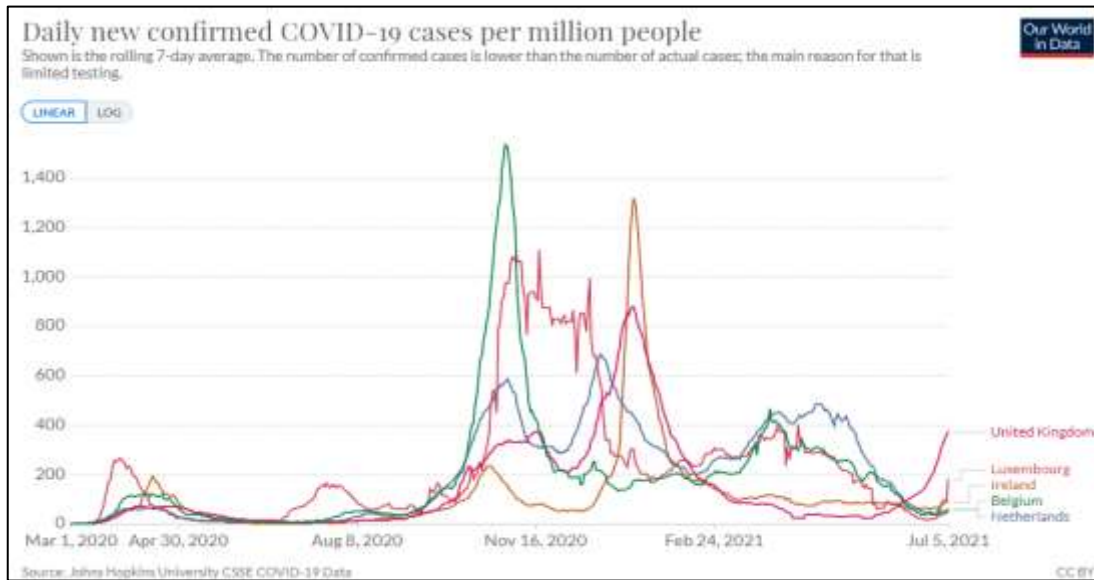
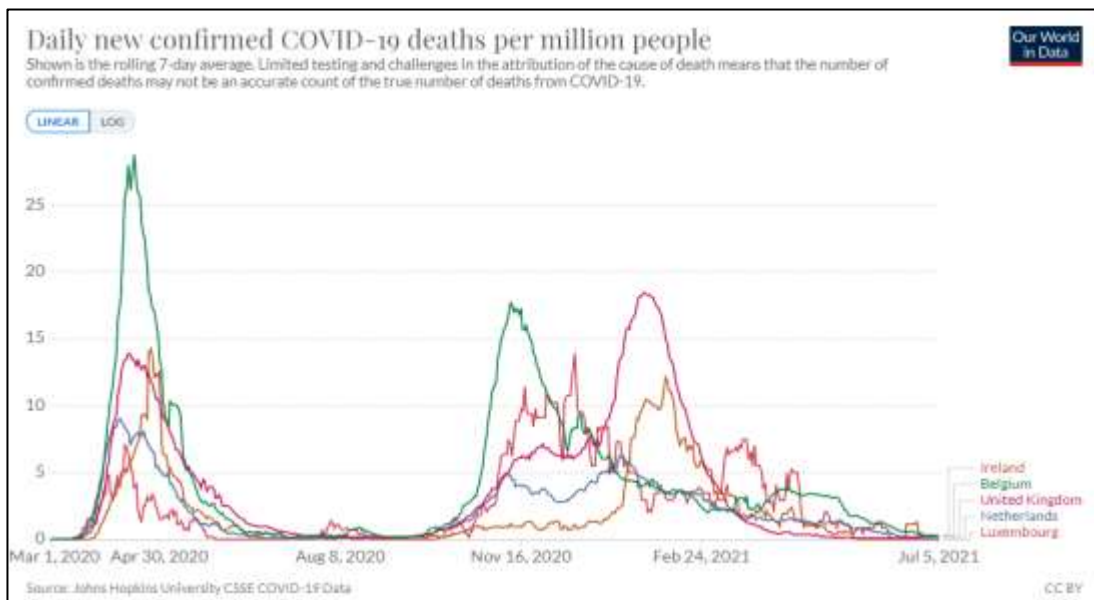


Figure 10:



Central Asia:
Figure 11:

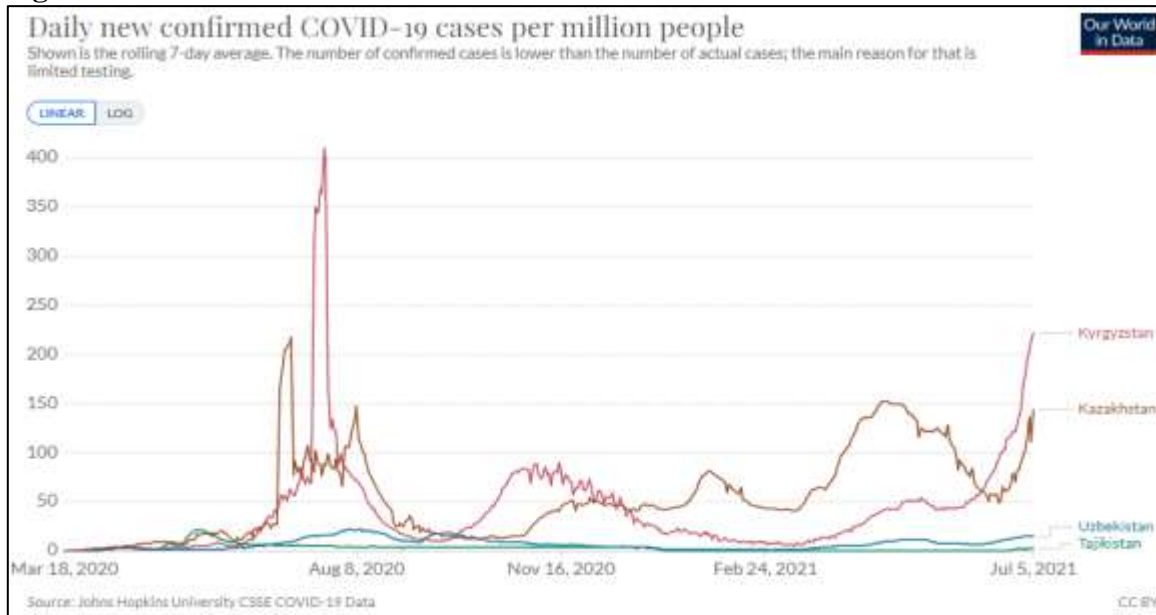
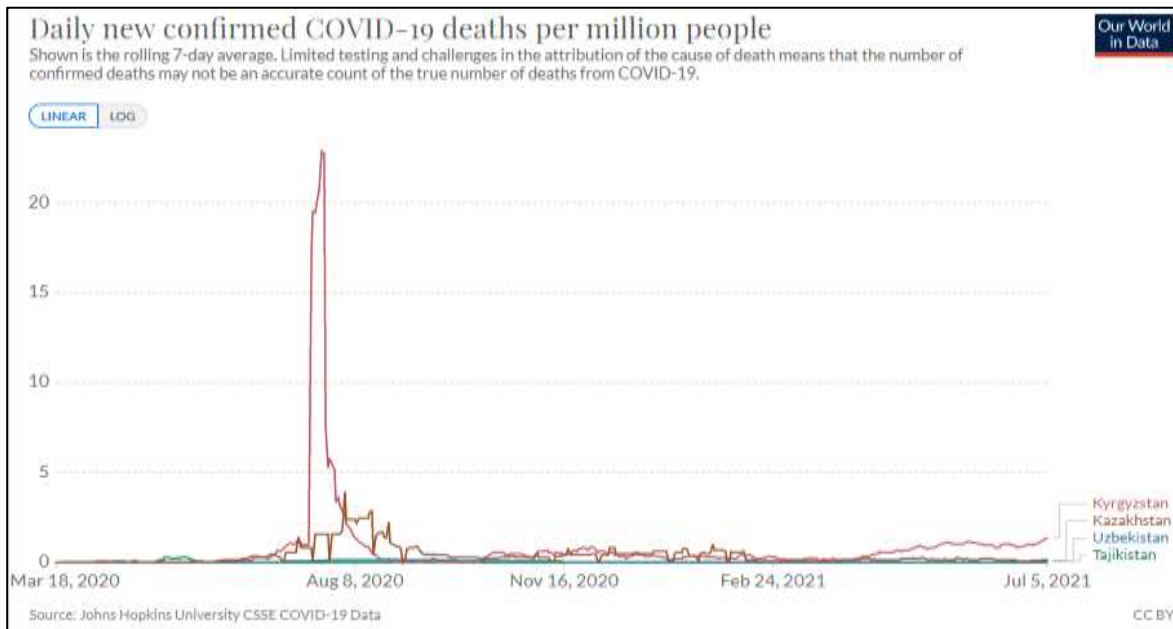


Figure 12:



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