

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 is concerned about the rapid expansion of the Delta variant of COVID-19 throughout Europe which is currently the dominant strain in the region. The EMA and ECDC strongly encourage those who are eligible for vaccination but have not yet been vaccinated to complete the recommended COVID-19 schedule in a timely manner ([link](#)). Full two-dose vaccination still seems to be protective, whereas having only received one dose, one is less well protected against infection ([link](#)). We believe there should be 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: [link](#))

In addition, genomic surveillance is emerging as a vital necessity to achieve containment of the virus in this pandemic. It would facilitate greater early anticipation as well as initiation of effective strategies to mitigate outbreaks of the COVID-19 virus ([link](#)). However, the process is marred by a lack of data, lack of capacity, and inequities between countries. As a result, the concern arises of insufficient rates of sequencing across the globe. It is important to address the factors that hold back surveillance to prevent uncontrolled viral outbreaks ([link](#)).

Given the fact that there is great variability in access to vaccines across countries, it is important to improve vaccine production. There should be coordinated global effort to enhance vaccine production, and supply to low-income countries. Considering the duration of effect of vaccine, it is important for the countries to act promptly to increase supply and availability of vaccines. This includes [implementing the vaccine waiver](#).

Several countries have announced administering booster doses in September including France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Israel. WHO has called for the postponement of the administration of booster doses at least till the end of September to enable a more equitable global approach to vaccination: enabling at least 10% of the population of every country to be vaccinated (“sprint to September”) ([link](#)) ([link](#)).

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 current situation demands international consensus on a long-term strategy to minimize the transmission of virus variants, not only by rapid vaccination but also by increasing vaccine confidence and improving accessibility to vaccines to prevent further waves. Despite vaccination status, following public health and social measures is still necessary.

Europe is currently amidst the 4th wave and is struggling to find a balance in addressing the pandemic and going back to the normal lifestyle. Countries take several different approaches, where some take a more cautious strategy and some try to live with the virus. It is a new phase in the pandemic for Europe and authorities should be careful in how they address the pandemic, with keeping in mind the risk of a new wave during autumn (1).

By increasing the vaccination rate with the simultaneous introduction of the EU Digital Covid Certificate, lockdown restrictions were eased and testing requirements were modified across and within the countries. This has contributed to flattening the epidemic curve in few regions. However, despite immunization programmes, there is a resurgence in the number of new cases due to the transmission of the Delta variant in Europe, requiring reimposition of strict measures in countries-UK, Portugal, Spain, France, Greece, Cyprus.

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 more than 4 million lives to date (4,235,559) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases are now close to two billion (198,778,175). 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	77,423,954
Europe	60,410,454
South-East Asia	38,589,683
Eastern Mediterranean	12,732,452
Africa	5,002,239
Western-Pacific	4,619,224

As per the WHO weekly epidemiological report, the European Region is contributing 30% of cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases worldwide. In the past 7-days, the number of new cases and new deaths are down by 9% and 2% respectively compared to the previous week (3).

IHME analysis shows, in most of the countries in the Europe region, the spread of the Delta variant is escalating. Due to the effectiveness of vaccination, the number of reported deaths were low and an upsurge in the reported number of cases is attributed to younger age groups. In contrast to other regions, the number of deaths is increasing in Central Asia and the Russian Federation. IHME forecasts, by early November, the daily deaths may reach 2000 per day. Considering the effectiveness of the vaccine and the duration of immunity, IHME suggests the following policies to control the pandemic: a) reporting cases, deaths, hospitalizations in respect to vaccination status to know the effectiveness of vaccine; b) focus on vaccination in far-reaching areas particularly with low vaccine confidence; c) implementing mandatory face masks if the speed of transmission increases; and d) mobilizing the resources assuming an increased burden on hospitals during winter due to seasonal flu and COVID-19 (4).

The following table shows a 7-day average of daily newly confirmed coronavirus cases, deaths and proportion of people fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in the countries of the WHO-Europe region reported on 03/08/2021 (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 population fully vaccinated against COVID-19
Georgia	751.36	6.41	4.31%
Cyprus	636.10	3.06	52.15%
Spain	473.16	1.38	59.48%
Kazakhstan	417.59	0.00	20.99%
Monaco	407.71	0.00	49.06%
United Kingdom	378.80	1.24	57.02%
Iceland	337.00	0.00	N/A
Andorra	332.81	1.85	N/A
France	325.65	0.64	48.69%
Israel	295.20	0.56	62.20%
Turkey	266.76	1.01	33.00%
Greece	258.84	1.17	50.19%
Ireland	258.18	0.26	56.97%
Portugal	241.25	1.26	57.97%
Montenegro	239.06	0.91	24.74%
Malta	195.42	0.65	87.74%
Netherlands	180.65	0.26	N/A
Denmark	160.07	0.12	56.92%
Russia	154.25	5.31	17.78%
Belgium	144.56	0.26	60.17%
Kyrgyzstan	141.25	1.73	2.02%
Estonia	135.80	0.21	37.66%
Lithuania	124.47	0.47	46.31%
Finland	116.20	0.05	36.25%
Belarus	97.57	1.06	N/A
Luxembourg	92.57	0.00	51.56%
Italy	90.56	0.28	53.35%
Switzerland	90.39	0.12	48.31%
Armenia	78.25	1.16	N/A
San Marino	71.56	0.00	69.18%
Azerbaijan	66.21	0.32	21.18%
Norway	62.45	0.00	33.98%
Sweden	52.99	0.03	42.24%
Austria	52.55	0.08	52.03%
Serbia	50.13	0.40	39.78%
Slovenia	48.51	0.07	39.24%
Kosovo	40.65	0.00	8.07%
Bulgaria	39.56	0.45	14.58%
Croatia	39.39	0.70	36.51%
Latvia	35.22	0.30	36.67%
Moldova	34.56	0.50	12.72%
Ukraine	28.83	0.73	4.92%
North Macedonia	28.73	0.21	N/A
Germany	27.01	0.20	52.66%
Uzbekistan	26.44	0.20	N/A
Czech Republic	15.50	0.21	46.07%
Albania	14.35	0.05	18.72%
Bosnia And Herzegovina	13.15	0.13	N/A
Slovakia	9.03	0.18	36.91%
Romania	8.60	0.18	25.42%
Tajikistan	7.97	0.03	N/A
Hungary	5.68	0.12	56.55%
Poland	3.61	0.06	46.48%

Georgia:

COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations are continuously rising rapidly in Georgia. **The seven-day average has risen above 4,000 cases on August 3, which is 11 times higher than in late June and the highest since February 10.** On August 3, hospitalizations increased above 2,600 state wide and hospitals voiced their concern about their capacity challenges. 26 hospitals are turning away patients or new intensive care patients. The rise in hospitalizations and infections is probably due to the contagious delta variant and the low vaccination rate (8).

Cyprus:

The moving 7-day average of **daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per mill people is decreasing**, almost halved (636.10) compared to the number of cases before 2 weeks (1149.93) (9). However, **total hospital admissions, particularly in ICU are increasing.** As of 3rd August, the number of hospital admissions is 289. Patients in critical condition and intubated are 98 and 40 respectively (10) (11). To control the spread of the virus, the Cyprus government has ramped up vaccine rollout. They **expanded the vaccination program by arranging “walk-in” vaccination centres** (at 3 districts) which serve as a priority base for those non-vaccinated individuals and beneficiaries of the General Healthcare System (12). The Ministry of Health has approved a free rapid antigen test for those who are unable to receive the vaccine due to medical reasons on submission of necessary documentation as proof (13).

Portugal:

The moving 14-day average of **daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per mill people is decreasing**, (3769) compared to the number of cases 1 week ago (4190) as well as **total hospital admissions, or ICU though still very slowly. The R(t) value is 0.92. Virtually all sequenced cases (98%) belong to the delta variant.** As of 5th August, the number of hospital admissions was 896, 194 patients being hospitalized in ICU. The vaccination process followed an age-related approach from the elderly to the younger - now targeting the age group 16-17; there was a decision to recommend vaccination to the age group 12-15 only if there was any comorbidity; however, doctors can prescribe vaccination to healthy children. The Ministry of Health offers monthly four free rapid antigen tests at individual description. There was a decision to handle measures at a national level (not based on municipalities measured incidence and transmission) and a plan of action for response measures designed based on national proportion of vaccination expected to lead to the lifting of restriction measures when vaccination reaches 85% of the population. (H. Barros personal communication).

France:

The **epidemiological situation in France is worsening.** Between 19th and 25th July, **the incidence and the number of new hospitalizations rose by 94% and 51% respectively compared to the previous week. Also, critical care admissions increased by 29%.** The number of new cases is high across all age groups, particularly among 20–29-year age olds. The number of deaths saw a rising trend (by 22%) following a declining trend for 12 weeks. Contact tracing data revealed that the majority of new cases are linked to night catering and medico-social establishments. In most of the regions of France, the presence of the Delta variant is predominant (14). Below 12 year age group are exempted from the mandatory Health pass. For 12-17 year age olds, the Safepass obligation will enter into force from the end of August (15).

Israel:

The government of Israel has authorized **mandatory Green Pass certificate for all citizens above 12 years of age** to attend any indoor parties or conferences and clubs if the participant number exceeds 100 and the venue organizers are required to recruit a "coronavirus supervisor". **Unvaccinated attendees must present negative PCR test reports till 8th August and from later, a rapid antigen test that is valid for 24 hours will serve the purpose.** Children younger than 12 years and those who cannot take vaccine jabs are completely exempt from testing mandates (16). The **Ministry of Health has announced booster dose for all older adults 60 years and above** (17) who are vaccinated 5 months before (18).

Germany:

The infection rate is low in Germany. However, **the incidence is increasing gradually**. As of the 3rd of August, the rolling average of 7-day incidence is 27.1/mill people which was 6.66 on the 3rd of July (19). As of the 1st of August, **all unvaccinated travellers coming to Germany will need to provide a negative test to enter the country** assuming the current new infections are brought in by the vacation returnee. First, the ruling only applied to passengers flying to the country. Fully vaccinated individuals or those recovered from the virus, cross border workers also people travelling in transit are excluded from this rule. Currently, over 61% of the population has received one dose of the vaccine and 51% is fully vaccinated (20) (21). Germany will also start offering vaccinations to children aged 12 and older (22).

Romania:

Romania sold 700,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses to Ireland. **The country faces a low vaccination rate and the Romanian government expects that it won't be able to use the vaccines**. At the end of June, a batch of one million Pfizer vaccines was also sold to Denmark. The authorities explain that the doses were not currently needed for the vaccination campaign, even if they will start administering a third dose of the vaccine. **Romania's vaccine uptake is currently 31.5% of the population and the number of daily cases has increased by more than 100 cases compared to last week** (23) (24).

Belgium:

After a slow decline of positive COVID-19 cases in Belgium, a 5% increase occurred from the previous week. **The reproduction rate has also risen from 1.14 last week to 1.17**. Due to the sharp rise of COVID-19 cases in July, **the average number of deaths due to the virus increased by 50% and sits at a daily average of 3.0 deaths. Between July 28 and August 3, there was an average of 38.4 new hospital admissions per day due to the virus, which is a 29% increase compared to the previous reference period**. In addition, more than 73.4% of the adult population has been fully vaccinated and 83.5% has received the first injection (25). Furthermore, Belgium's authorities want to phase out **the Coronalert app**, which is used to anonymously report a COVID-19 infection to possible risk contacts so they can get tested and isolated. The app has shared 27,800 positive test results since it has launched, which is only 2.7% of all positive cases. Thereby, only 30% of all smartphone users in Belgium have installed the app. The Flemish Groen ecological party speaks of no success with such low percentages and calls for an evaluation of the app (26).

Ireland:

Daily new cases in Ireland remain around 1300 since the end of July (27). Irish citizens are warned about the workplace and social event outbreaks and are urged to stay at home to stop the spread of the virus (28). **As the Irish authorities begin to plan their booster shot programme for the autumn and winter periods, approximately one million people are likely to be targeted for COVID-19 booster shots**. Planning is still at a preliminary stage, but the initial advice is to target healthcare workers, people over 80 years old and residents of care facilities. Several factors could impact the booster programme, including the advice of mixing vaccines and further advice from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) is awaited (29).

United Kingdom:

On August 4, the UK reported 29,312 new cases and 119 deaths compared to the 27,734 cases and 91 deaths of the previous week (30). **As of August 4, 88.7% of the adult population has received the 1st dose whereas 73.2% is fully vaccinated** (31). Up until now, children over 12 have been allowed to get vaccinated if they have certain conditions or are at high risk. England is expected to adopt the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) to offer all 16 and 17-year-olds a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine (32). Meanwhile, the Scottish government confirmed that starting August 6, 16 to 17-year-olds will be able to register their interest for a vaccine on the mainland (33). Many youngsters not living in the mainland, but rather the islands, would have been vaccinated because of the small and interlinked nature of population. The Welsh government also confirmed its adoption of the advice (34). Lastly, from 8 August onwards, people entering England from France will no longer have to quarantine if they have had both doses of a COVID-19 vaccine (35)

Finland:

As of August 4, Finland has vaccinated 66.4% of the population with the first dose and 36% fully (36). The City of Helsinki has started listing places on its website where coronavirus exposures may have occurred, including the dates of such exposures. The city updates any locations and times of exposure on weekdays, meaning that the places on the list may have been exposed to the coronavirus in the last 14 days. Places with an exposure time of more than 14 days will be removed from the list (37).

Norway:

As of August 4, 78.8% of the population has received the first dose and 34.15% is fully vaccinated (38). Even though the infection is increasing in Norway, a lockdown is unlikely at the moment according to Deputy Health Director Espen Rostrup Naksta (39). In 24 hours, 475 people have been confirmed infected with COVID-19, 202 more than the same day of the previous week. The last time so many people were infected was May 26, 2021 (40). Meanwhile, hospitalisations and deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic have decreased considerably in Norway over the summer, as COVID-19 now has lower mortality rates in Norway than regular seasonal flu (41).

Sweden:

4,910 cases and only one death due to COVID-19 have been registered in Sweden between July 24 and August 3 (42). **As of August 4, 79.0% of the population has received the first dose, while 53.0% has received the second one as well (43).** The Public Health Agency of Sweden considers recommending most adults to get a third dose next year. The agency also has plans to offer the vaccine to young people aged 16 and 17 (44).

Denmark:

On August 3, 927 have been found infected and 59 have been hospitalised with Covid-19 (45). **As of August 4, approximately 82.3% of the population has received one dose of the vaccine, whereas approximately 64.0% is fully vaccinated (46).** Over 110,000 children aged 12-15 (four out of ten) have received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, while Health Minister Magnus Heunicke made a call to the country's young people on August 3 to accept the offer to get vaccinated (47).

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 from the beginning of 1st January 2021 until 3rd August 2021:

Mediterranean Region:

Figure 1:

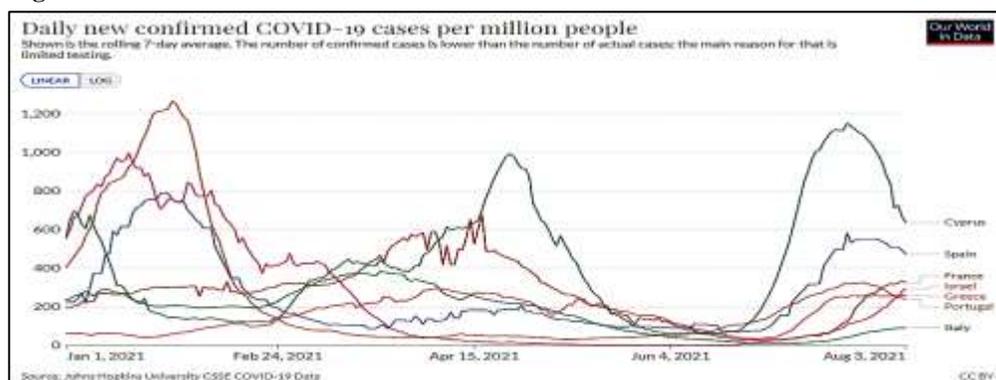
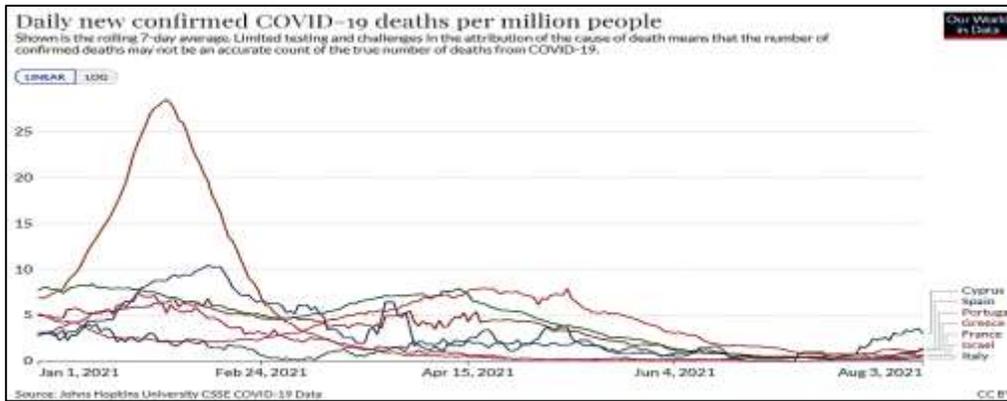


Figure 2:



South-East region:

Figure 3:

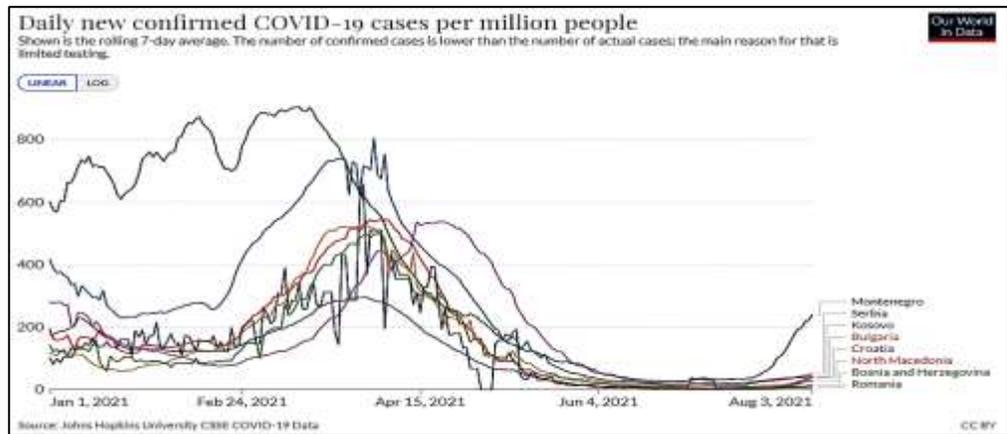
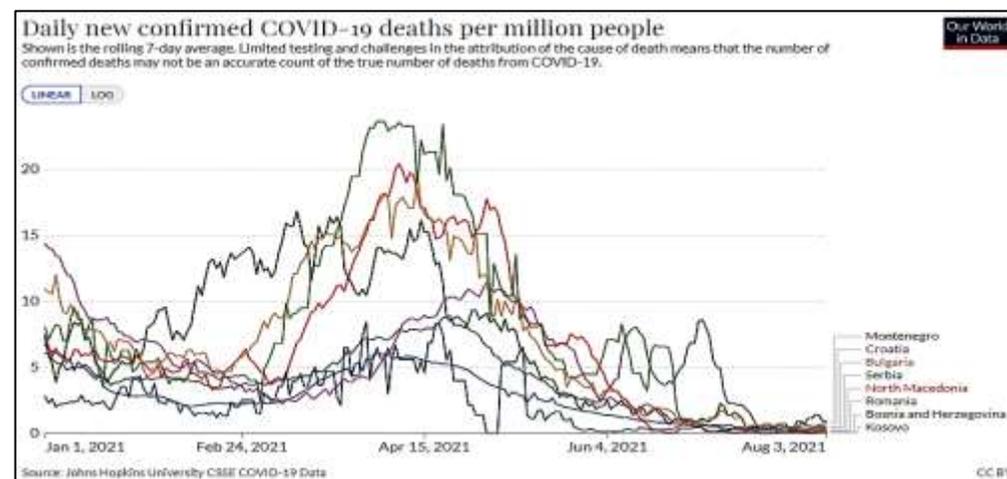


Figure 4:



Central Europe

Figure 5:

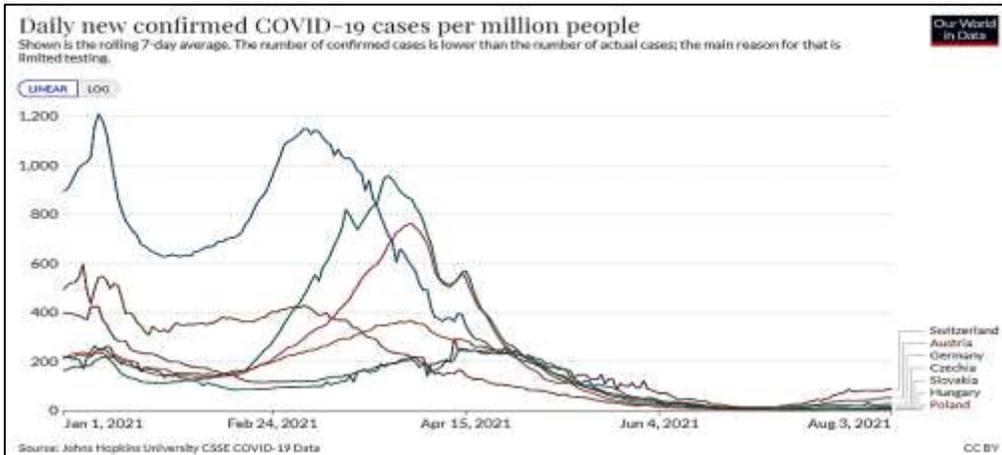
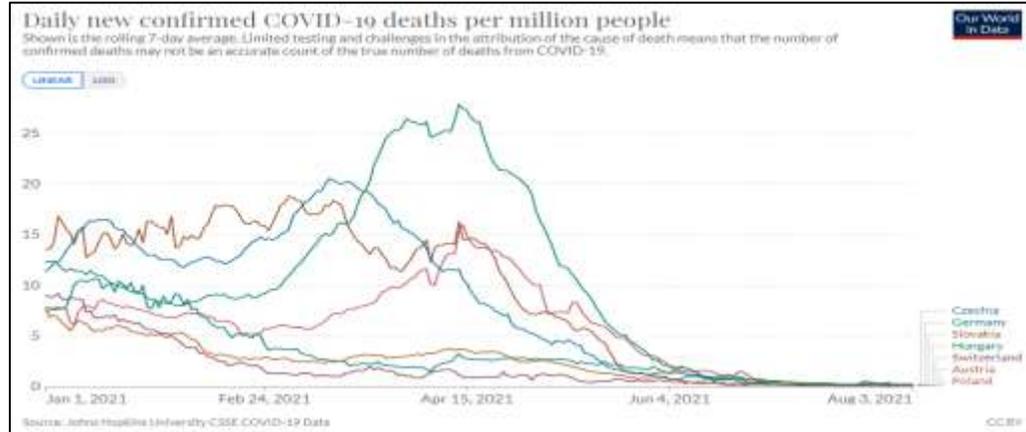


Figure 6:



Baltics and Nordic Countries:

Figure 7:

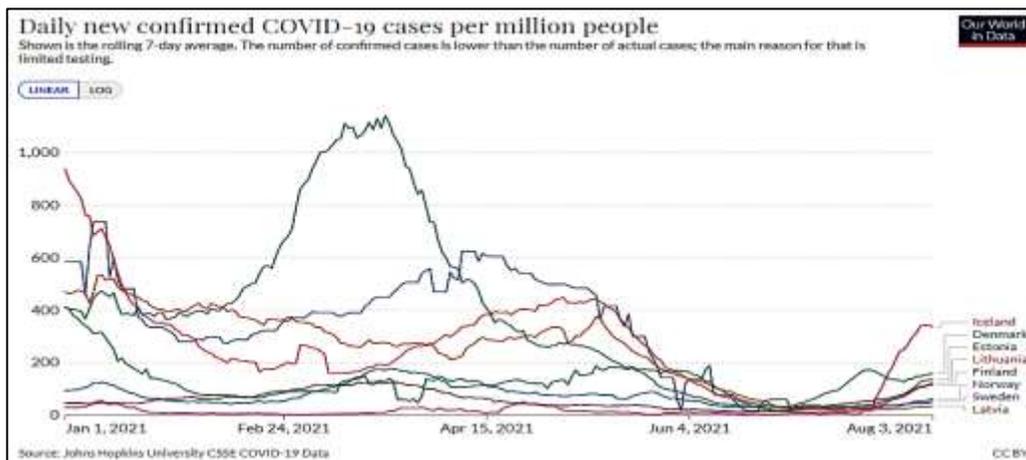
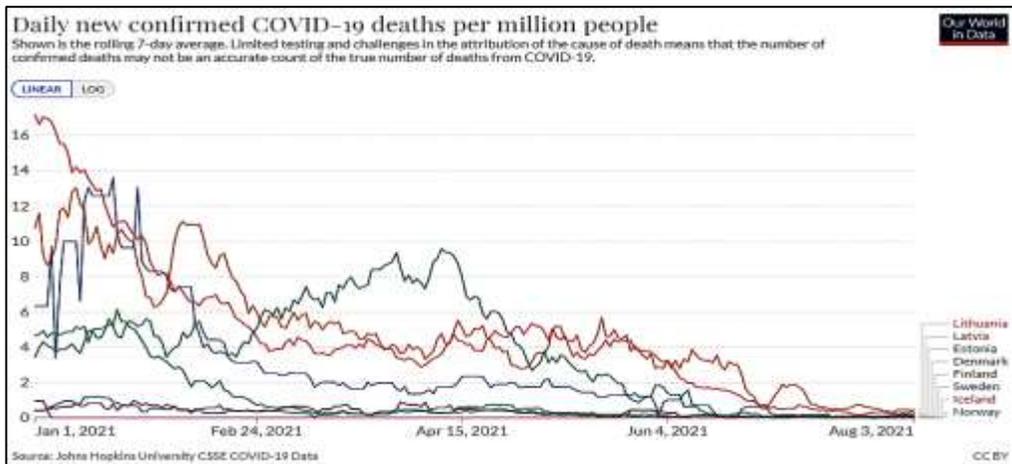


Figure 8:



North-western Europe:

Figure 9:

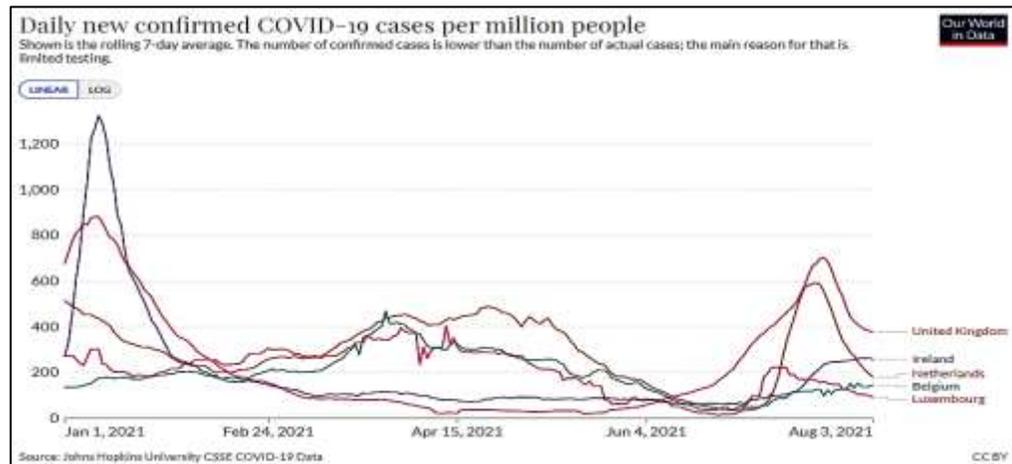
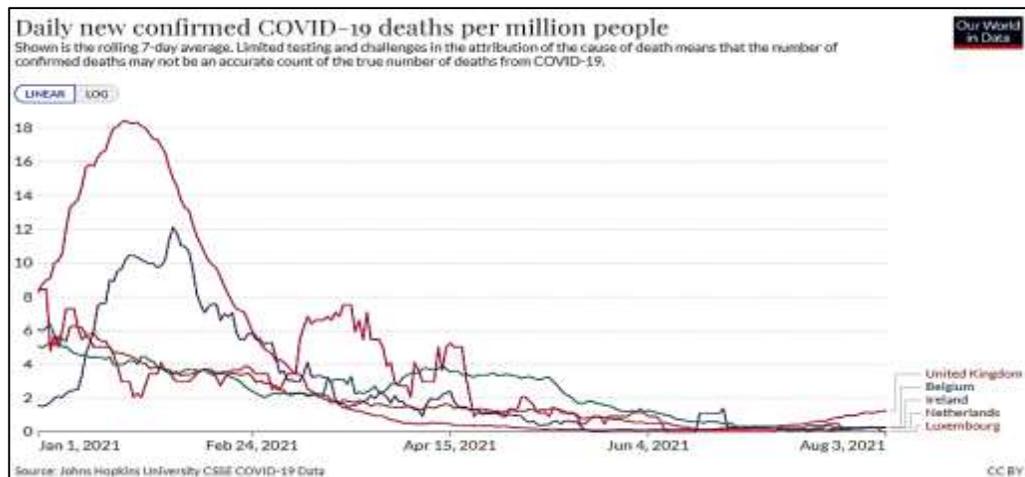


Figure 10:



Central Asia:

Figure 11:

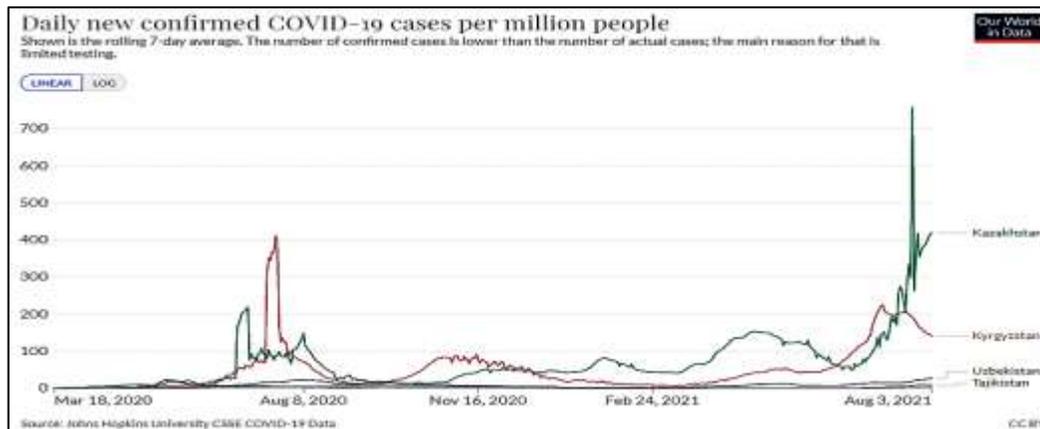
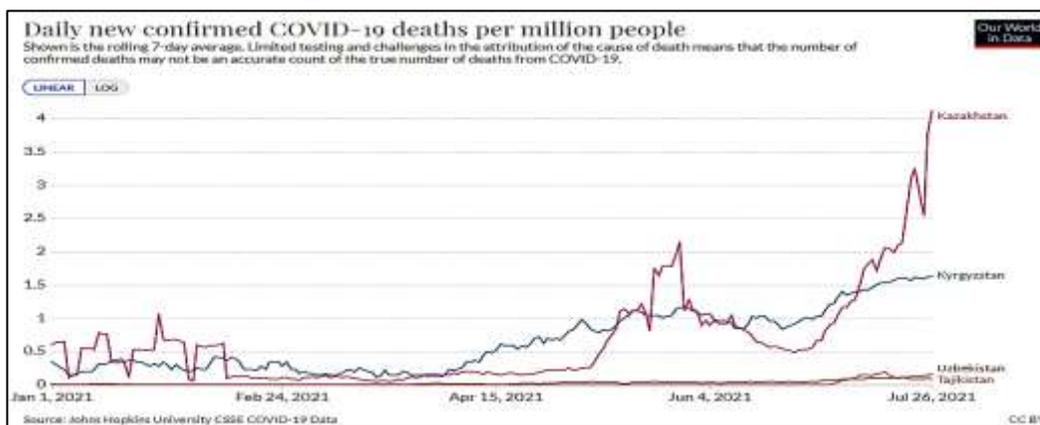


Figure 12:



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