

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 related to vaccination programmes and urges all countries to address their internal problems with vaccination programmes and get these sorted.

We are concerned about the disastrous explosion of the pandemic in India (<https://time.com/5957118/india-covid-19-modi/>). 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. (<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/04/26/what-should-we-ask-of-a-new-global-treaty-for-pandemic-preparedness/>) It also shows the need for further efforts to promote internationalism in vaccination programmes (<https://doi.org/10.3389/ijph.2021.1604077>) 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 increasing the vaccine confidence. Improving accessibility to vaccine must be considered to further waves. Despite vaccination status, 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, some countries has significantly reduced the number of deaths and the infection rate. A few countries in individual European sub-regions have started easing lockdown restrictions (UK, Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Israel, Portugal, France, Denmark, Belgium, Germany). However, some countries are still experiencing a mounting infection rate, which is a major concern (Lithuania, Georgia and Sweden).

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 (3,482,907) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has surpassed 0.1 billion (167,492,769). Individual WHO regions confirmed COVID-19 cases are as follows (2).

Table 1

WHO Region	Confirmed COVID-19 cases
Americas	66,414,286
Europe	53,962,217
South-East Asia	30,781,898
Eastern Mediterranean	9,955,811
Africa	3,466,139
Western-Pacific	2,911,654

As per the WHO weekly epidemiological report, the European Region is contributing 33% of cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases worldwide. The number of **new cases and deaths in the past 7 days has reduced by 25% and 21% respectively**.(3). According to IHME COVID-19 weekly projections, a constant decline is seen in COVID-19 cases, deaths also hospitalizations which can be attributed to the rising vaccination rate, gradual release of lockdown measures and change in seasonality. **As of 24th May, the population infected with COVID-19 in the European region was 29% and is the second leading cause of death** (next to ischemic heart disease). **Despite the accelerating vaccine rollout and slow lifting mandates the transmission of the variant first identified in India (slowly replacing the UK variant) is rising concerns in few European countries- Wales, Scotland, England and in some parts of Germany.** (3) In Germany, the UK variant is found to be the dominant variant found in nearly 9 out of 10 samples tested and the transmission of the Indian variant is slowly increasing (found in 2% of samples detected which was 1.5 previous week) (4). In parts of Southeast Europe and Central Asia, the transmission of B.1.351 is being reported which could spread into neighboring countries. IHME predicts, because of the Indian variant and other escape variants, the infection rate in Europe may begin to rise after July and emphasizing rapid vaccination particularly m-RNA vaccine also to increase vaccine confidence, mask usage to minimize the transmission of B.1.617 and other escape variants (5)

The following table shows daily new confirmed coronavirus cases, deaths, an estimate of the effective reproduction rate (R), the share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19 across European countries as reported on 25/05/2021 (table 2) (6).

Table 2

WHO Europe country	7-day rolling average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases/mill people	7-day rolling average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths/mill people	Effective reproduction number estimate (R)	Share of people who received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine
Lithuania	256.17	4.36	0.75	35.18
Georgia	246.17	5.55	0.87	2.94
Sweden	243.75	1.34	0.72	35.21
Latvia	214.04	4.70	0.86	24.40
Netherlands	210.36	0.82	0.68	N/A
Belgium	196.76	1.53	0.82	38.47
Andorra	175.65	0.00	0.39	N/A
Denmark	172.13	0.17	1.02	33.45
Greece	168.81	4.63	0.89	32.21
France	158.53	1.77	0.75	35.18
Slovenia	149.60	1.72	0.76	30.70
Estonia	143.12	1.29	0.72	33.70
Belarus	137.68	1.06	1.00	N/A
Serbia	119.81	2.52	0.57	35.68
Croatia	117.83	6.44	0.58	29.16
Kazakhstan	113.72	0.23	0.94	10.73
Cyprus	112.86	1.47	0.49	N/A
Switzerland	110.97	0.56	0.91	N/A
Turkey	108.24	2.37	0.70	19.27
Spain	100.92	0.91	0.98	36.76
Ukraine	88.94	4.11	0.77	2.26
Norway	88.25	0.21	1.05	29.74
Montenegro	88.03	2.96	0.83	19.72
Ireland	87.52	0.00	0.05	N/A
Germany	79.58	1.81	0.60	40.79
Luxembourg	77.59	0.91	0.53	35.68
Italy	72.93	2.37	0.69	35.91
Austria	63.18	0.82	0.63	37.82
Czech Republic	60.82	1.44	0.61	33.43
Russia	57.93	2.52	1.00	10.81
Hungary	52.57	4.50	0.54	52.17
Armenia	48.21	2.60	0.63	N/A
Kyrgyzstan	44.54	1.03	0.98	N/A
Portugal	43.05	0.14	1.10	35.54
Poland	38.74	4.44	0.52	34.24
Bulgaria	37.15	4.15	0.61	11.03
Bosnia and Herzegovina	36.49	4.27	0.65	N/A
United Kingdom	35.68	0.10	1.18	56.53
Finland	34.70	0.34	0.92	42.43
Azerbaijan	30.90	1.06	0.59	11.43
Slovakia	28.63	1.39	0.67	30.31
Moldova	26.17	1.45	0.66	7.47
Monaco	25.48	0.00	0.56	N/A
Kosovo	24.39	1.11	0.48	N/A
Romania	23.63	2.81	0.57	21.75
North Macedonia	18.31	7.54	0.36	N/A
Malta	8.41	0.32	0.67	70.30
San Marino	8.12	0.00	0.40	63.38
Albania	7.84	0.55	0.53	N/A
Uzbekistan	7.60	0.04	0.89	3.58
Israel	7.44	0.23	0.75	62.92
Iceland	2.51	0.00	0.29	48.14
Tajikistan	0.00	0.00	0.00	N/A

Belgium:

According to the weekly epidemiological report, the 14 day incidence is 254/100 thousand inhabitants and the reproduction number estimate is 0.882. Compared to the previous week a **13% reduction is seen in the number of ICU beds occupied by COVID-19 patients** (analyzed from 21st May to 27th May) and the number of hospital admissions also decreased (7). More than 72% of the 1.5 million high-risk patients in Belgium received their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. The goal is to achieve a vaccination rate of 80% in this population group by the beginning of June (8). Vaccination rates differ slightly between the Belgian regions, with Brussels having a rate of 36%, Flanders 46%, Wallonia 48%, and the highest of 53% in the German-speaking area (9).

United Kingdom:

Between 20 to 26th May, the **number of people who tested positive for COVID-19 increased by 18% compared to the previous week**. The number of deaths remains the same for the same period (54). By 25th May, **72.9% of the UK population have received the first dose of vaccine and 44.8% received the second dose** against COVID-19 (10). The surveillance overview of variants shows, in the past seven days the **total number of cases confirmed cases (reported until 19th May) of B.1.617.2 almost doubled from 3,535 to 6,959** (11). **75% of newly detected cases are found to be Indian variant**. The current situation in the UK is challenging to proceed with opening the 4th stage of the roadmap of lifting lockdown restrictions planned for June 21 (12).

Bulgaria:

The rolling 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths are 37.15 and 4.15 per mill people respectively (table 2). Between 26th and 26th May, 293 new cases and 20 new deaths have been reported (13). **Considering the risk of transmission of new variants, also to reduce the burden on health care systems the current anti-epidemic measures are extended until 31st July** (14). A total of 515.963 people in Bulgaria have completed the vaccination cycle. Yet, vaccination rates are the lowest compared to other EU member states due to delivery delays and poor management. They only vaccinated 11% of citizens aged 80 or older, 18% of those aged 70-79 and 17% among the 60-69 age group (15) (16). **From 27th May, in the public places of the capital city in Bulgaria, three green corridors are opened as part of the immunization program which operates during weekends** (17) and the general practitioners can also provide vaccine to the people beyond their list of patients (18).

Hungary:

Between 25th and 26th May, 213 new COVID-19 infections and 41 new deaths have been reported. Currently, 1,343 patients have hospitalized with COVID-19 148 patients are on ventilator and the number of people who recovered from COVID-19 is improving. As of 26th May, the country has vaccinated more than 5 million people with the first dose and above 3 million with the second dose (19). **Hungary has eased further restrictions (phase 5) on 23rd May by lifting night curfew and wearing a facemask is not mandatory in public areas however the border control at the state level exists until the 23rd of June** (20). For easy access, **Hungary has introduced a mobile application “EESZT Lakossagi” for service providers also for receivers to confirm the vaccination status of guest/visitor** (21).

Norway:

From the 27th of May, Norway is **easing COVID-19 restrictions in the second phase of a four-step reopening plan**. Gyms, cinemas, theatres and restaurants will reopen and children can practice sports indoors. Thereby, bars can serve alcohol until 10 pm and up to 20 people can meet for indoor events. 15% of adults are fully vaccinated and one in three adults received the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine (22).

Iceland:

Corresponding to vaccination status Iceland has started easing restrictions from the end of April. Social restrictions are loosened in Iceland, including removal of mask requirements in shops, reduced distancing to 1 meter for certain activities, and the gathering limit was raised to 150 people. Thereby, gyms and swimming pools are open with full capacity, as well as restaurants with a liquor license may remain open until 11 pm. It is assumed that all local restrictions will be released by late June (23) (24).

Sweden:

The overall incidence, the number of deaths also the number of new admissions to hospital with COVID-19 decreased during week 20 (epidemiological report from 17th to 23rd May). Compared to other age groups, high incidence is seen among age groups 10-19 years and 40-49 years. Sweden's overall incidence is 176/100 thousand inhabitants (25). A recent survey by Swedish public health agency between 25th April and 5th May regarding the attitude towards vaccination against COVID-19 revealed that the willingness to get vaccinated among adults was high. Around nine out of ten people are interested to take the vaccine against COVID-19 (26). The agency expects that the infection rate may go down by early Autumn 2021 according to its modelling scenario. As of 27th May, 44.3% of the population have received at least one dose of vaccine and 15.7% two doses (27). The government and Swedish public health agency have planned to ease few lockdown restrictions from 1st June with a simultaneous adaptation of measures to control the spread of infection (28). Universities, colleges, high schools, polytechnics and municipal adult education can resume classes on campus from 1st June (29).

France:

Currently, the incidence is decreased to 100/100,000 inhabitants and the reproduction rate is 0.86. The number of hospitalization continues to decrease over the past few weeks, except in Guyana. On the 27th of May 3,206 people are in intensive care for Covid-19 (30). Vaccination is in progress with 24,150,103 having received one dose and 11,108,158 with 2 doses (31). Since the 19th May, the curfew is postponed to 9 p.m. and commerce's and cultural places are reopening with limited capacities: shops, terraces (Maximum 6 people per table), museums, cinemas, theatres and sports area (800 people indoors and 1000 people outdoors) (32).

Mediterranean Region:

Figure 1

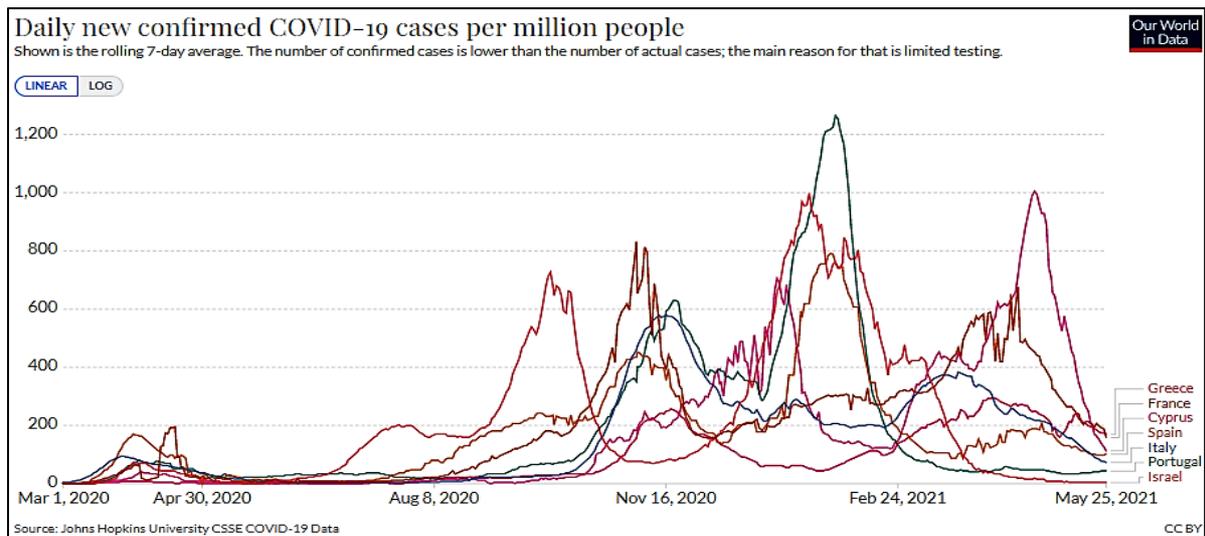
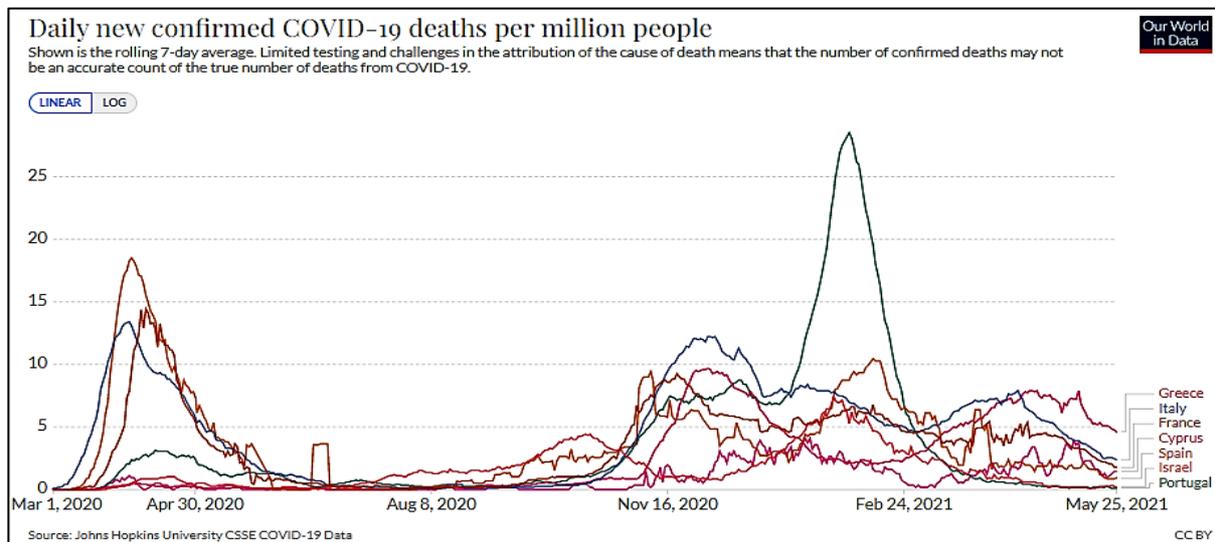


Figure 2



South-East Europe Region:

Figure 3

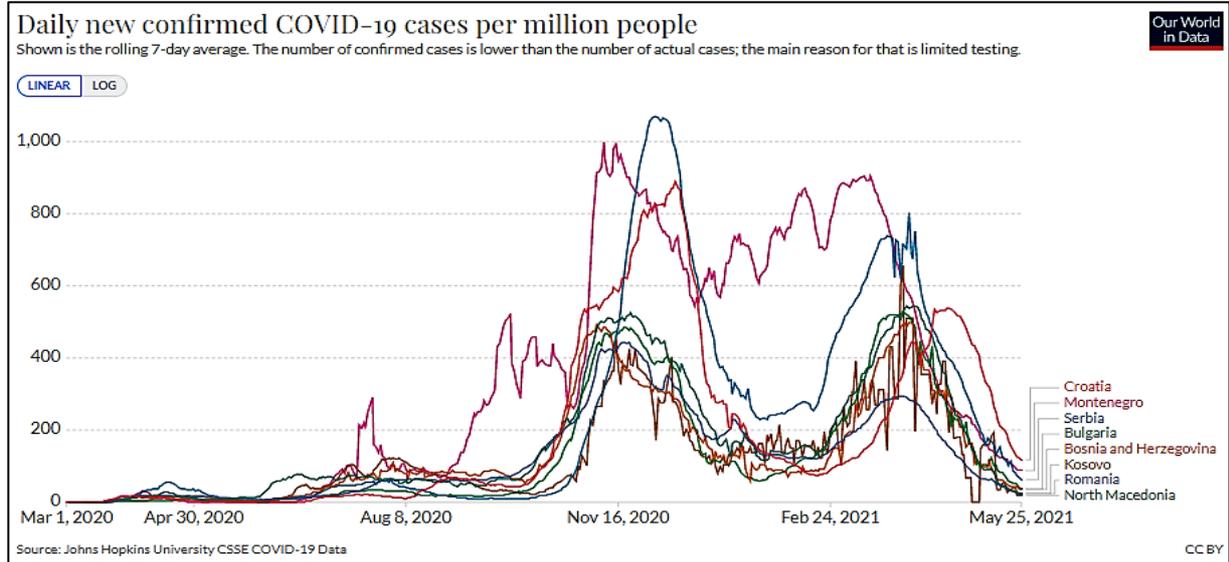
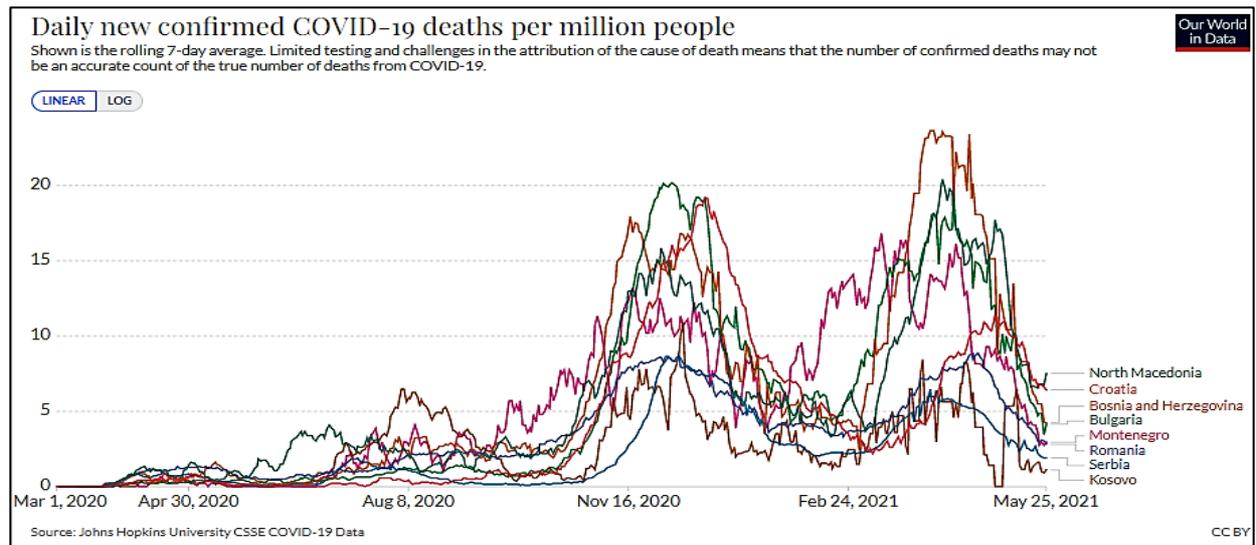


Figure 4



Central Europe:

Figure 5

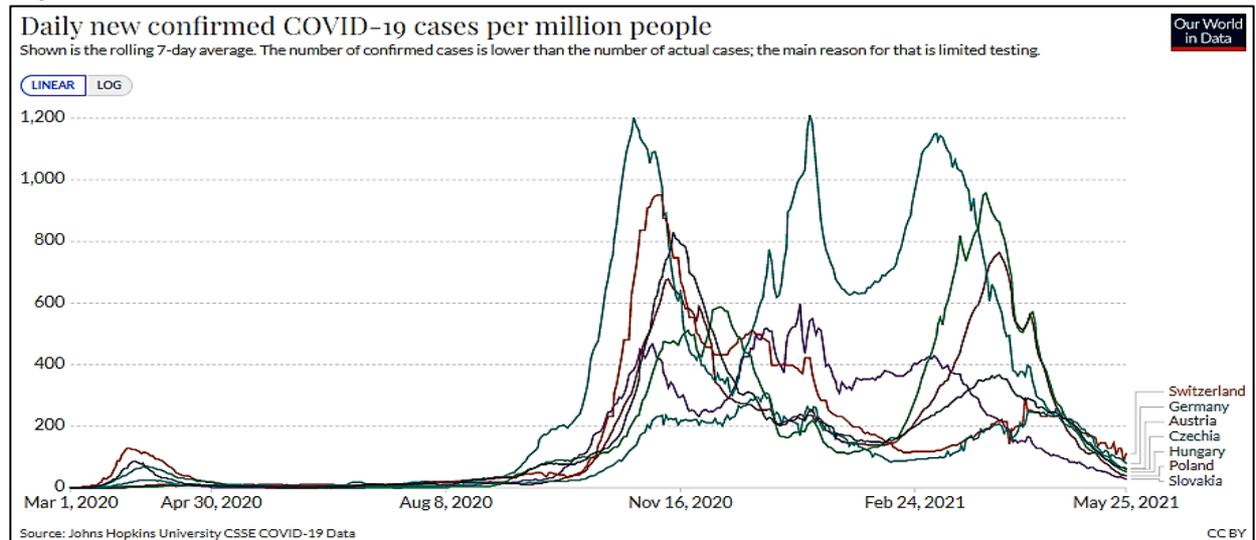
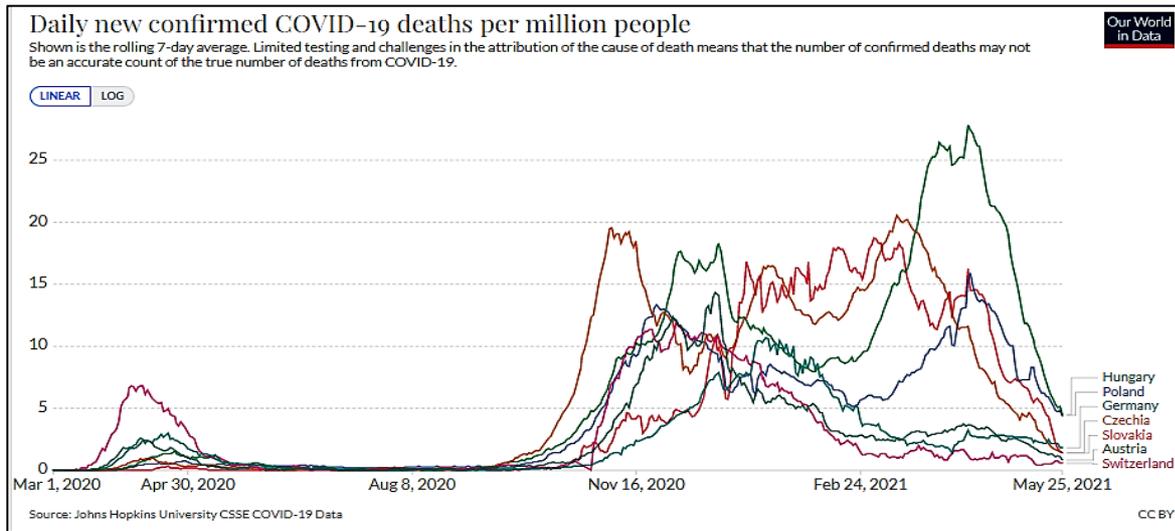


Figure 6



Baltics and Nordic countries:

Figure 7

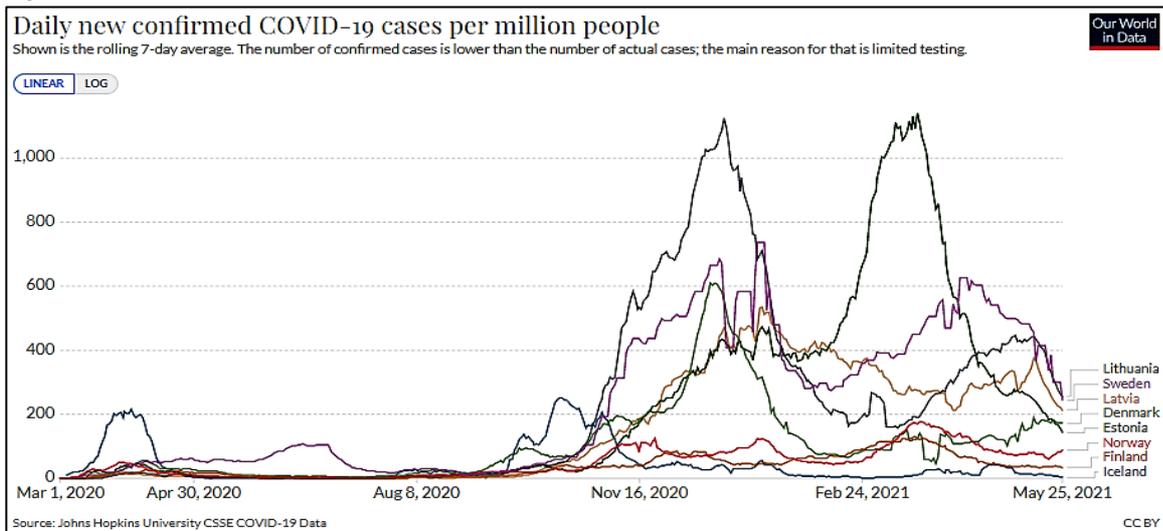
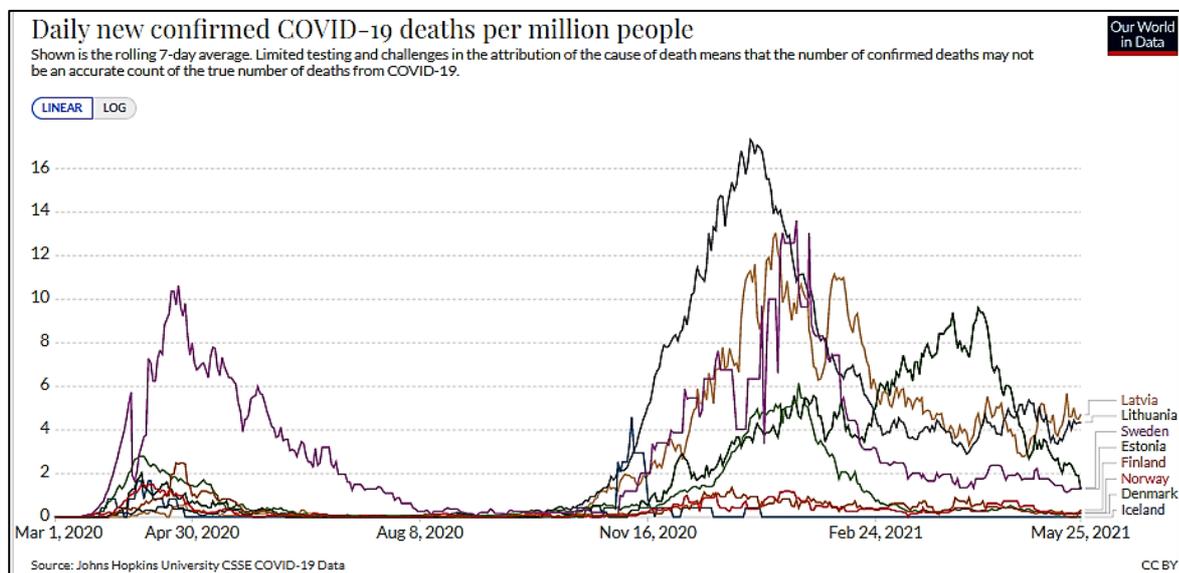


Figure 8



Northwestern Europe:
Figure 9

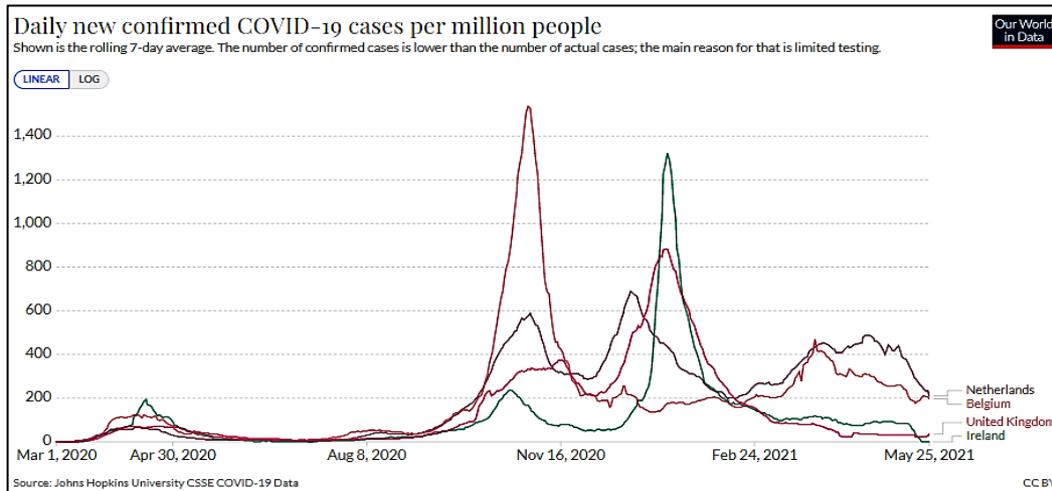
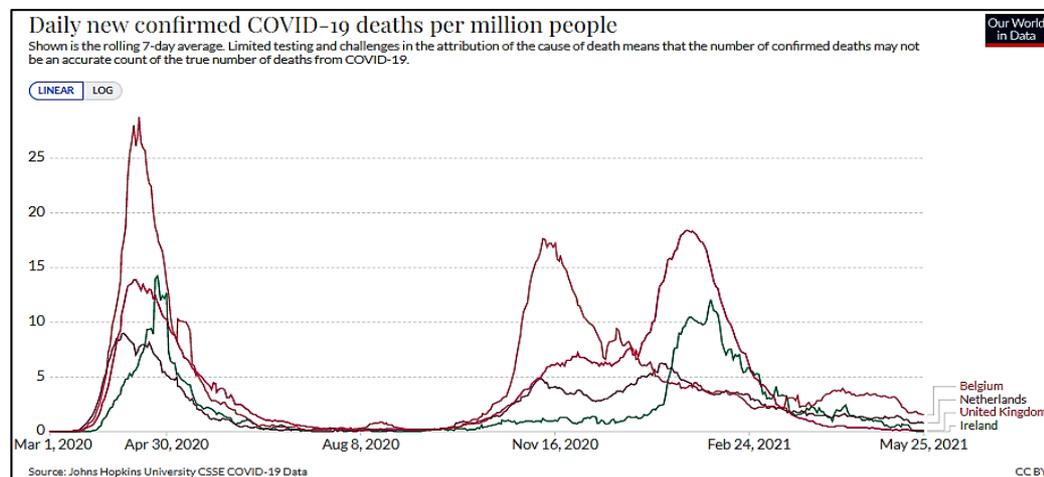


Figure 10



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