

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, particularly in England](#), and now also in Portugal. The frequency of the infection is increasing by around 70% weekly and hospitalisations are also increasing. Full two-dose vaccination still seems to be protective. We believe there should be international collaboration, capacity and standards in the genomic 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.

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 situation seen recently in India presented 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](#). It also shows the need for further efforts to promote [internationalism in vaccination programmes](#) for the protection of everyone.

The current situation demands international consensus on a long-term strategy to minimize the transmission of variants, not only by rapid vaccination but also by increasing vaccine confidence and improving accessibility to vaccines, in order to prevent further waves. Despite vaccination status, the use of face masks and social distancing is still necessary. https://www.aspher.org/download/726/aspher_statement_on_abolition_of_prevention_measures.pdf.

Political decision making continues to be arbitrary, nationalistic and inconsistent. ASPHER continues to be concerned at the failure to achieve international consensus and action on travel restrictions, social prevention measures and mass gatherings. This has been particularly evident in the management of the EURO2020 football tournament where hundreds of positive cases have now been linked to people who attended football venues.

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). The battle against the current pandemic is continuing with emerging virus variants challenging the usefulness of the vaccine and delaying the end of the pandemic. 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, most of the countries have significantly reduced the number of deaths and the infection rate. Consequently, governments began stepwise lifting of lockdown restrictions (UK, Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Israel, Portugal, France, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Belgium, Germany, Czechia, Austria). However, the transmission of variants of SARS-CoV-2 in a few European countries is a rising concern (Scotland and Portugal) (2).

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 nearly 4 million lives to date (3,930,496) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has surpassed 180 million (181,176,715). Individual WHO regions confirmed COVID-19 cases are as follows (3).

Table 1: Cumulative number of confirmed COVID-19 cases since 30/12/2019

WHO Region	Confirmed COVID-19 cases
Americas	72,074,734
Europe	55,837,403
South-East Asia	34,765,110
Eastern Mediterranean	10,948,678
Africa	4,012,822
Western-Pacific	3,537,204

As per the WHO weekly epidemiological report, the European Region is contributing 31% of cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases worldwide. The number of **new cases rose by 10% to the previous week (after two months decline) and new deaths in the past 7 days reduced by 1%** (4).

IHME analysis shows the declining trend in reported daily new infections and deaths is continuing, though it is not uniform in all European regions. In the UK particularly in Scotland,

Portugal, and the Russian Federation significant increase in transmission is noticed which is linked to the Delta variant (B.1.617.2). Also, in the regions of Central Asia (Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) an increase in transmission is already evident which could be related to the Delta variant. IHME forecasts, based on the current inferences on immune escape, the infection rate will increase from the beginning until mid-July. Although, there is ambiguity about the summer impact of the Delta variant, IHME suggests the effective policy strategies remain consistent, such as – expanding the vaccination by all means particularly with mRNA (proven to be effective against B.1.617.2), encouraging mask use and maintaining social distance once the number of cases, hospitalizations and deaths begin to rise (2)

The following table shows a 7-day average of daily new confirmed coronavirus cases, newly confirmed deaths and share of people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in the countries of the WHO-Europe region reported on 21/06/2021 (table 2) (5) (6).

Table 2:

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 the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19
United Kingdom	241.65	0.26	48.20%
Cyprus	223.45	0.00	N/A
Georgia	169.49	3.58	2.37%
Kyrgyzstan	138.63	0.98	N/A
Portugal	135.10	0.25	32.53%
Russia	133.54	3.94	11.64%
Spain	85.53	0.31	36.55%
Monaco	83.72	0.00	N/A
Kazakhstan	83.64	0.12	10.15%
Belarus	69.95	1.04	N/A
Ireland	65.62	0.29	N/A
Turkey	65.58	0.67	17.79%
Sweden	60.26	0.64	N/A
Belgium	47.31	0.33	33.65%
Greece	37.25	1.43	35.17%
Netherlands	36.38	0.13	N/A
Andorra	33.28	0.00	N/A
Denmark	32.01	0.05	32.53%
Norway	31.59	0.05	28.49%
Latvia	29.54	0.53	27.76%
Armenia	28.83	0.53	N/A
France	27.29	0.49	29.74%
Montenegro	25.48	0.91	21.70%
Luxembourg	24.42	0.00	31.73%
Ukraine	22.07	1.06	1.35%
Finland	20.34	0.05	17.80%
Israel	19.91	0.03	59.65%
Estonia	17.77	0.11	28.91%
Slovenia	17.25	0.28	31.32%
Croatia	16.77	0.70	25.88%
Moldova	15.12	0.50	6.48%
Lithuania	14.80	0.73	36.91%
Uzbekistan	13.83	0.06	N/A
Switzerland	12.41	0.17	N/A
Italy	11.80	0.49	29.94%
Czech Republic	11.54	0.24	28.99%
Serbia	11.42	0.73	N/A
Austria	10.37	0.33	32.79%
Bulgaria	10.16	0.82	11.38%
Germany	7.18	0.59	35.60%
Malta	7.12	0.00	71.52%
Slovakia	6.28	0.34	28.47%
Kosovo	6.21	0.44	N/A
Hungary	6.09	0.44	50.45%
Bosnia And Herzegovina	5.70	0.65	N/A
Azerbaijan	4.97	0.10	11.93%
San Marino	4.21	0.00	N/A
North Macedonia	3.36	0.48	10.51%
Poland	3.21	0.57	33.85%
Romania	2.86	6.83	23.41%
Tajikistan	2.28	0.00	N/A
Albania	1.14	0.10	13.77%

Ireland:

Last week, the national incidence of confirmed cases per 100,000 increased during the week from 93.1 to 98.9 (7). The reopening of indoor eating and drinking at hospitality businesses was planned to take place July 5, but it will be postponed due to the fear of the Delta variant. The government has announced that Ireland is going to restrict indoor hospitality, also to those who are fully vaccinated, due to the increased transferability of the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus. Yet, other plans of easing the restrictions won't be postponed, such as increasing the number of attendants to weddings to 50 (8).

The Netherlands:

Last week, there was a decline of 26% in the number of positive cases in the Netherlands. There have also been nearly 6 million fully vaccinated, having either received one dose of the Janssen vaccine or two doses of the other vaccines in use in the Netherlands (9). **In addition, the Dutch government approved Covid vaccines for 12- to 17-year-olds** which consists of 1.1 million people in this age group. This age group can only **receive the vaccine manufactured by Pfizer/BioNTech and they must decide on vaccination together with their parents or guardians.** The government decided this to lessen the virus circulation in this group and to prevent a possible epidemic later in winter (10).

Romania:

It is expected that the Delta COVID-19 strain will become dominant in Romania. Currently, there is a vaccination rate of approximately 20% and a good epidemiological situation regarding cases. Yet, the vaccination speed is now rather low and the fear of the delta variant increases. Thus, hospitals are instructed to prepare for an increased number of cases and to increase the number of beds in hospitals (11).

Bulgaria:

To increase the low vaccination rates in Bulgaria, the new caretaker government decided to suspend and replace the national vaccination headquarters against COVID-19 with an advisory council on vaccines. The new council would involve experts with broader expertise and would have a wider public representation. In total 1,748,265 vaccines have been administered in Bulgaria, with 798,053 people having completed the vaccination cycle (12).

Cyprus:

The moving 7-day average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases in Cyprus is 223.45 per mill people (table 2). As of 29th June, 59 people are hospitalized and 20 people are in critical condition (13). **From 1st July, the EU Digital COVID Certificate (EUDCC) will come into force which includes the person's vaccination status (approved by EMA and Sputnik V or Sinopharm), certificate of recovery from COVID-19 in the past 180 days since the date of sampling and a negative RT-PCR laboratory test certificate carried out 72 hours before the entry to the Republic of Cyprus.** Individuals should meet one of the above criteria to enter Cyprus. To ensure the soundness of the EUDCC, the certificate will be issued in digital format (14). **The latest data from the Tracing Unit suggests nearly 30% of COVID-19 cases are attributed to age group 18 and below especially 15 to 18 years with evidence of virus characteristics similar to adults. Hence the Ministry of Health approved vaccination for ages 16 and 17 with mRNA (registrations are open from 30th June) with an obligation to provide proof of consent from both parents or guardians at the vaccination centres at the time of vaccination (15).**

Portugal:

A high number of new coronavirus cases are being recorded since the second week of June which are the highest since February 2021 (16). According to the daily COVID-19 situation report on 29th June, the 14-day incidence at the national level is 158.5 per 100 thousand inhabitants and the rate of transmission is 1.13 (17). **Since the beginning of June, the INSA (Doctor Ricardo Jorge National Health Institute) has initiated implementing a new monitoring strategy by weekly sampling to identify genomic diversity of SARS-CoV-2 in Portugal. The recent report from INSA shows, the frequency of the Alpha variant is decreased while the Delta variant has been increased (particularly in the capital region of Lisbon and southern Algarve). The incidence of the Delta variant show, sudden rise at the national level from 4.0% in May to 55.6% in June.** Considering the current trend, it is predicted that the Delta variant will become dominant at the national level. To limit the spread of the infection, on 28th June, **face to face classes were cancelled for the next 12 days for children up to 16 years in Algarve and Lisbon, the opening hours of vaccination centres will be extended for those above 50 years to receive vaccine jabs without an appointment (18) (19).**

Czechia:

As of 29th June, nearly five million people in Czechia are partly vaccinated against COVID-19 and 3.10 million people are fully vaccinated (20). From 26th June, the limit on the number of people attending mass events (sporting events and cultural performances) increased to 2000 people indoors and 5000 outdoors also at swimming pools and wellness centres, the capacities increased to 75% of their original space (the rule supposed to enter into force from 1st July). However, the obligation to present a corona pass at such events and services still apply (21). Recently, **the Ministry of Health has launched a network of sequencing centres across the country for molecular-biological surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 mutations considering it as a priority to control the pandemic. A blanket testing of all positive samples using a discriminative PCR test will be conducted in all networking laboratories and compensation is paid for from July. The existing networks capacity is 4,500 samples per month (sufficient for the current epidemic situation) which will be extended if the epidemic worsens (22).**

United Kingdom:

The infection rate of the virus shows the same increasing trend as it did in previous weeks. Between June 17 and June 23, an increase of 69.9% in people testing positive has been observed (23). 95% of all new cases in the country are of the Delta variant (24). **As of June 30, 84.9% of the adult population has received the 1st dose whereas 62.4% is fully vaccinated (23).** On June 28, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care confirmed the July 19 is the target date for ending restrictions (24).

Finland:

From June 23 to June 30, there have been 947 confirmed cases in Finland, an increase of 198% compared to the prior week. **On June 30, Finland has vaccinated 58.3% of the population with first dose and 17.9% fully (25).** Helsinki is also planning on giving COVID-19 vaccines to children 12-15 years at risk of severe infection (26).

Norway:

From June 24, Norway will be able to verify COVID-19 certificates from other EU/EEA countries if they are connected to the EUDCC gateway (27). As of June 30, 28.71% of the population is fully vaccinated and 47.16% has received the first dose (28).

Sweden:

From June 24 to June 30, there have been 1520 confirmed cases in Sweden (29). **As of June 23, 58% of the population has received the first dose, while 37.1% has received the second one as well** (30). Starting July 1, restrictions on how long restaurants can be open are removed and the limit on how many people can sit at the same table is raised to eight inside and with no restriction on numbers outdoors (31).

Denmark:

As of June 24, approximately 56.8% of the population has received one dose of the vaccine, whereas approximately 33% is fully vaccinated (32). In addition, Denmark secured 1.17 million COVID-19 doses of the Pfizer vaccine from Romania (33).

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 since the beginning of the pandemic until 21st June 2021:

Mediterranean Region:

Figure 1:

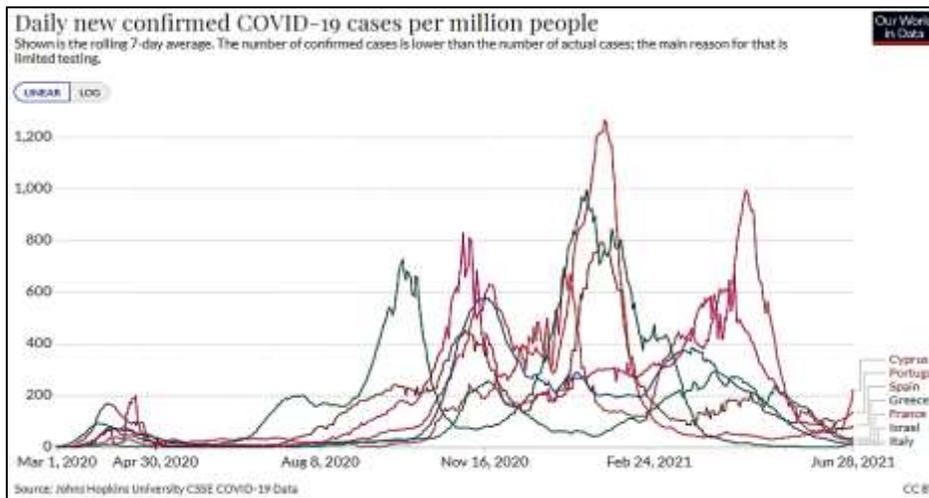
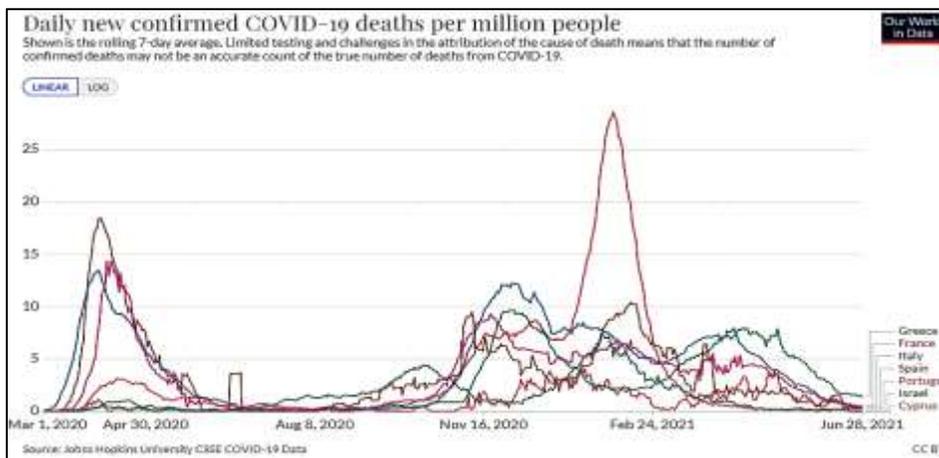


Figure 2:



South-East Europe:

Figure 3:

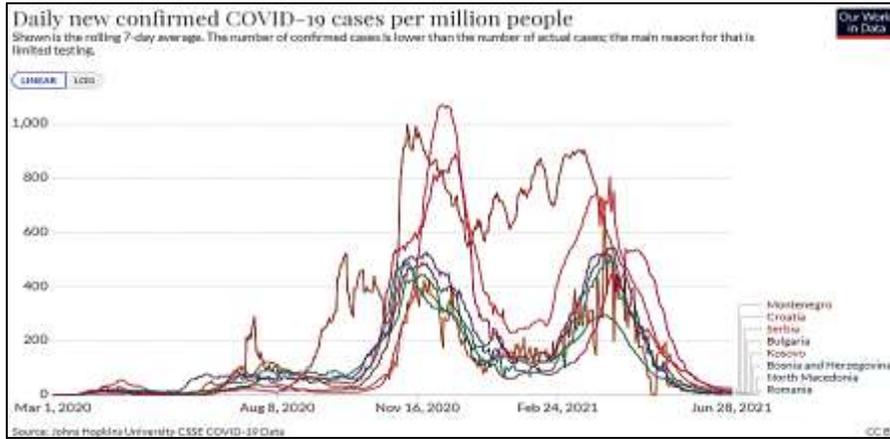
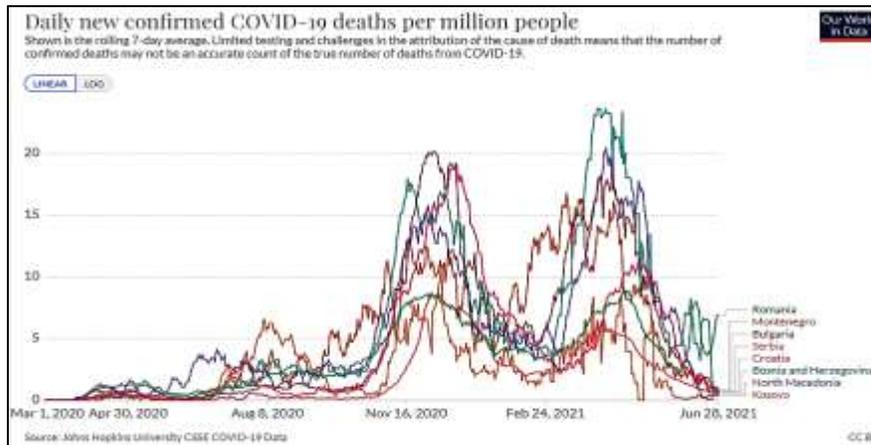


Figure 4:



Central Europe

Figure 5:

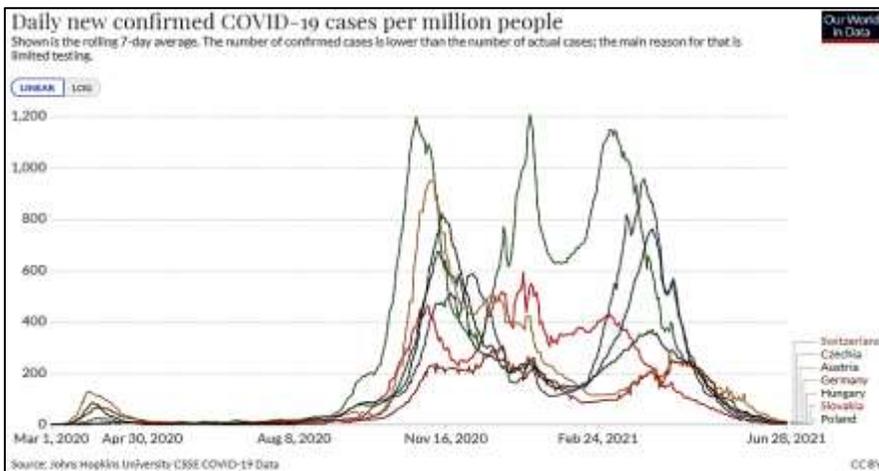
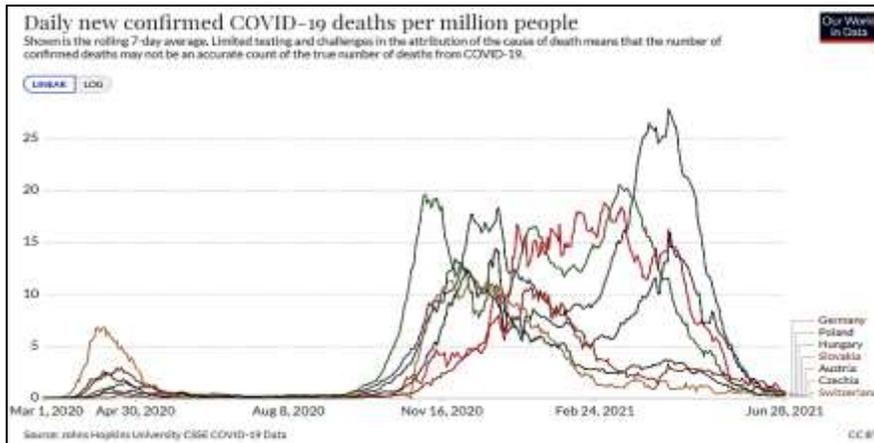


Figure 6:



Baltics and Nordic Countries:

Figure 7:

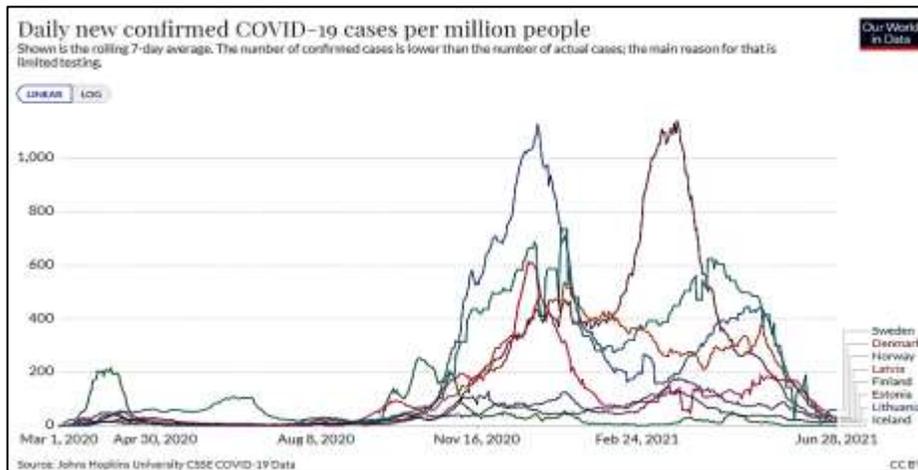
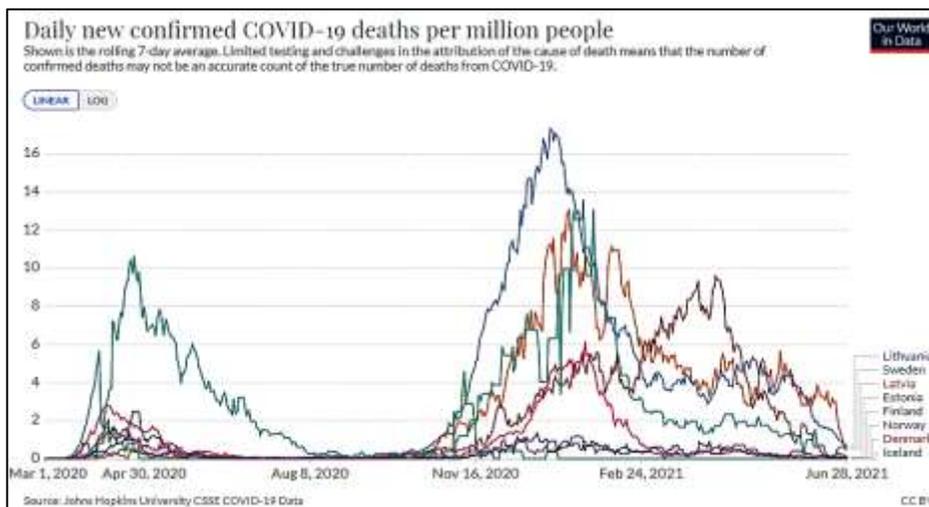


Figure 8:



North-western Europe:

Figure 9:

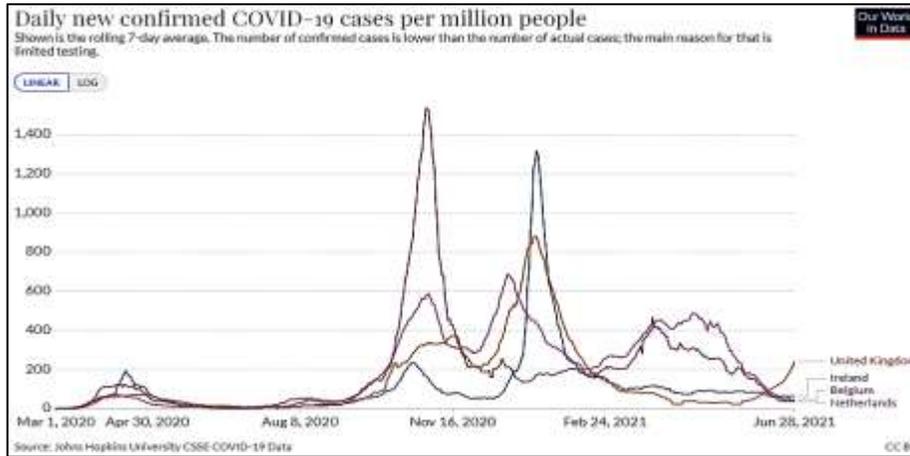
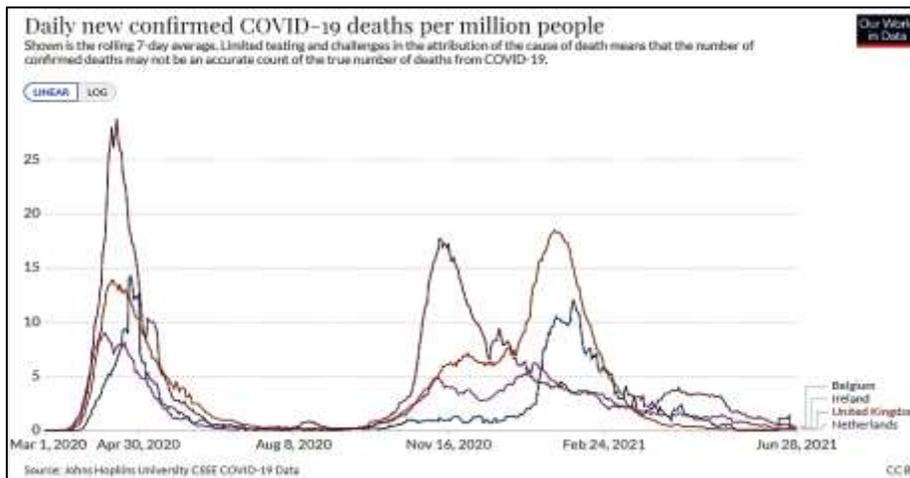


Figure 10:



Central Asia:

Figure 11:

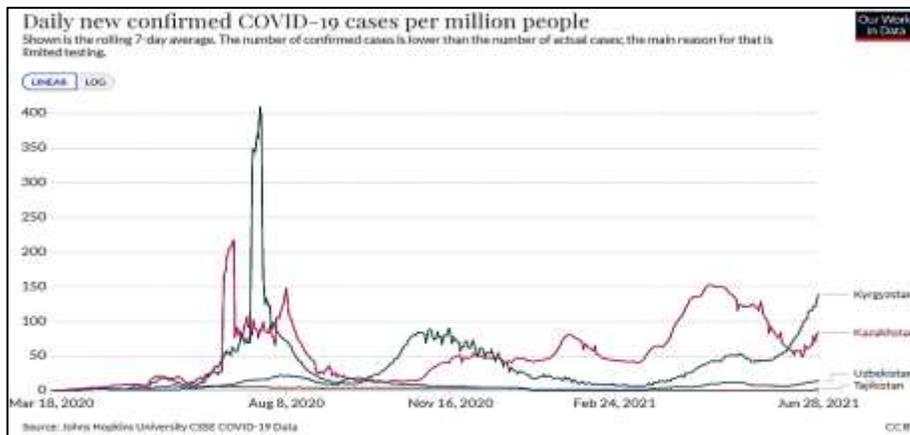
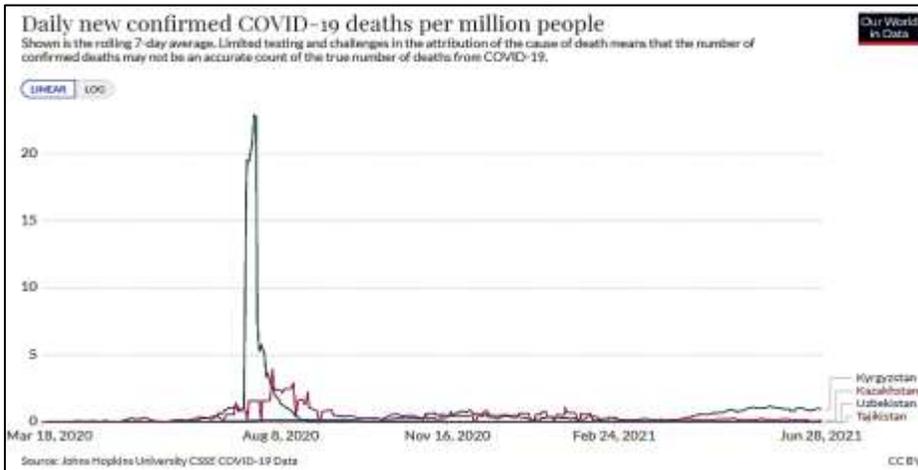


Figure 12:



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