

ASPHER Report

COVID-19 Situation Reporting across Europe

Week of April 19th 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 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)

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 data on the transmission of variants is very limited and the criteria for sequencing of samples tested across countries not yet standardised.

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, some countries have significantly reduced the number of deaths and the infection rate (UK, Spain, Israel, Portugal). A few countries in individual European sub-regions have started easing lockdown restrictions (UK, Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Israel, Portugal). However, some countries are still experiencing a mounting infection rate which is a major concern (Turkey, France, Germany).

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 (3,037,398) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has surpassed 0.1 billion with the highest number in the Americas (60,062,728) followed by Europe (49,820,616), South-East Asia Region (18,562,170), Eastern Mediterranean (8,609,860), Africa (3,242,955), and Western Pacific (2,258,194) according to WHO statistics (2).

As per the WHO weekly epidemiological report, the **European region is contributing 35% of cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases** worldwide. The number of new cases and deaths in the past 7 days has reduced by 3% each compared to the previous week. In Turkey, France and Germany high incidence of coronavirus is reported at 491.2, 358.7, 173.1 per 100,000 population respectively (3). According to the IHME analysis based on the seroprevalence data for waning antibody test sensitivity, to date 1/5th of the population in the European Region has been infected. In most of the European countries, B.1.1.7 is the dominant variant which might have suppressed the transmission of other escape variants (4).

The following table shows the incidence of daily new coronavirus confirmed cases and deaths across European countries as reported on 19/04/2021

Table 1
Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus>

WHO Europe Region	Rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases/million population	Rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths/million population
Cyprus	823.32	3.42
Turkey	711.43	3.53
Sweden	604.53	2.36
Croatia	531.10	9.33
France	480.24	4.29
Netherlands	453.70	1.41
Serbia	415.66	5.31
Andorra	414.16	3.70
Hungary	413.28	24.74
Poland	410.23	13.79
Kosovo	392.11	8.28
Lithuania	390.90	3.83
Slovenia	379.66	2.82
Estonia	359.58	6.79
North Macedonia	356.22	14.81
Ukraine	303.07	8.96
Montenegro	290.24	12.96
Luxembourg	288.46	3.19
Czech Republic	287.17	8.19

San Marino	286.24	8.42
Bulgaria	281.67	16.30
Latvia	281.59	5.00
Bosnia and Herzegovina	281.12	19.64
Greece	271.28	7.94
Armenia	264.72	6.85
Austria	263.15	3.43
Georgia	257.16	2.36
Germany	243.03	2.65
Italy	234.86	6.22
Switzerland	234.03	0.91
Azerbaijan	204.54	3.17
Romania	167.69	8.41
Moldova	156.46	6.45
Kazakhstan	143.84	0.17
Slovakia	128.19	14.18
Denmark	125.02	0.40
Belgium	124.41	3.44
Belarus	124.41	1.06
Spain	123.75	1.76
Albania	117.95	1.29
Malta	110.33	2.27
Norway	99.06	0.58
Monaco	98.29	0.00
Ireland	74.67	1.48
Russia	58.84	2.57
Finland	51.80	0.44
Portugal	48.42	0.39
Kyrgyzstan	37.73	0.59
United Kingdom	37.50	0.38
Iceland	25.95	0.00
Israel	17.50	0.61
Uzbekistan	7.97	0.02
Tajikistan	0.00	0.00

Northwestern Europe:

Belgium:

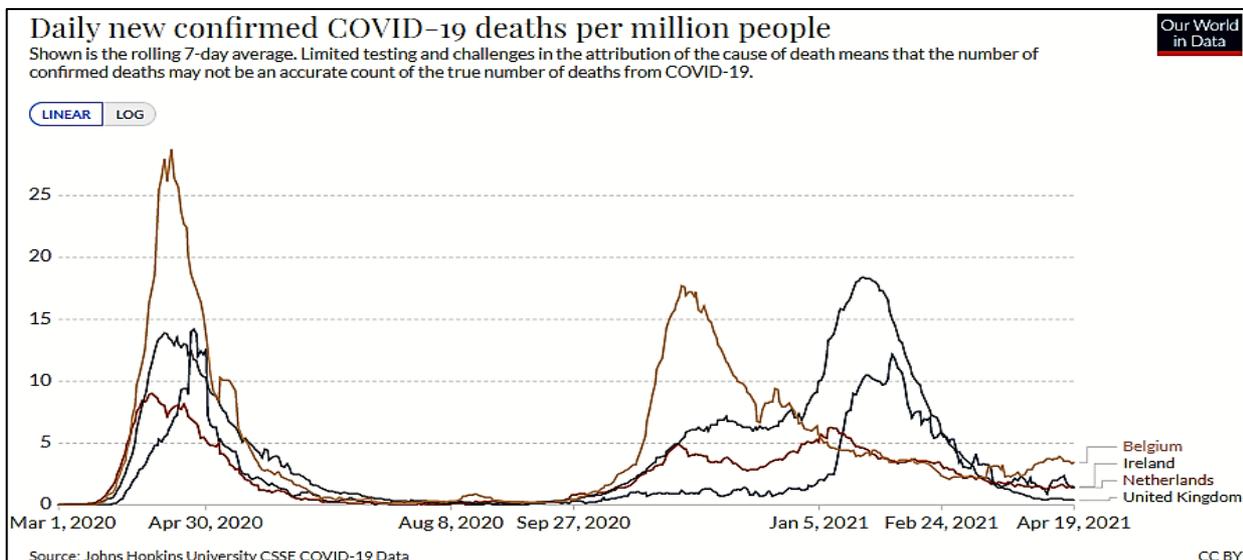
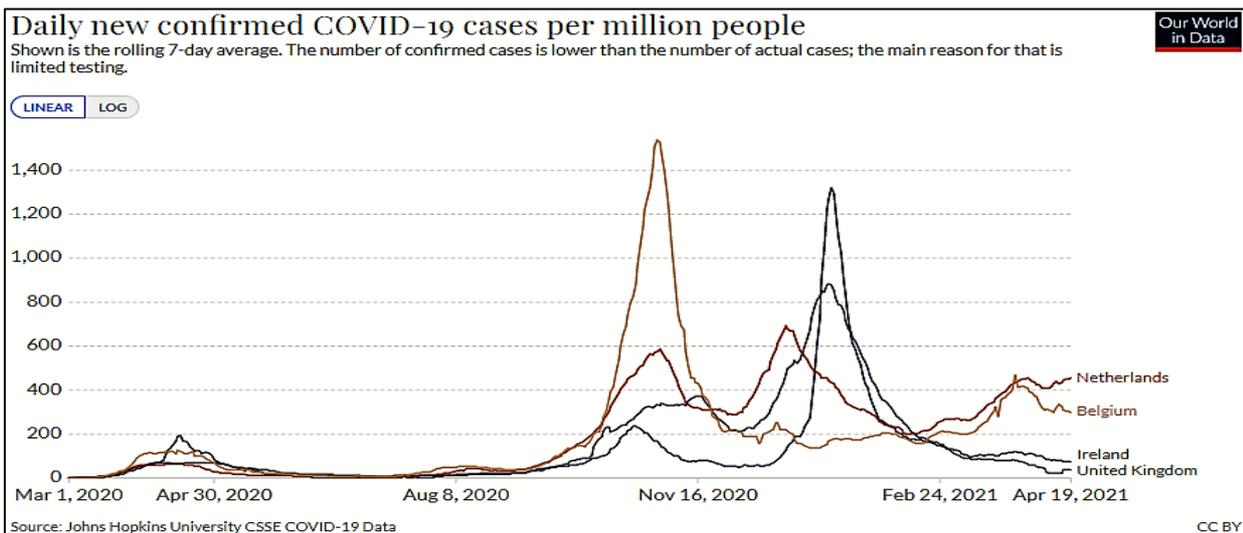
- The epidemiological situation as on 21st April: daily average of confirmed cases in past 7 days are 3469.
- **There is reduction in number of hospital beds (3103), ICU beds (925), daily average deaths in past 7 days (36.9), at -1%, -2% and -15% respectively compared to the past week.**
- Median R estimate for 14 to 20 April is 0.989. 25.5% of adult population has received one vaccine dose (20.4% of total population) and 7.8 % of adult population has received two doses (6.2% of total pop). No reporting given on variants (3).

Netherlands:

- The number of people who received positive test result for COVID-19 increased to 310/100,000 inhabitants (between 14th and 20th April), which was 294 in the past week.
- **Among the age group 80 and above the number of reported positive tests has reduced by 11% and no change is observed between 60 and 80 years age group. Whereas, across the population aged below 30 years, an increase in number of new infections has been reported.**
- The pressure on the hospitals and health care workers (general practitioners, municipal public health services and other care providers) is persisting, specifically on general practitioners because of the possibility in providing treatment to the patient at their homes (5).

United Kingdom:

- The number of deaths (within 28 days of positive test for COVID-19) and the daily number of people who tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 7 days (14th to 20th April) has reduced by 23.7% and 10.2% respectively compared to the week before.
- By 19th April, 3.3 million people have received a first dose and 10.4 million people are fully vaccinated (6).
- **The data on distribution of variants in UK shows that there are 77 confirmed cases (73 England, 4 Scotland) of COVID variant B.1.617 (first originated in India) (7).**



Scandinavian and Baltic countries:

Sweden:

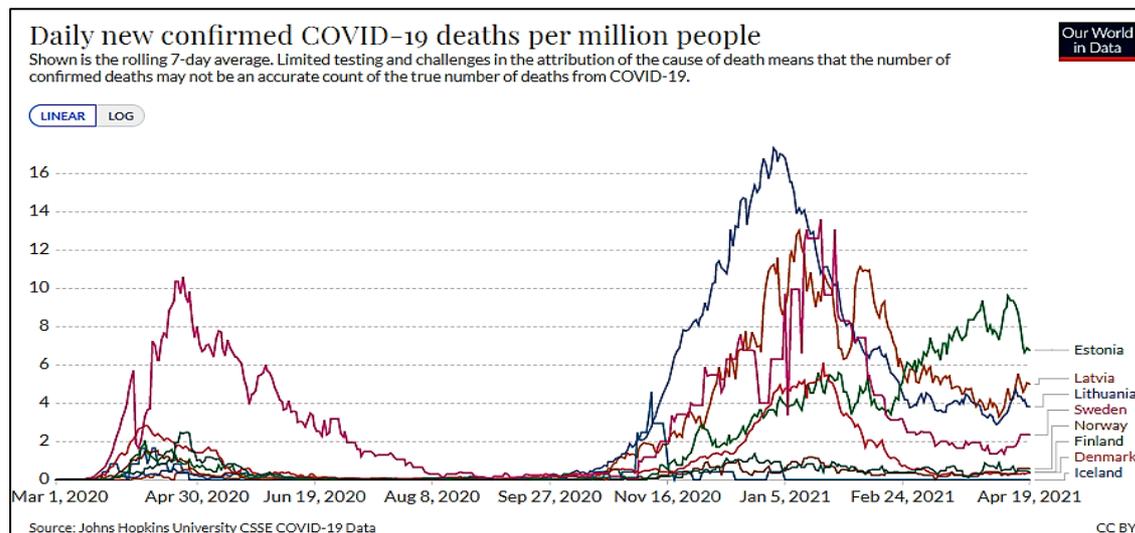
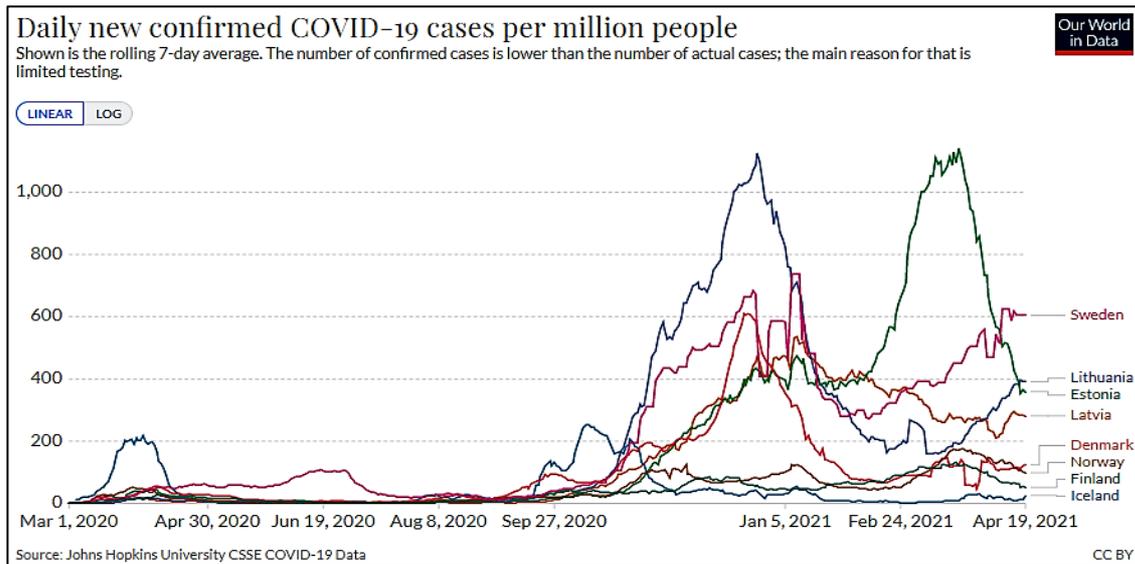
- **The transmission of coronavirus is high at the moment in Sweden and the capacities of health care are overburdened. Due to this reason the plan for lifting restrictions is extended to 3rd May (initially planned for 11th April) with a possibility to extend further (8)**
- The weekly epidemiological report on COVID-19 (April 12 to 18) in Sweden shows that, the overall incidence is 398/100,000 inhabitants and is high among 0-9 and 40-49 years age group. Compared to the previous week there is **significant statistical increase in incidence among 0-9 and 10-19 years age group noted** and the opposite is seen among 40-49 and 60-69 years age group. **Due to vaccination the incidence is below 100/100,000 inhabitants in people who live in special housing for elderly, nursing home care and above 80 years (9)**. As on 20th April, the percentage of people vaccinated with one dose are 23.1% and 8.4% are fully vaccinated (10).

Estonia:

- The rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases in Estonia are 359.58/million people which was above one thousand before the end of March (11). The number of new infections in last 24 hours (on 21st April) are 472 and number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 are 427 among which 58 patients are in intensive care, 37 patients are on ventilator support (12). Currently the reproduction number is between 0.80 to 0.85.
- **As part of stepwise relaxation of restrictions, from 26th April schools will reopen and the primary school children can go back to classroom, also there is possibility of some outdoor activities (with continues monitoring of infection rate). The decision made by the government regarding schools is a growing concern among members of the scientific advisory council, that children who spent holidays abroad can be the source of infection on returning to school (13)**. From May 3rd, 1 to 4 classes can return to schools in parallel with outdoor dining until 9 pm, outdoor sports with restrictions (2+2 rule, 25% occupancy and no group trainings). All indoor activities are restricted (14) (15).

Denmark:

- **The 14-day case notification in Denmark is 164.48/100,000 inhabitants which is one of the lowest in European countries according to ECDC weekly COVID-19 report-week 15 (16)**.
- As on 22nd April, the number of people hospitalized are 191, out of which 44 patients are in ICU and 24 are on respirators (17).
- Denmark **has planned gradual reopening at 14 day intervals in 4 phases**. On 6th April 2021- **phase 1**, schools, education and training are partly opened along with liberal service trades, small shopping centres, department stores, etc. The country has **lifted border restrictions** for Iceland (whole nation), Norwegian regions – Nordland, Trøndelag, Troms and Finnmark from 21st April and travellers from these areas are exempted from isolation after entry (18). **In phase 2**, freedom of assembly will be increased (indoor 10, outdoor 50); schools (5-8) and educations (in few regions, for 30% students; outdoor and indoor dining, indoor sport for children and elderly, large department centres etc. From 6th May-**phase 3**, assembly limits increased to 25 indoor, 75 outdoor, cultural activities and indoor sport for adults will be opened. In **phase 4** further extension of limit on assembly, sport, leisure activities, society and club activities, amusement parks, evening schools can be opened from 21st May. **Corona pass is required to participate in the events, sports, and cultural activities from phase 2 to 4 (19)**.



South-East Europe Region:

Bulgaria:

- The rolling 7 day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths are 281.67 and 16.30/million population respectively (table 1).
- For a **fifth consecutive week all 28 states in Bulgaria are in COVID-19 “red zones”**. However, the infection rate is showing a declining trend according to the National Center for Infectious and Parasitic Diseases weekly report (20).

Romania:

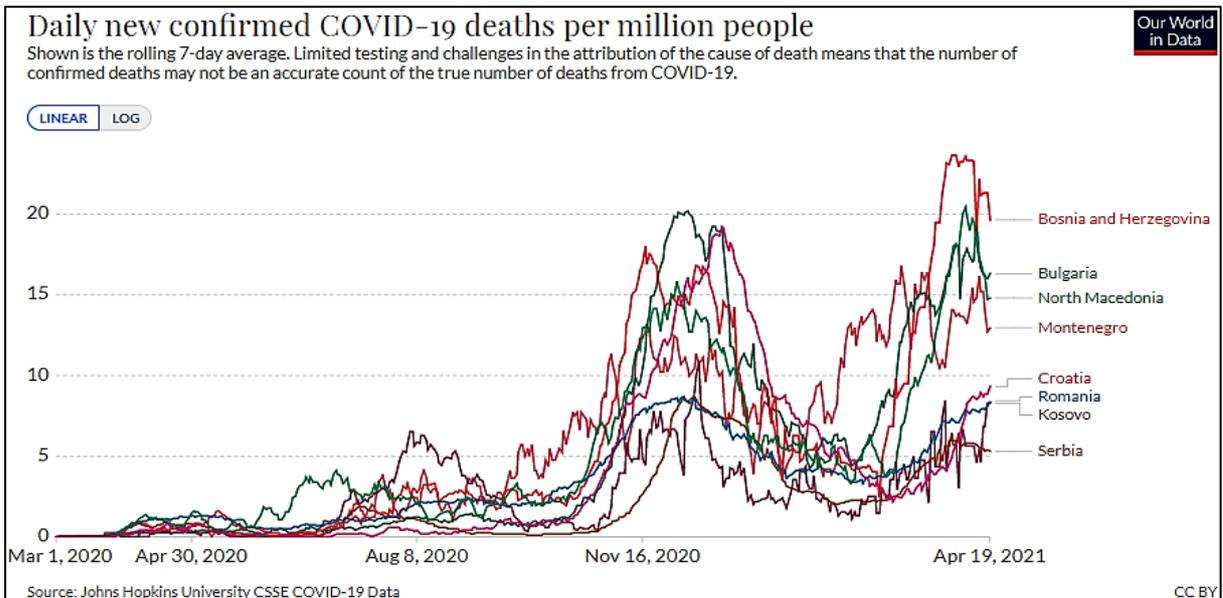
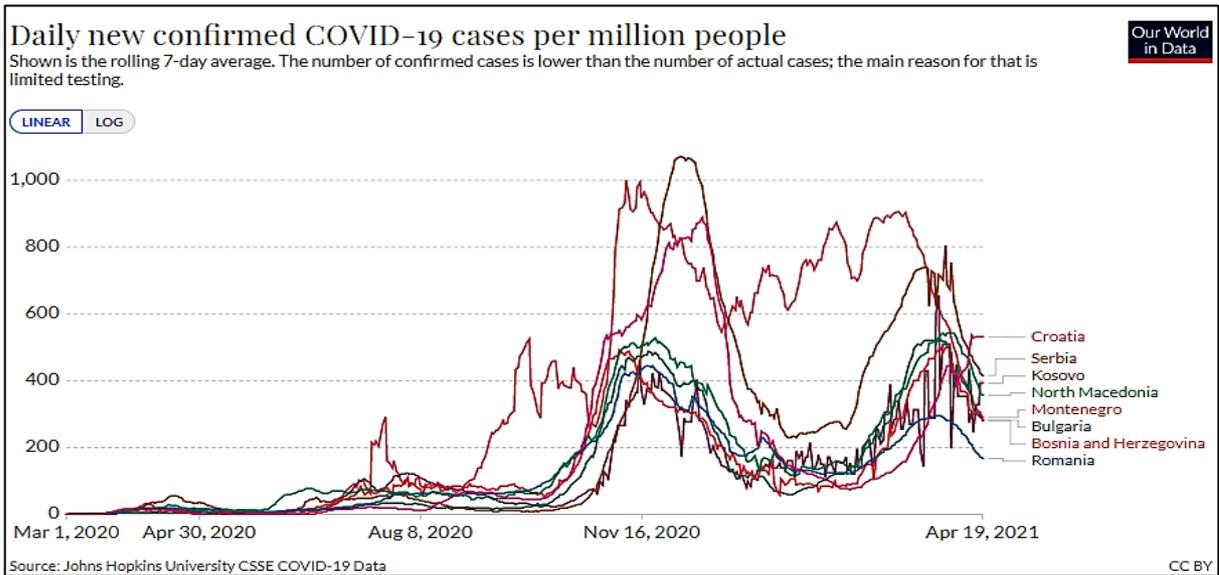
- Since the beginning of the pandemic until 21st April, a total of 1,037,009 people have been infected.
- **From 20 to 21st April, 174 COVID-19 deaths were reported (majority belonging to the age group 70-79 years) (21).**
- Until 12th May the restrictions against transmission of coronavirus will be in effect which includes movement restrictions from 22hrs to 5am the next morning, and prohibition of gatherings of more than 6 people.
- **In the areas where the infection rate is below 3/1000 inhabitants, entertainment and cultural activities are allowed with an obligation to follow strict regulations (22).**

North Macedonia:

From 12 to 18th April, in the Republic of North Macedonia, the percentage of new positive cases has reduced by 24.3% from the previous week. The cumulative incidence is 7,115.4/100,000 as on 18th April and the reproduction number is 0.83.

Out of 48 selected samples for sequencing, 98% showed the presence of the UK variant B.1.1.7. The number of infected people among all age groups has reduced compared to previous week. The lowest rate is reported between 0-9 age group 1.8%, and the highest in above 60 years age category at 33.1%.

In view of the current situation, the government has announced the closure of catering facilities, casinos, gyms, organizing conferences and night curfew (20hrs to 5am next morning) until 27th April (23).



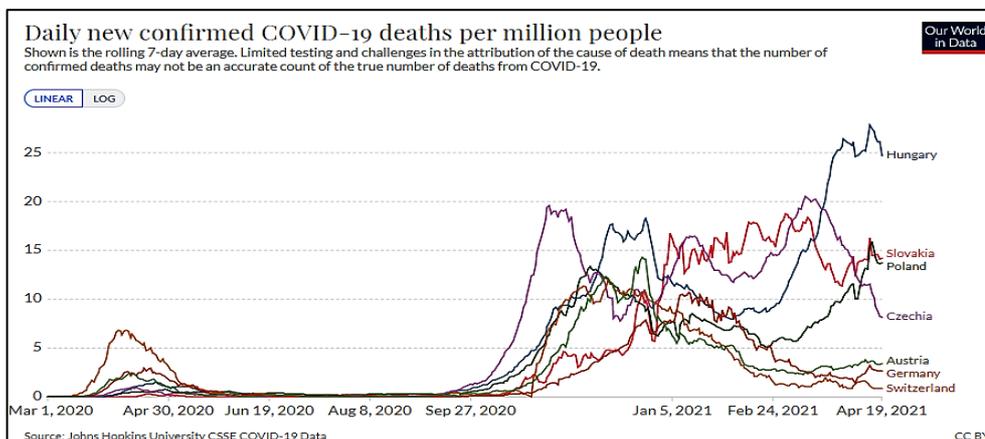
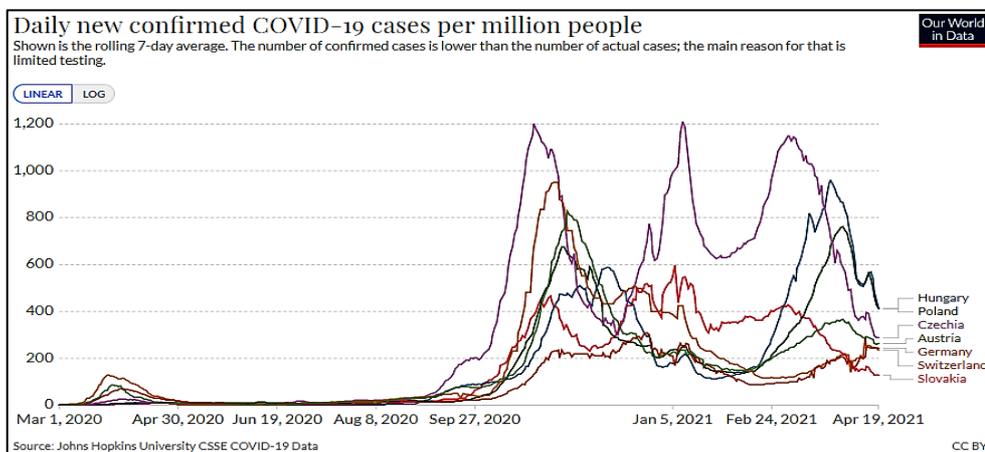
Central Europe:

Hungary:

- On 21st April, 2,527 new infections were identified and 207 new deaths. Elderly and chronic patients are the majority among 207 deaths. The number of hospitalized patients with COVID-19 are 8,097 and 925 of them are on ventilator support.
- The country's 7-day rolling average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths/million population is declining gradually (11). And the country's vaccination rate is ahead of the EU average (19%) through its vaccine campaign (34%).
- **Hungary is a step closer to a second stage of relaxation of lockdown measures. Once the number of vaccinated people reaches 3.5 million, garden rooms and terraces of restaurants are allowed to open also shops, salons, hairdressers.** From 26th April, kindergartens and lower grade schools could be reopened. From May 10th, students of upper grade and high schools can return to classes. However, it is mandatory to wear a face mask and to follow distancing from others in public areas and nightly curfew (from 10pm) is still continuing. The government has announced strict border control until 23rd May (24).

Czechia:

- The number of hospitalizations with COVID-19 is showing an overall declining trend (from the first week of April to 20th April). The number of hospitalized patients are 4,063 and 861 patients are in severe condition as reported on 20th April (25).
- **In order to trace the possible source of infection, regular antigen testing at schools was launched by the Ministry of Health in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth.** Also, from 24th April, comprehensive testing will be initiated at universities with a mandatory test once a week for students before participation in full-time teaching (on 26th April). People who are fully vaccinated or who have tested positive and recovered in the past three months are exempted from testing (26).



Mediterranean Region:

Cyprus:

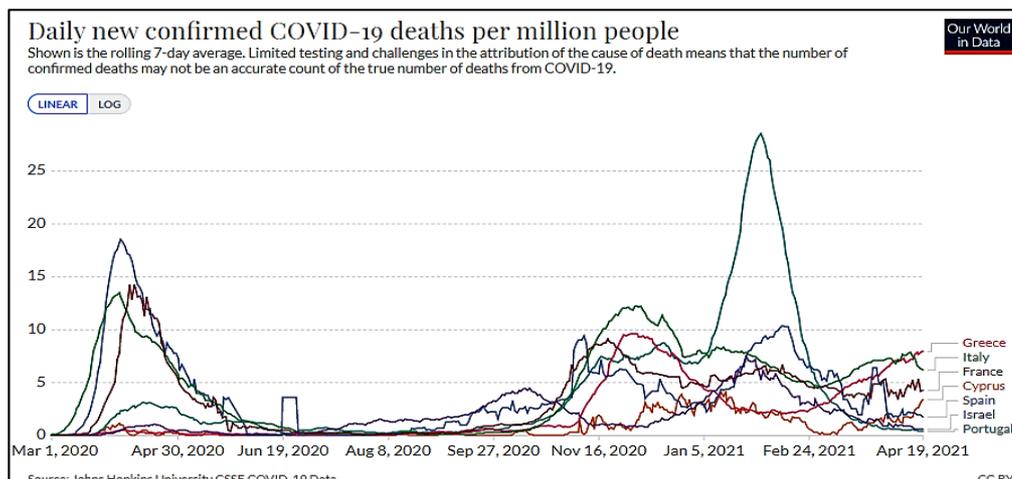
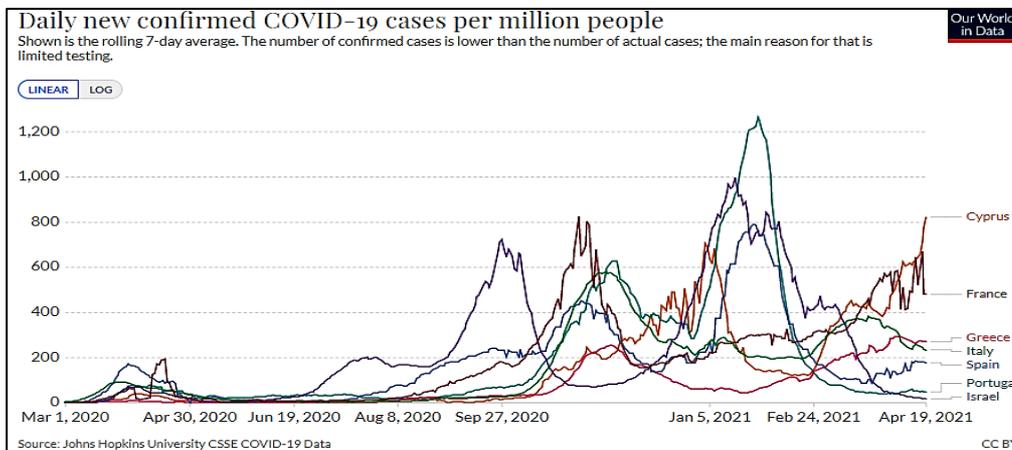
- **The rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases are high among WHO European countries at 823.32/million population (table 1).**
- 843 new cases and 295 new deaths were reported on 21st April. 291 patients are hospitalized and 71 were in critical condition on the same day (27).

France:

- Currently the incidence is 337/100,000 inhabitants and the reproduction rate is 0.98 (28).
- From 26th April, primary school students and kindergartens can be opened and from 3rd May older students can return to class. Anticipating a decline in the number of new COVID-19 cases, **France is planning to lift nationwide curfew and travel restrictions from 2nd May.** However, execution of new entry restrictions for all travelers from India will take place. Domestic travel bans will be lifted from 3rd May. (29).

Spain:

- **According to the COVID-19 situation update in Europe by ECDC, the 14 day case notification and death notification rate per 100,000 inhabitants are high in Spain (next to France and Italy) at 247.25 and 27.87 (16).**
- After a month of vaccine rollout against COVID-19, the mortality among 80 years and more has reduced significantly.
- **Recently, the public health commission has updated the vaccination strategy prioritizing the age group above 60, and 70-79 also people with high-risk conditions will be vaccinated using mRNA. The results on effectiveness of vaccine through mRNA among nursing home residents shows that the risk of infection has reduced by 57.2% after two weeks of initial dose and 81.2% after second dose. In residences with high vaccination rate, an indirect effect is seen among those who are not vaccinated living in the same residence (30).**



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