

ASPHER Report: COVID-19 Situation Reporting across Europe

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Authors: Pallavi Chatarajupalli^{1,2}, Petra Andelic^{2,3}, Leo Gkekos^{2,4}, Ralf Reintjes^{1,5}, Katarzyna Czabanowska^{3,5}, John Middleton^{5,6,*}

¹ HAW Hamburg University, Germany

² ASPHER Young Professional

³ Maastricht University, the Netherlands

⁴ Department of Global Public Health, Karolinska Institute, Sweden

⁵ ASPHER COVID-19 Task Force

⁶ ASPHER President

* Corresponding Author: john.middleton@aspher.org

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?

Europe is currently overwhelmed by Delta variant surges. A high level of protection against morbidity and mortality caused by COVID-19 and its variants can be attained on completing vaccination schedule as recommended ([link](#)). ECDC emphasizes that the vaccination program in the EU/EEA region should focus on ensuring that all eligible populations are vaccinated ([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 new variants of COVID-19 virus ([link](#)).

ASPHER is concerned that countries are adopting different policies on rolling out a third vaccine dose. Finland is proposing a third vaccine shot to health care personnel and nursing home residents. Israel has announced that all above 12 years age group who have completed second vaccine dose are eligible to get a booster shot. A third vaccine dose is offered to immunocompromised individuals in the UK. Available data shows that, for immunocompromised individuals the initial two doses of vaccine don't seem to confer sufficient protection. COVID-19 vaccines can invoke an immune response in individuals with primary immunodeficiency. However, this response is lesser (compared to healthy individuals) which is causing breakthrough infections. A clinical study on organ transplant recipients revealed that 68% of participants have shown noticeable level of immune response after three doses of Pfizer vaccine. A similar response is observed in almost 100% of healthy individuals after the first dose of vaccine. Therefore, in immunocompromised patients, the third vaccine dose may likely be beneficial ([link](#)) ([link](#)).

ASPHER believes that greater international consensus and shared research is required to determine the efficacy of different types of vaccine over time. ASPHER’s statement on vaccination for children and young people can be found here. [Link](#).

ASPHER recognizes the importance of following [non-pharmacological interventions](#) as well as achieving high levels of vaccination uptake. Also, countries should closely monitor new infection rates among both vaccinated and unvaccinated to understand the efficacy of the vaccine.

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, non-pharmacological interventions which complement vaccination must be followed.

ASPHER remains concerned that countries are unprepared and complacent about the responses that will be needed by health services and public health authorities this autumn. Read our statement [here](#).

Europe is currently in [a third wave of the pandemic](#), fuelled by the Delta variant. Countries are struggling to find a balance in controlling the virus and going back to the ‘normal’ everyday activity. Countries take several different approaches, with some taking more cautious strategies and others trying 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, keeping in mind the risk of a new wave during autumn (1).

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 (4,574,089) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases are now above two hundred million (221,134,742). 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	85,254,112
Europe	66,313,191
South-East Asia	41,774,857
Eastern Mediterranean	14,975,204
Western-Pacific	7,076,430
Africa	5,740,184

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 deaths rose by 20% and the number of new cases decreased by 4% compared to the previous week (3).

According to IHME analysis, the Delta variant is still prevailing in the European region. Transmission rates are on the rise in all the regions except in the Russian Federation, Malta, Cyprus, Turkey, Central Asia and Southwest region where the transmission is showing a declining trend. A major surge is observed in Scotland, after the Delta-peak and decline trend, which could be attributed to the reopening of schools as the majority of infections were seen among the age group up to 18 years. **Predictions show that, by early December, 52% of the population in Europe will be fully vaccinated and 64% will be immune to the Delta variant.** By early winter, the daily reported number of cases will start increasing and reopening of schools may further increase the number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths. To minimize the speed of transmission, booster doses will be necessary. Also, control measures in schools such as wearing a face mask, regular testing, physical distancing should be cautiously deployed. Currently, the goal of most European countries is to reduce the risk of infection rather than infection transmission. Hence, the main emphasis should be on increasing the vaccination rate particularly among the elderly (60 years and above), imposing mask mandates and monitoring the epidemic in terms of the number of cases (including the type of variant), hospitalizations and deaths by vaccination status as well as genomic surveillance (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 06/09/2021 (table 2) (5) (6) (7).

Table2:

WHO Europe region	Rolling 7-day average of daily newly confirmed COVID-19 cases/mill people	Rolling 7-day average of daily newly confirmed COVID-19 deaths/mill people	Share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19
Israel	911.90	2.63	62.70%
Montenegro	836.83	11.37	30.19%
Georgia	751.08	19.31	12.29%
Kosovo	669.28	13.30	15.91%*
United Kingdom	549.43	1.66	63.83%
Serbia	501.22	2.52	41.49%
Azerbaijan	337.81	4.01	28.14%
North Macedonia	316.83	13.44	N/A
Albania	306.61	1.19	23.46%
Cyprus	270.43	2.41	59.53%
Slovenia	266.92	0.48	44.17%
Norway	263.46	0.21	60.64%
Estonia	258.94	1.19	42.03%
Turkey	256.31	3.22	45.42%
Lithuania	255.67	3.45	57.28%
Greece	248.75	4.59	55.82%
Kazakhstan	245.03	11.18	29.81%
Ireland	197.53	0.57	69.32%
France	188.87	1.66	61.65%
Monaco	187.97	0.00	N/A
Bulgaria	186.86	6.40	17.41%
Belarus	182.07	1.20	N/A
Armenia	175.82	4.52	3.64%*
Bosnia And Herzegovina	174.35	4.99	NA
Latvia	170.79	1.15	41.60%
Belgium	170.04	0.58	70.53%
Austria	164.83	0.30	58.04%
Portugal	164.26	1.12	77.25%
Croatia	164.22	1.54	40.02%
Netherlands	153.12	0.55	62.86%*
Iceland	148.95	0.00	N/A
Switzerland	143.16	0.54	51.59%
Luxembourg	128.95	0.45	56.51%
Germany	124.24	0.36	60.94%
Russia	123.58	5.33	26.30%
Moldova	123.58	1.70	17.75%
Spain	121.67	2.39	73.63%
Denmark	113.78	0.29	73.31%
Malta	108.00	1.39	80.52%
Finland	101.57	0.39	53.65%
San Marino	100.81	0.00	70.51%*
Sweden	100.00	0.10	N/A
Italy	95.34	1.00	62.32%
Romania	71.63	1.31	27.04%
Andorra	68.33	0.00	N/A
Ukraine	53.02	1.26	9.90%
Slovakia	36.36	0.08	40.08%
Czech Republic	23.35	0.05	54.03%
Hungary	21.66	0.19	N/A
Kyrgyzstan	21.40	0.65	7.40%
Uzbekistan	20.51	0.19	N/A
Poland	8.62	0.15	50.16%
Tajikistan	2.45	0.00	N/A

*data available at the latest on 05.09.2021

Israel:

The country is **offering the third dose of vaccine to all eligible populations above 12 years of age**. 2.6 million people out of 9.3 million have completed three doses of vaccination in Israel. Those who have completed 5 months from the date of the second vaccine can receive the third vaccine dose (8). The severity of the coronavirus disease is 15 times higher among unvaccinated compared to the vaccinated individuals in Israel. Despite the number of new infections continue to rise. One possible reason could be increased testing among children by parents before beginning the school year (9). **The authorities have set new regulations predicting a rise in infection rate due to holiday gatherings. The validity of the PCR test is extended for 96 hours instead of 72 hours. For unvaccinated or recovered individuals, a temporary Green Pass will be issued after taking a rapid antigen test paid for by themselves** (10). The Ministry of Health and Home Front Command has recently launched a **digital contact tracing service** for the effective control of virus transmission. The confirmed patient will receive a notification on WhatsApp and must respond to the virtual tracer (11). Israel has prohibited travellers from countries under the red list excluding those who are vaccinated or recovered on receiving clearance from Exception Committee and should complete the isolation period upon entry (12).

Georgia:

Between 6th and 7th September, Georgia has recorded 1,965 new COVID-19 cases and 50 new deaths which were 1,120 and 61 respectively on the day before (13). Due to an increase in the number of new infections, the government of Georgia has **suspended entertainment events, festivals, and public transport until 13th September**. Both private and public sector employees were requested to work remotely. **The educational institutions including the kindergartens will continue remote teaching until 4th October**. After 4th October, face to face teaching will resume in the regions where the infection rate is below 4%. Public transport will also resume from 13th September (14). By 7th September, a total of 489,194 people in Georgia were fully vaccinated against COVID-19. **To encourage vaccination among the citizens the government of Georgia has introduced GEL lottery prizes intending to vaccinate 1.7 million people by the end of 2021** (15).

Kosovo:

The number of new infections and hospitalizations in Kosovo has increased rapidly (16). Many of the hospital admissions amongst Swiss have a history of travel to Kosovo or North Macedonia (17). **By 5th September, 15.91% of the population are fully vaccinated** in Kosovo (table 2). Given the current epidemiological situation, the Republic of Kosovo has mandated certain regulations to combat the spread of COVID-19. **It is mandatory to show a vaccination certificate or proof of recovery or negative antigen test (not older than 48 hours) to enter the Republic of Kosovo**. The capacity of the public transport is reduced to 50%. Night curfew from 10 pm until 5 am next morning. The learning process is suspended in both private and public educational institutions until 12th September except preschools and day care centres. From September 13, the staff must produce proof of vaccination/recovery/negative test to enter the school premises (18).

United Kingdom:

During the 1st week of September (1 to 7 September), the **number of people tested positive for COVID-19 and the number of deaths rose by 13.9% and 39.2% respectively compared to the previous week** (25 to 31 August). By 6th September, a total of 7,976 patients are in hospital with COVID-19 and 1,062 patients are on mechanical ventilator support. So far, a total of 43,620,946 (80.3%) people have had two vaccine doses (19). The third vaccine dose rollout will begin this month (20). Data suggests that the number of deaths and hospitalizations in the third wave are relatively low compared to the second wave in the UK (22). Vaccinating teenage groups (12-15 year olds) is currently in debate. However, the concern is about an increase in the rate of transmission due to schools reopening (21). A study on the impact of the pandemic on the region by the Northern Health Sciences Alliance revealed that COVID-19 mortality also hospitalizations are high in the North West region compared to the rest of England (23). The government may soon introduce vaccine passports to gain access to the larger events (24).

Finland:

The incidence of COVID-19 is showing a declining trend in Finland. Between 16 to 29 August, the incidence is 152/100 thousand inhabitants; 18% less compared to the previous 14-day incidence. The reproduction number is 0.75 to 0.95 (25). **The number of new cases is high among the unvaccinated working age**

group and below 10 years age group (26). As of 8th September, the country has vaccinated 53.9% of the population with two doses and 72.5% with one dose (27). **Teenagers (12-15 years) are getting vaccinated at an accelerated pace. 57% of this age group have received the first dose of vaccine.** On contrary, vaccination among young adults (below 40 year age group) is declining. The rate of vaccination in young adults varies between the municipalities, which are working to make every possible effort for easy access to get vaccine jab by enabling more vaccination sites and without an appointment (28). **The Finnish Institute of Health and Welfare suggests a third vaccine dose for those who are immunocompromised individuals** and proposed that priority must be given to those who were vaccinated during early 2021 (health care workers, residents home residents and employees) (29). On 9th September the government is going to issue a revised hybrid strategy to abolish all the restrictions to avoid burden on the health care system and to promote vaccination. As part of the hybrid strategy, a uniform regional model will be introduced (30).

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 March 2020 until 6th September 2021:

Mediterranean Region:

Figure 1:

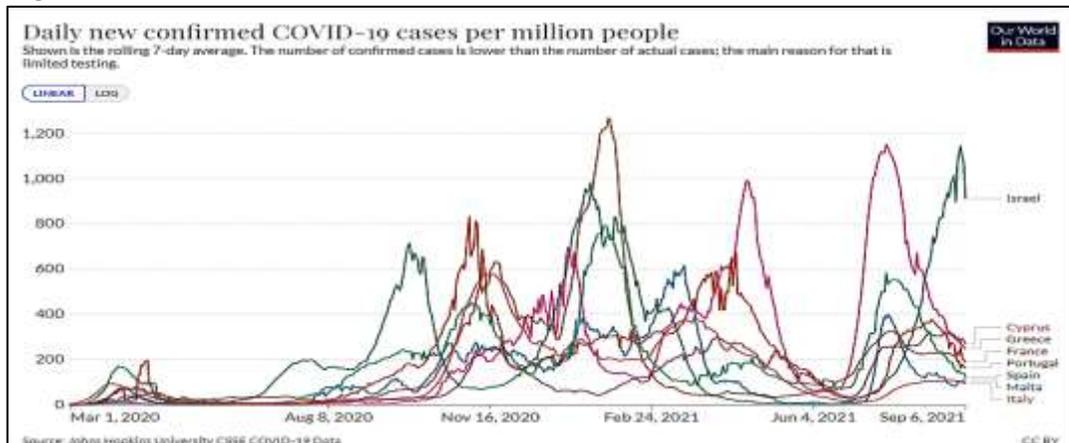
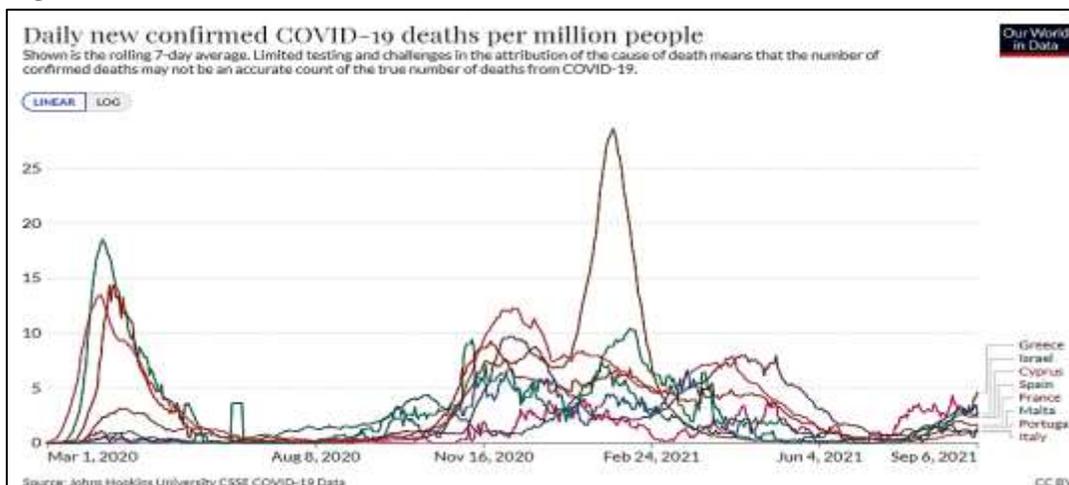


Figure 2:



South-East region:

Figure 3:

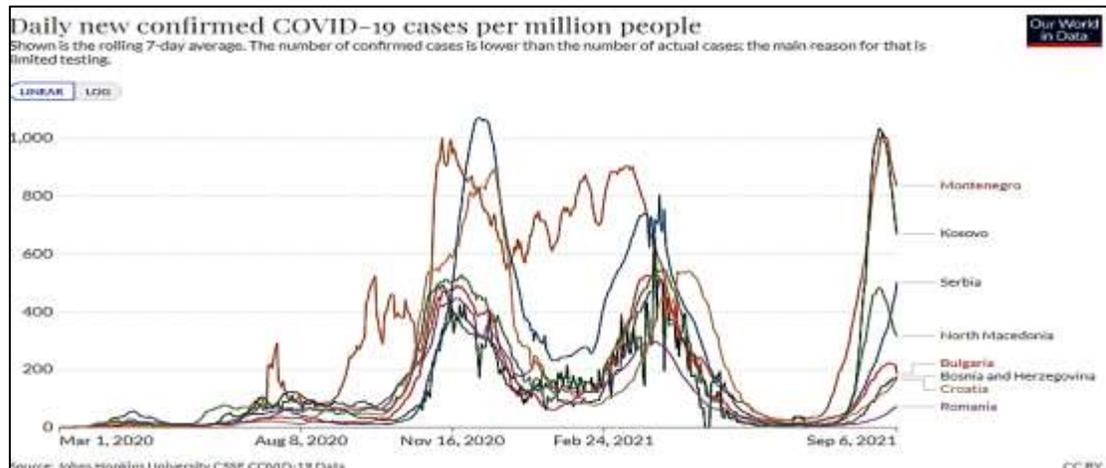
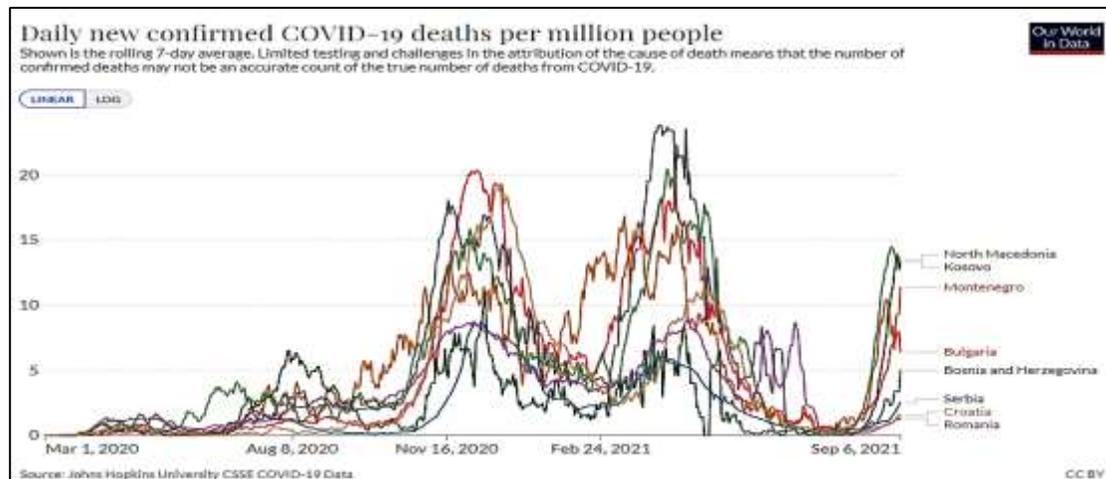


Figure 4:



Central Europe

Figure 5:

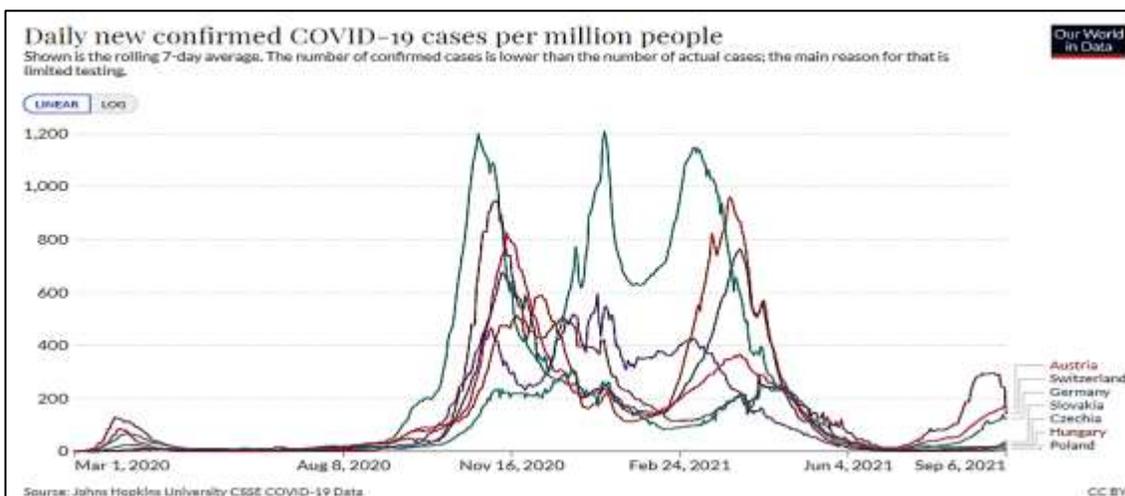
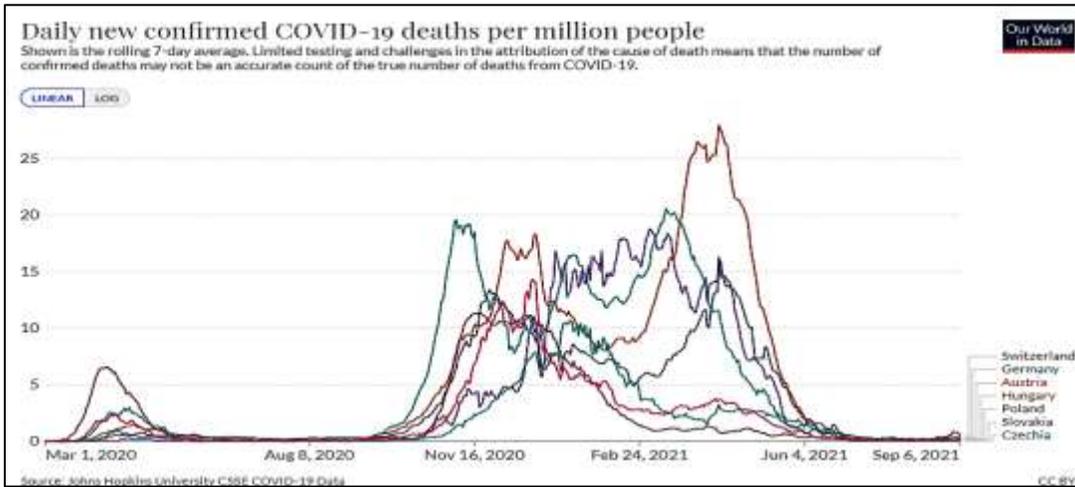


Figure 6:



Baltics and Nordic Countries:

Figure 7:

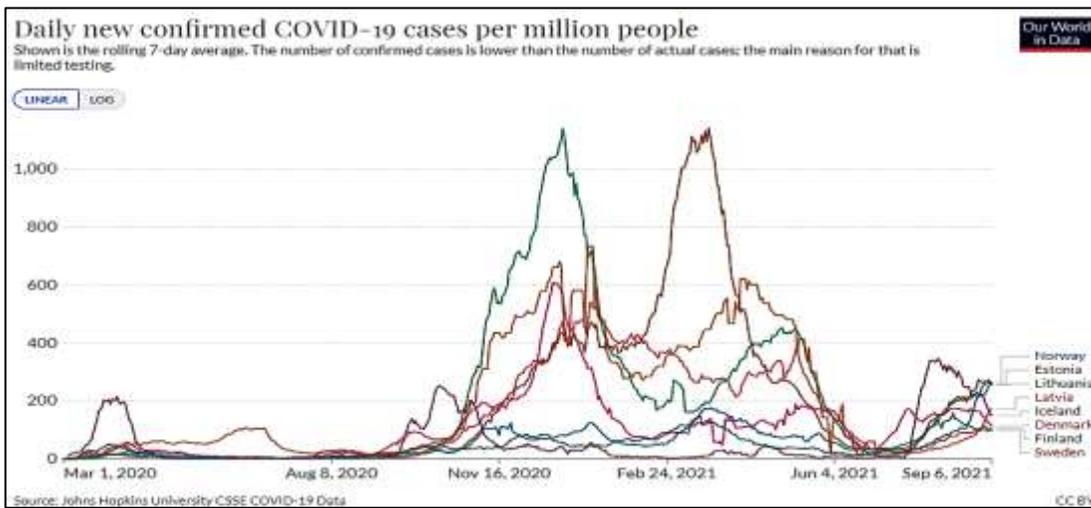
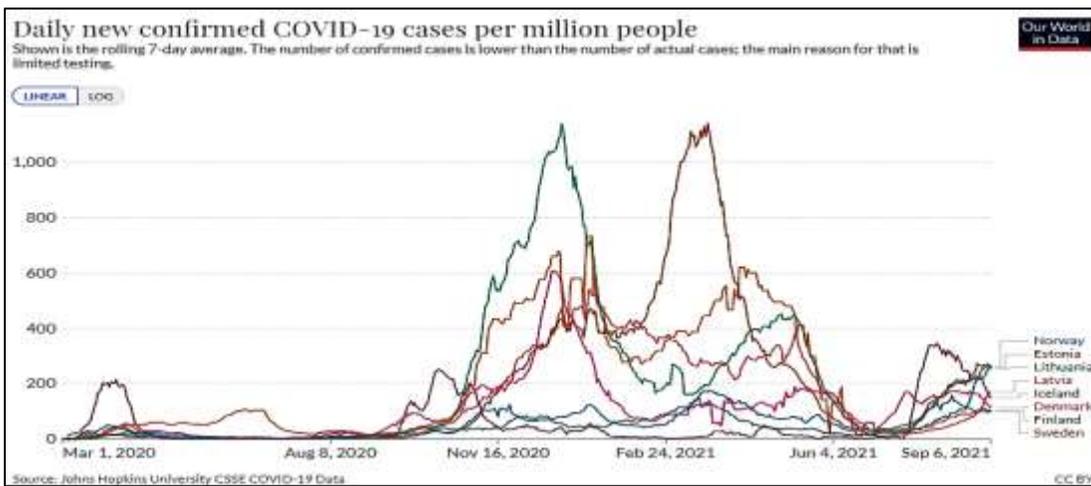


Figure 8:



North-western Europe:

Figure 9:

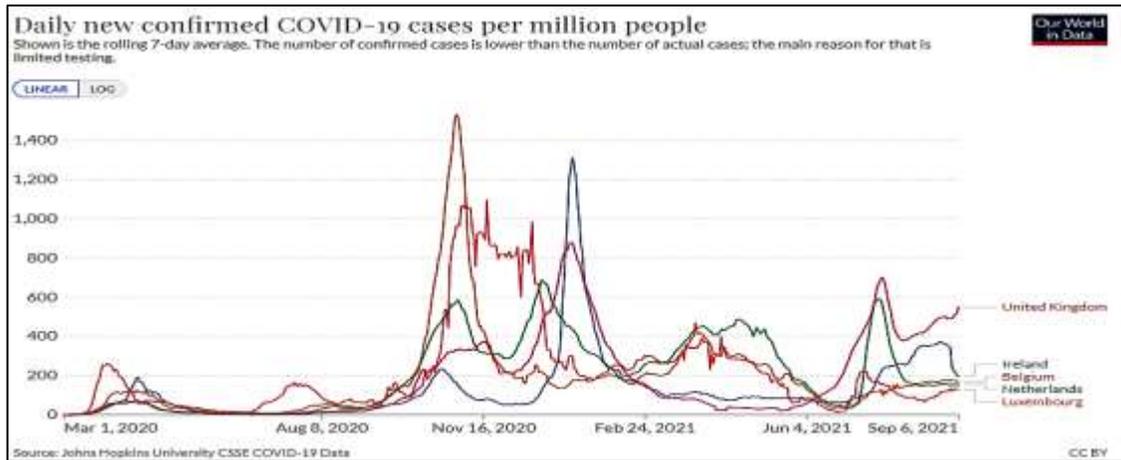
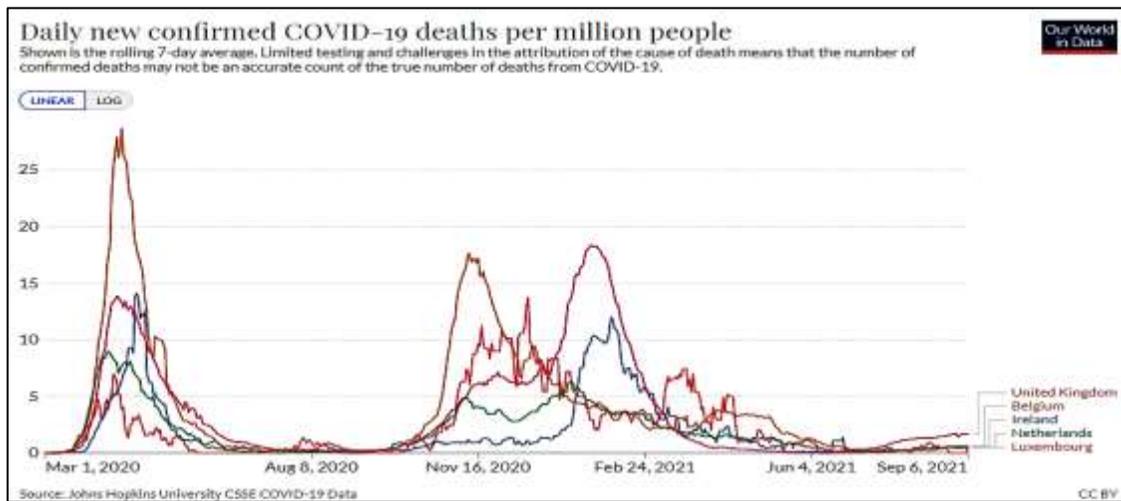


Figure 10:



Central Asia:

Figure 11:

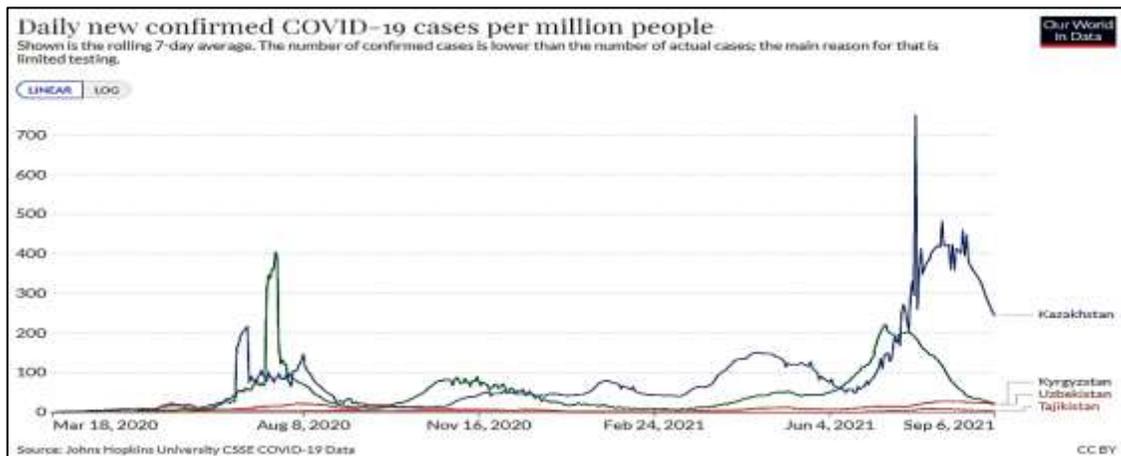
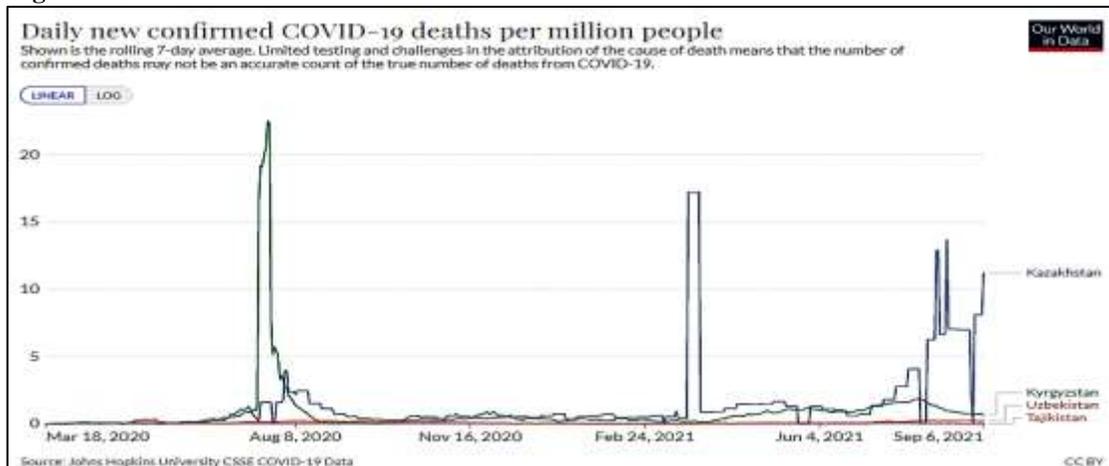


Figure 12:



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