

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 celebrates the extraordinary and dramatic falls of deaths from COVID-19 in Israel, Spain, UK and urges all countries to address their internal problems with vaccination programmes and get these sorted.

ASPHER is still gravely concerned about the severe undermining of confidence in all COVID-19 vaccination, brought about through the actions of individual European governments in pausing use of the AstraZeneca vaccine. This is in direct contradiction to the advice of the international health agencies, World Health Organisation, ECDC and the European Medicines Agency. This is damaging to all efforts of European countries to combat the virus and reduce it to very low levels so that some return to 'new normality' may be possible. No-one will be free from the virus unless we are all free. (see also https://www.aspher.org/download/677/aspher_az_vaccine_statement_en.pdf)

ASPHER is concerned about the rise of cases in many countries and the necessity for new lockdown implementation in Belgium, France, Austria and Poland amongst others. We are concerned about contradictory policies on lockdown and travel and urge governments to work together with the World Health Organisation, ECDC and the European Commission to create a coherent framework for control on international movement. We call on all governments to work together to create a practical strategic approach for suppressing the virus, saving lives, and reopening social and economic life.

ASPHER urges countries which have not yet been able to implement effective vaccine programmes to pay particular attention to safeguarding their clinically vulnerable people.

More generally 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 COVID-19 pandemic has entered its second year since the time WHO has declared 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 of vaccine rollout, some countries have significantly reduced the number of deaths as well as the infection rate (UK, Spain, Israel, Portugal). However, some countries are still experiencing a mounting infection rate, which is a major concern (Poland, Italy, France).

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapid spread of the virus in almost all the countries has resulted in considerable disruption of public health at a global level. The pandemic has cost over two million lives to date (2,862,664) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has surpassed 0.1 billion with the highest number in the Americas (55,035,136) followed by Europe (46,256,984), South-East Asia region (15,567,369), Eastern Mediterranean (7,837,399), Africa (3,132,143), and Western Pacific (2,007,736) according to the WHO statistics (2).

As per WHO weekly epidemiological report, the European region is contributing 35% of cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases worldwide. Overall, Europe has seen a rising trend in the number of new deaths in the past 7 days (2%). In Poland, France and Turkey, high incidence of coronavirus is reported at 495.6, 374.7, 315.3 per 100,000 population respectively in two consecutive weeks (3).

The following table shows the incidence of daily new coronavirus confirmed cases and deaths across European countries as reported on 05/04/2021

Table 1

Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus>

WHO Europe Region	Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases rolling 7-day average per million people	Daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths rolling 7-day average per million people
Serbia	753.87	6.45
Hungary	720.60	26.13
Poland	681.32	11.60
San Marino	606.15	0.00
Estonia	599.52	7.65
France	584.18	3.96
Andorra	556.53	3.70
North Macedonia	543.55	17.90
Cyprus	536.10	1.30
Montenegro	528.15	13.88
Slovenia	512.56	3.99
Czech Republic	494.22	13.62
Turkey	489.56	2.08
Bulgaria	485.39	17.95
Sweden	469.24	1.36
Bosnia and Herzegovina	462.69	22.9
Croatia	439.92	5.99
Netherlands	425.54	1.51
Belgium	370.13	3.46

Ukraine	340.67	8.18
Austria	339.93	3.28
Italy	316.58	7.03
Armenia	307.19	6.65
Lithuania	306.83	2.89
Moldova	295.24	10.94
Greece	294.98	6.96
Romania	278.79	7.10
Monaco	251.18	7.28
Luxembourg	235.52	2.05
Latvia	228.50	3.86
Switzerland	206.96	1.19
Azerbaijan	204.36	2.79
Kosovo	195.87	2.96
Slovakia	190.62	14.44
Germany	183.06	1.70
Norway	134.66	0.29
Belarus	131.39	1.01
Georgia	128.53	2.04
Denmark	125.91	0.37
Spain	123.75	1.78
Albania	117.95	2.88
Malta	110.33	3.56
Kazakhstan	105.87	0.19
Ireland	98.02	1.48
Finland	85.39	0.62
Russia	58.92	2.58
United Kingdom	52.26	0.52
Israel	40.90	0.84
Portugal	38.92	0.59
Kyrgyzstan	21.68	0.22
Iceland	17.58	0.00
Uzbekistan	5.40	0.02
Tajikistan	0.00	0.00

Northwestern Europe:

- In the Netherlands, between 31st March and 6th April, 276 individuals per 100 thousand inhabitants tested positive for COVID-19, which was 298 (per 100,000 inhabitants) in the previous week and the declining trend is also noticed in the number of people who tested positive across all age groups specifically below 18years (-11%) and above 80 years (-15%) (4).
- In Belgium, the moving 7-day average of daily newly confirmed COVID-19 deaths is high (among Northwestern regions) at 3.46 per million people and the incidence is 370.13/million people (table1). The past 7-day daily average of hospital admissions is 255.9/100 thousand inhabitants and the current reproduction number is 0.98 (5).
- In the United Kingdom, the average number of daily new cases has decreased significantly and the government is moving towards easing the lockdown restrictions across the country (6) (7).

Figure 1

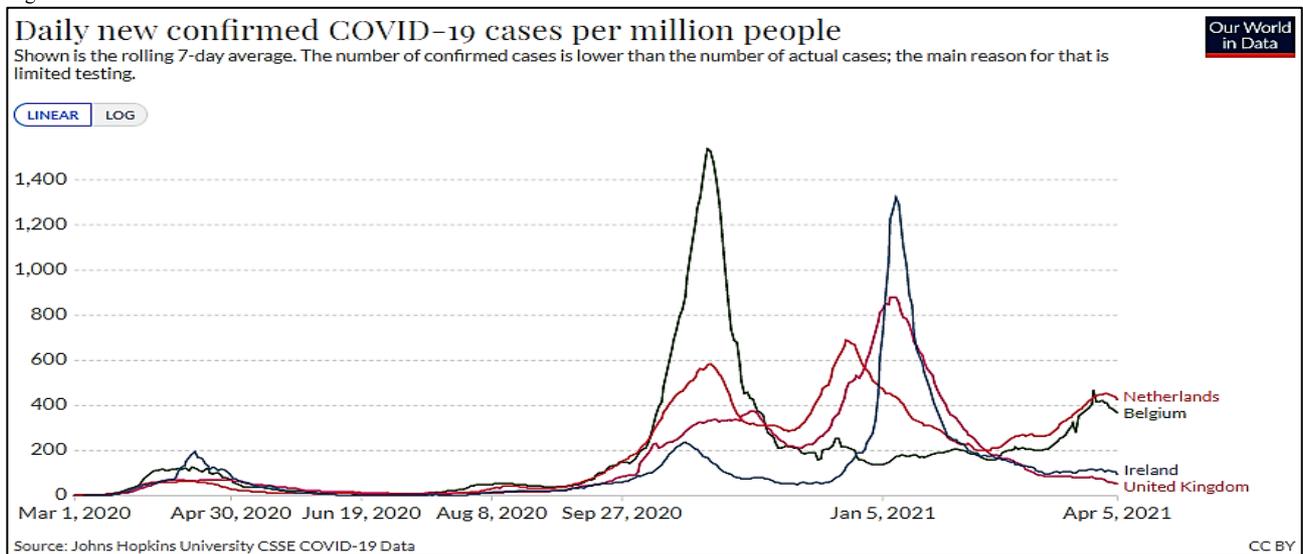
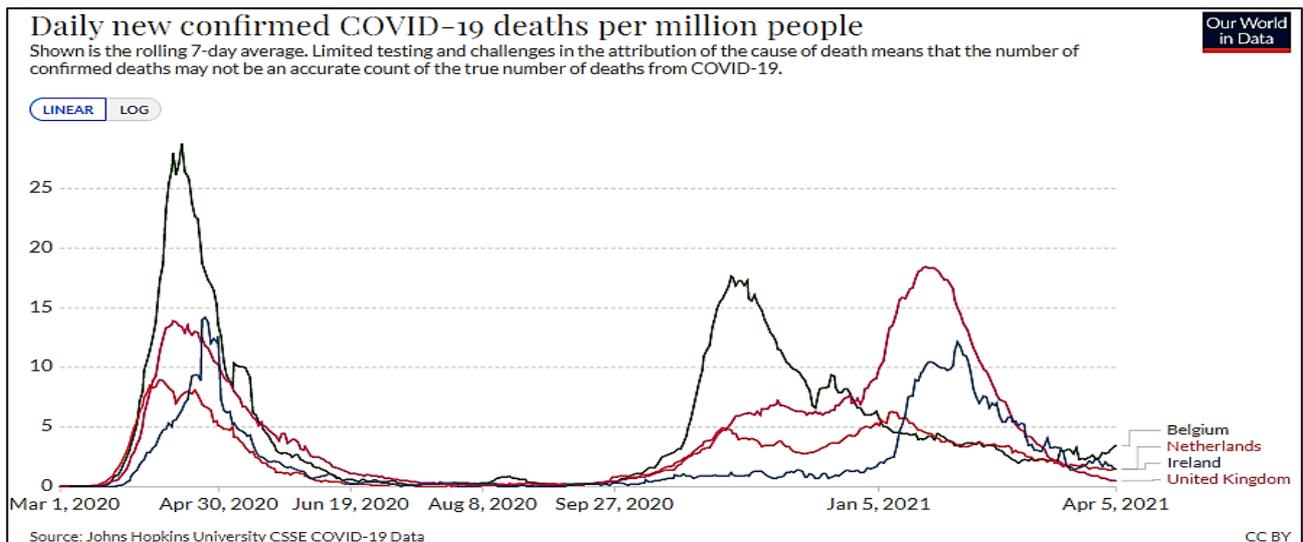


Figure 2



Scandinavian and Baltic Countries:

- In Estonia, the daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths are still high (figure 3,4) amongst Scandinavian countries for two successive weeks (8). As of the 5th April, the number of hospitalized individuals with COVID-19 is 686 and 52 patients require ventilator support. Most of the hospitalized patients are females, above 85 years of age followed by 80 to 84 years (9).
- In Finland, the epidemiological surveillance (from August 2020 till February 2021) among schools (both primary and secondary) has revealed that the risk of infection is low (1.5% i.e 926 out of 62,584 individuals) in the school setting when compared to other situations of virus exposure (10). The country has vaccinated 17.5% of its population with a first dose and second dose 1.6% (11). The preliminary research results regarding the effectiveness of vaccination against coronavirus has revealed that in the elderly, vaccination has reduced severe coronavirus disease requiring hospital admission by around 74% and 84% in people with comorbidities (12).

Figure 3

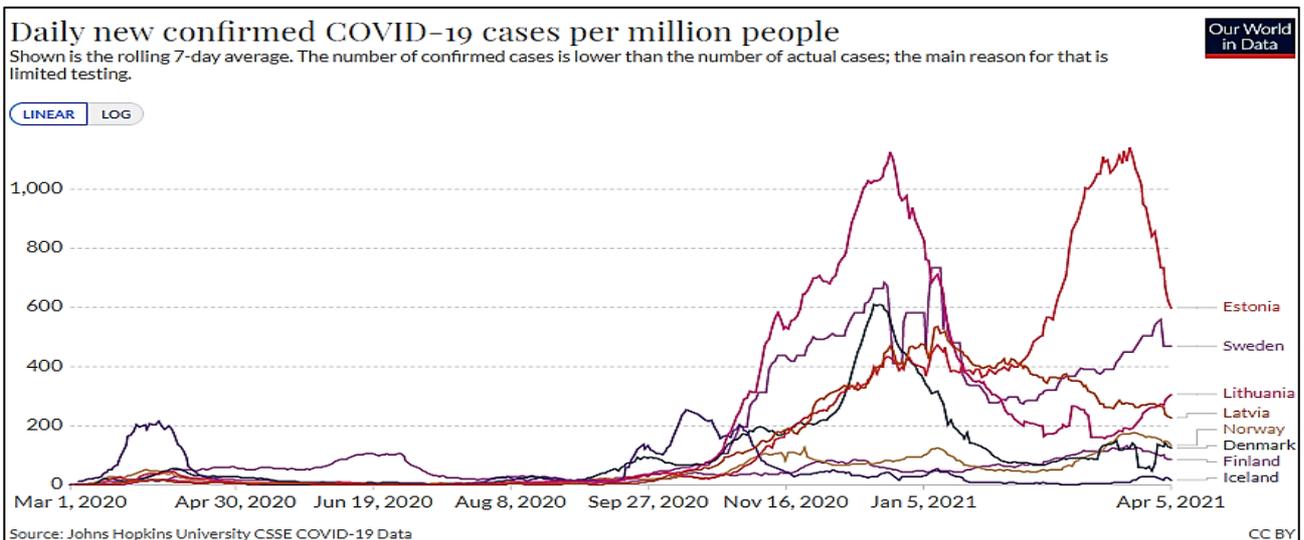
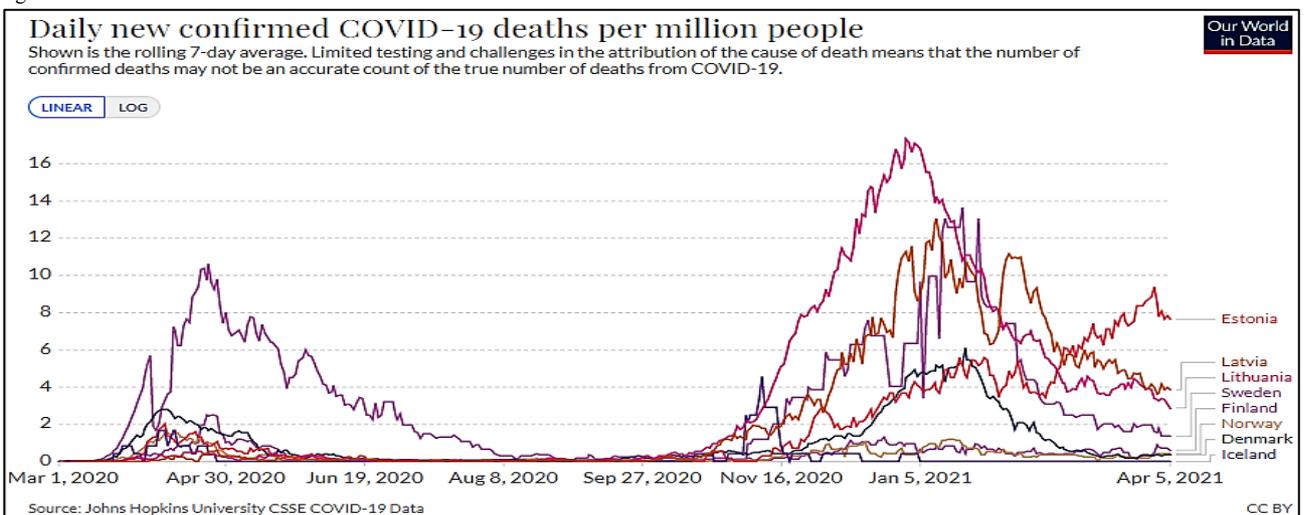


Figure 4



Central Europe:

- In Poland, the restrictions against spread of COVID-19 have been extended until 18th April despite a declining trend in the number of infections (28,073 cases on 03/04; 22,947 on 04/04; and 9,902 on 05/04) as the requirement of hospital beds and respirators is demanding (13) (14). On 8th April, Poland reported 241 new deaths due to COVID-19, while the Ministry of Health reported that 713 people died due to the coexistence of COVID-19 with other diseases. This is the highest number of deaths since the start of the pandemic (R. Otok personal communication).
- The rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths in Austria are 339.93, 3.28 per million people respectively (table 1) and the proportion of population fully vaccinated are 6.54% (15). Until 10th April (with a plan to extend until 18th) restrictions will be in place for the eastern regions of Austria-Burgenland, Lower Austria, Vienna (“Easter rest for Eastern Austria”) (16). The daily incidence (identified case number) went down over the past few days but this needs to be treated with caution in light of the considerably lesser number of tests done due to schools closure. The decision on further measures taken by the government is based on the criteria-comparative assessment of three prediction models on reproduction number and bed occupancy (intensive care). Previous aims to bring the incidence below 50 for reopening was not feasible and is no longer used as a target, however, a very low level of incidence in Vorarlberg (the most Western Bundesland) allowed for reopening of business, restaurants, etc. before Easter. Since then, the numbers are increasing in this region (J. Simon personal communication).
- The Czech Republic, which was leading among European countries with the highest number of infections, is now seeing a plateau in its infection rate. The moving 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases are 494.22 per million people which was 659.51 in the previous week (17).
- Hungary is ranked high in the WHO Europe Region recording a high number of deaths in two successive weeks (according to ourworldindata) (8) (table 1). However, as stated by the government, the first stage of easing restrictions is possible once 2.5 million people receive a first dose of vaccination (18) and the the country has initiated easing the current restrictions (cutdown in curfew hours, extension of opening hours for shops) from 7th April (19). Hungary is the second country among the EU in vaccination with the highest vaccination rate in Malta according to ECDC COVID-19 vaccine tracker (20).

Figure 5

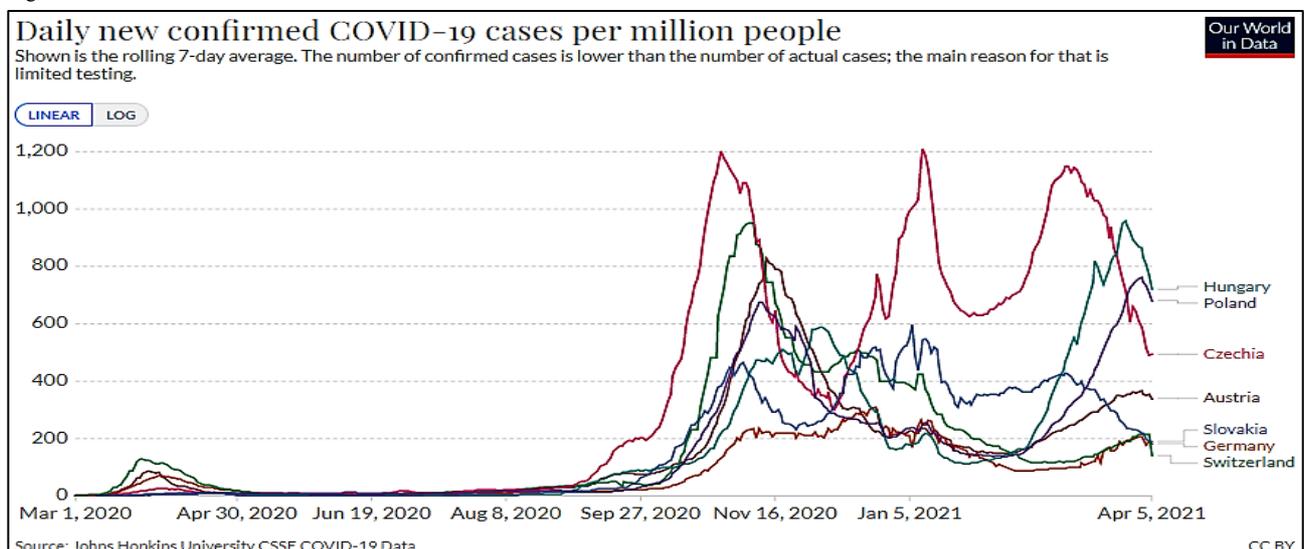
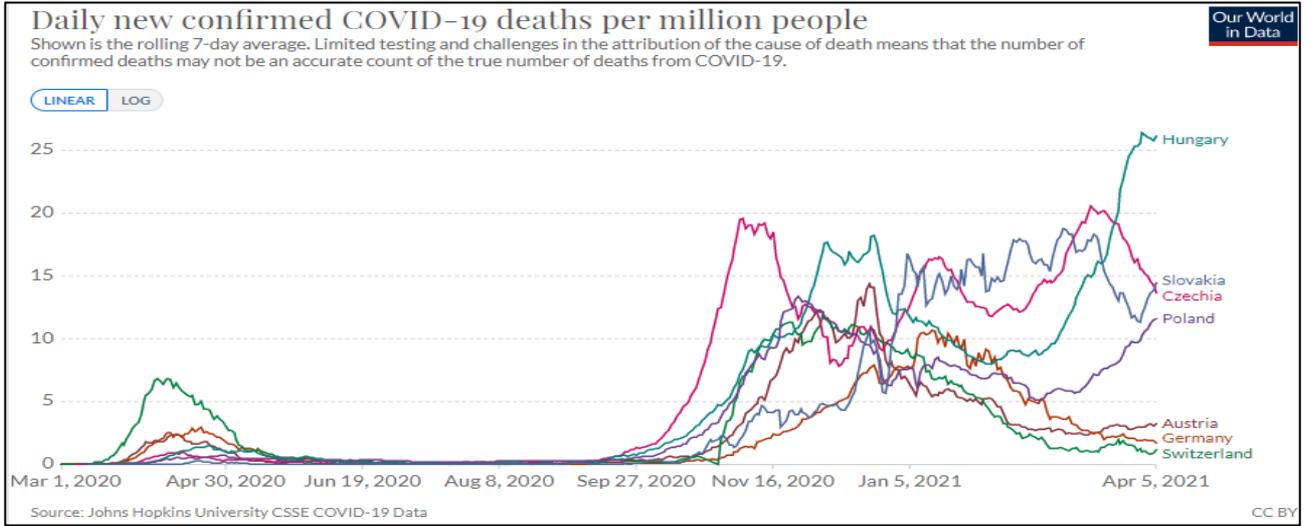


Figure 6



South-East Europe:

- Croatia has streamlined its testing strategy by including rapid antigen tests in view of a rising number of infections as well as inadequate testing capacity for RT-PCR (21).
- In a series of three weeks, all the districts in Bulgaria are in COVID-19 “red zones” (22). A total of 69,644 active cases were reported as of 6th April, an increase of 667 cases in comparison with the figures reported on the previous day (23).
- In Romania, the daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths are 278.79 and 7.10 per million people respectively (table 1). According to the weekly epidemiological report in Romania, since the beginning of the pandemic till 7th April, 85.5% of deaths are attributed to above 60 years age group and males contributed 59% of deaths (24).
- In Kosovo, new measures were introduced by Ministry of Health to reduce the infection rate, which are in effect from 7th April – closure of schools from 12th to 18th April (kindergartens remain open), movement restrictions from 22 hrs to 5 am the next morning and closure of restaurants and bars till 18th April, ban on public gatherings of more than 10 people (25).

Figure 7

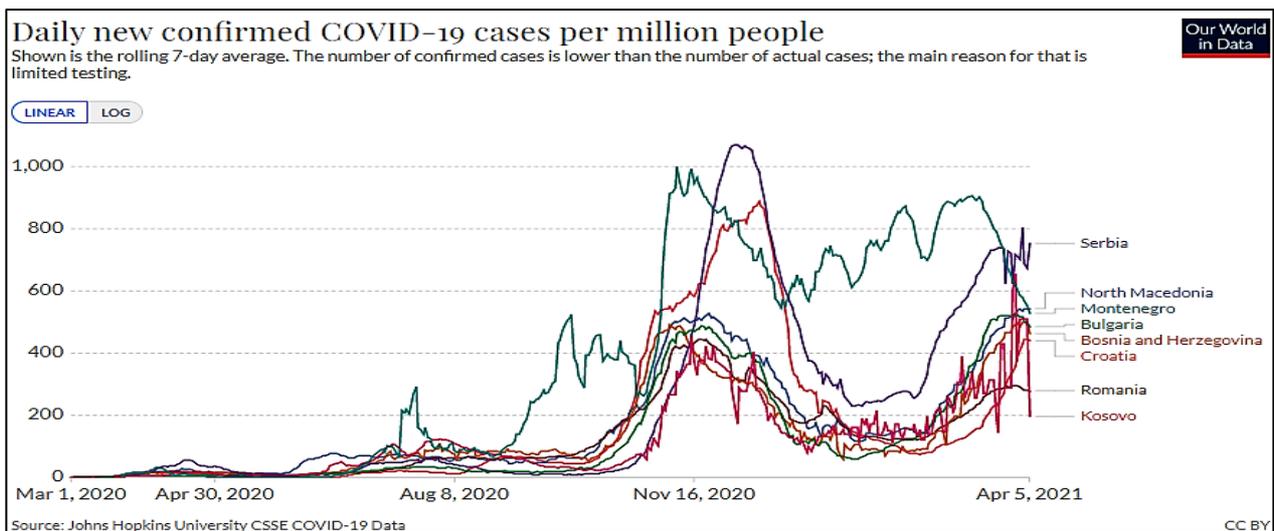
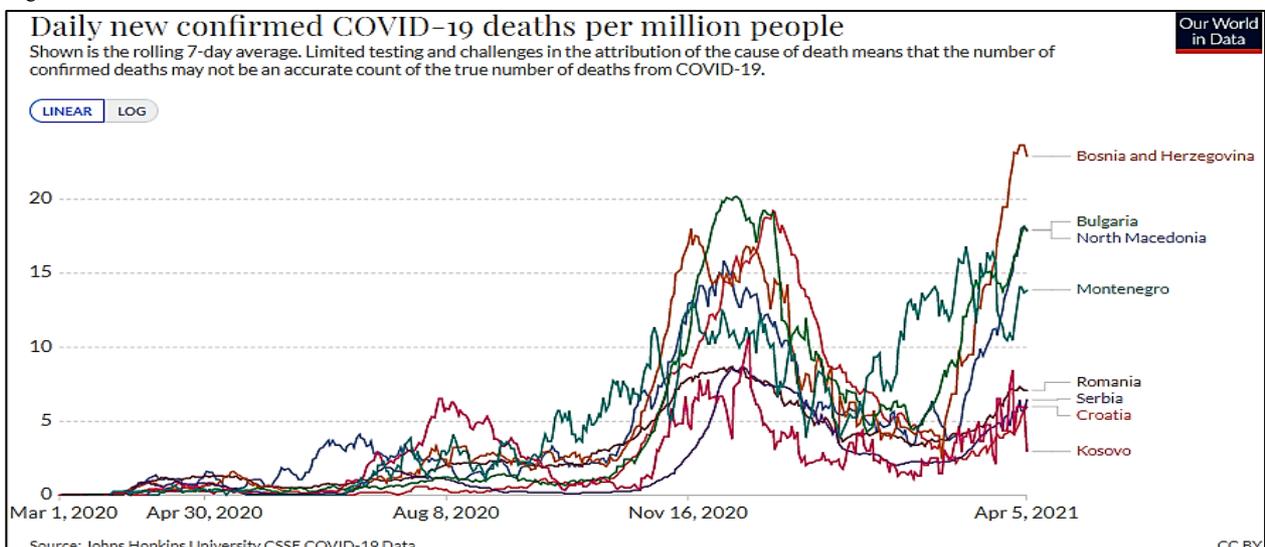


Figure 8



Mediterranean Countries:

- In Cyprus, free rapid antigen testing for employees and general public is in progress. Individuals who are self-employed or taking care of elderly/disabled persons are also required to take the test. All the teachers, school staff should undertake the rapid antigen test every week and produce the negative report during checks (26).
- In France, a third lockdown is in effect since 5th April. All schools and non-essential shops are closed for the next 4 weeks also night time curfew is in effect from 19hrs until 6AM (27). To ramp up the vaccine roll out, seven military hospitals were opened with an aim to administer 50 thousand vaccine doses in a week (28).
- In Italy, the daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths are 316.58, 7.03 per million people (rolling 7-day average) (table 1). In the past 30 day period, the percentage of COVID-19 cases among 19 to 40 years age group is high at 43.7% followed by 51-70 years, 27.8% , 15.6% in 0 to 18 years and 12.9% in above 70 years (29).
- Israel has launched a pilot study in the IDF (Israel Defence Force) for a duration of three months starting on 5th April – to exempt soldiers (who are fully vaccinated/recovered from coronavirus infection) from wearing masks while training in open areas, alongside keeping an eye on morbidity rate (30).

Figure 9

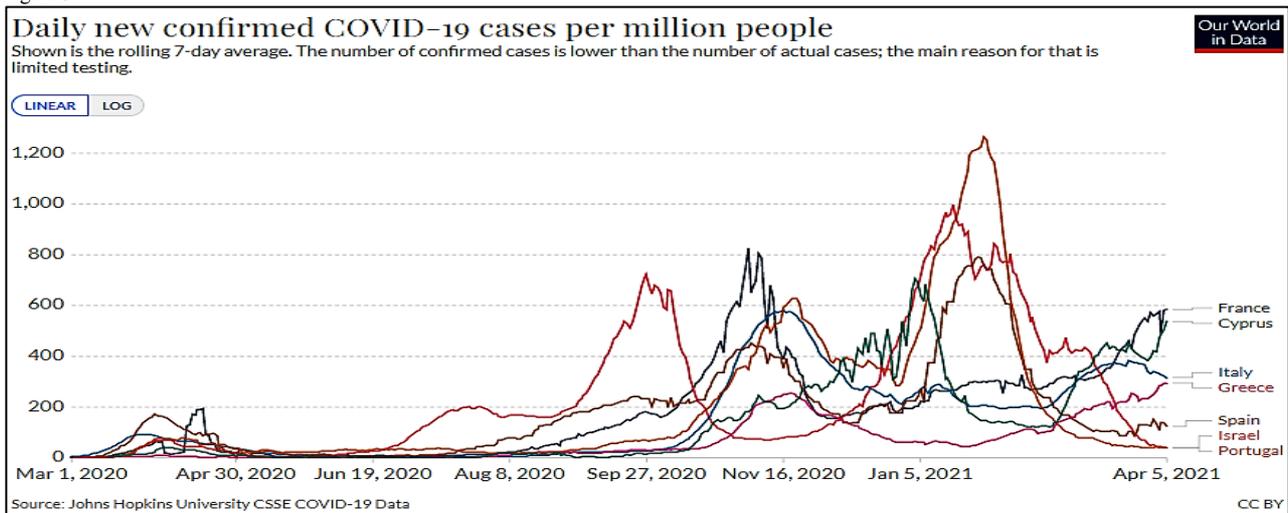
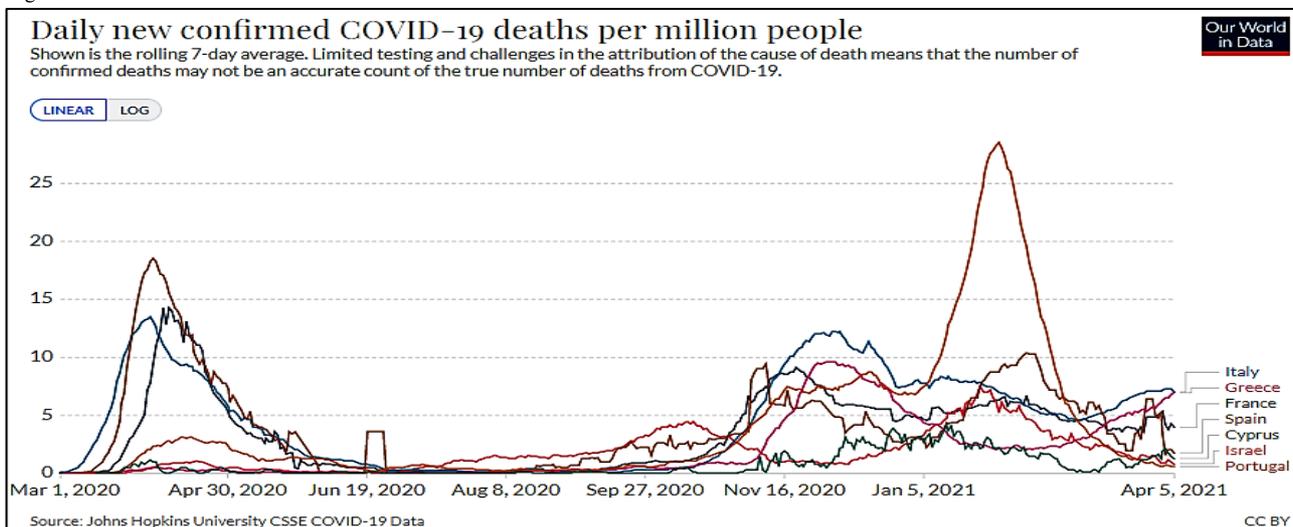


Figure 10



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