

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 ([link](#)). By the end of August, the cumulative uptake of at least one dose and full vaccination among adults in the EU/EEA region is 76.5% and 68.5% respectively, according to ECDC ([link](#)). Despite this, there is a huge disparity in vaccine coverage across countries. A few regions such as Denmark, Portugal, Ireland have fully vaccinated more than 80% of their adult population whereas in Latvia, Romania and Bulgaria the proportion of fully vaccinated adults is 45.5%, 31.9% and 19.3% respectively ([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 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 the effect of the vaccine, the countries need to act promptly to increase the supply and availability of vaccines. This includes [implementing the vaccine waiver](#). ([link](#)) ([link](#)).

ASPSHER 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.

APPSHER recognizes the importance of following non-pharmacological interventions though a set goal of a proportion of vaccination is achieved. Also, the countries are required to closely monitor any new infection among both vaccinated and unvaccinated to know the nature of the epidemic and the efficacy of the vaccine. Detailed information is needed regarding the administration of booster doses to define policies for all countries.

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.

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 '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).

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 countries. This has contributed to flattening the epidemic curve in a few regions. However, despite the immunization program, 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 – 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 (4,507,837) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases are now above two hundred million (216,867,420). 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	83,662,949
Europe	65,138,274
South-East Asia	41,262,276
Eastern Mediterranean	14,613,554
Western-Pacific	6,554,772
Africa	5,634,831

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 4% and the number of new cases decreased by 1% compared to the previous week (3).

IHME analysis shows that the **transmission of the Delta variant is divergent across the European region**. Azerbaijan, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Israel are going through an accelerated rate of transmission. Whereas, England, Scotland and Wales are experiencing a rapid rise in transmission preceding a pattern of a peak. In Greece, Malta, Portugal and Netherlands the number of cases is fairly stable and may follow similar patterns as in the UK. **By early December, a third of the population will be susceptible to the Delta variant, due to continued variant transmission and an increase in the rate of vaccination**. Considering the divergent trends in the Delta variant spread, authorities should exercise cautious measures to tackle the epidemic and 1) ensure enhanced vaccine supply and improve vaccine confidence 2) conducting regular testing programs at schools and workplaces among both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals to detect any new infections 3) mandating face mask in the regions experiencing a high rate of transmission and banning mass gatherings and 4) strengthen the hospital systems which are near to or beyond their capacity due to increases in the number of hospitalizations (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 30/08/2021 (table 2) (5) (6) (7).

Table2:

WHO Europe region	7-day rolling average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases/mill people	7-day rolling average of daily newly confirmed COVID-19 deaths/mill people	Share of the population who received vaccine against COVID-19
Israel	1013.81	3.04	62.37%
Montenegro	1003.10	9.10	29.05%
Georgia	1002.75	17.88	9.64%*
Kosovo	977.65	9.90	13.93%*
United Kingdom	489.62	1.69	62.74%
North Macedonia	440.51	14.13	25.50%
Azerbaijan	372.43	3.52	25.87%
Ireland	354.30	0.52	67.57%
Serbia	331.75	1.26	41.21%
Kazakhstan	319.50	2.11	28.11%
Cyprus	309.20	2.73	58.61%
Greece	300.93	2.96	55.21%
Switzerland	294.68	0.46	51.01%
Albania	279.06	0.84	22.06%
France	267.83	1.61	59.26%
Estonia	266.59	0.65	40.92%
San Marino	252.03	0.00	70.44%*
Norway	226.27	0.08	55.72%
Turkey	221.60	2.84	43.23%
Iceland	219.68	1.25	N/A
Bulgaria	217.56	6.38	16.87%
Portugal	217.39	1.19	73.63%
Lithuania	216.63	2.81	55.81%
Slovenia	205.69	0.55	43.42%
Armenia	179.33	3.27	3.32%*
Belgium	174.49	0.41	69.72%
Monaco	169.90	0.00	N/A
Denmark	163.20	0.32	72.14%
Spain	161.81	2.47	70.59%
Netherlands	154.90	0.56	62.32%*
Bosnia And Herzegovina	151.90	2.28	N/A
Austria	149.65	0.30	57.47%
Belarus	147.19	1.17	N/A
Russia	128.21	5.35	24.91%
Croatia	122.22	0.98	39.48%
Luxembourg	121.97	0.00	55.88%*
Germany	111.36	0.31	59.95%
Italy	108.19	0.83	60.46%
Finland	106.80	0.26	49.95%*
Latvia	98.10	0.31	40.69%
Sweden	96.02	0.24	N/A
Moldova	87.26	0.99	16.96%*
Malta	81.07	1.11	80.15%
Andorra	55.40	0.00	N/A
Romania	45.65	0.85	26.80%
Ukraine	44.14	1.34	8.56%
Kyrgyzstan	31.06	0.75	6.68%
Uzbekistan	24.26	0.20	N/A
Slovakia	18.26	0.03	39.87%
Czech Republic	17.65	0.23	53.28%
Hungary	16.40	0.07	N/A
Poland	5.97	0.09	49.61%
Tajikistan	4.44	0.00	N/A

*data available at the latest on 29.08.2021

Israel:

At the end of August, the 7-day rolling average of daily new COVID-19 cases in Israel is above 1000 per million population, an incidence similar to that recorded in January this year (8). From 18th August, the country has updated its COVID-19 regulations such as **mandatory Green Pass for the age group 3 and above at all open and closed spaces regardless of the number of participants** (9). Recently, the ministry of health offered home COVID test kits for parents to test their children to prepare for the opening of the school year. Children with positive test results should register for PCR laboratory tests and are required to be in isolation until results are revealed (10). Israel has approved booster shots for the age group 30 and above and recommends receiving the third vaccine dose 5 months after their second vaccination date (11)(12). Accordingly, the validity of Green Pass has been updated. From the date of the third vaccination date, the Green Pass is effective for the next six months which enter into force from 1st October (12).

Malta:

As of 31st August, Malta has recorded 48 new cases and one death. 31 patients are currently being treated for coronavirus of which one patient is in ICU (13). By the end of August, a total of 412,767 are fully vaccinated against coronavirus (14). **The government has announced the booster dose for ages above 70, immune-compromised patients, and those living in elderly care homes. From 6th September, fully vaccinated people can attend concerts and festivals.** Currently, a single vaccination centre is operating at the University of Malta for walk-in everyday patients and the remaining will be closed as the country has achieved a 90% vaccination rate (15)

Switzerland:

Switzerland's infection rate is stabilizing. However, the situation in hospitals is alarming – hospitalizations were high among those unvaccinated particularly in the age group 10 to 29 years (16)(17). By 31st August, 51% of the Swiss population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (16). To improve the vaccination rate among unvaccinated the authorities have announced that **from 1st October, free corona tests are no longer available.** For those individuals exhibiting symptoms, the test will be offered free of cost, however the issuance of the Covid Certificate is not guaranteed. In events where the Covid Certificate is mandatory, mask mandates are lifted. Yet, social distancing and hygienic rules must be followed (17).

Netherlands:

The number of new Covid-19 cases is rising again in the Netherlands with an increase of 8% over the past week. The R-number has also risen to 1.02. The infection rate differs per region with differences of 20% to 42%. In contrast, hospital admissions continue to fall with 642 Covid-19 patients being treated in Dutch hospitals (18). Meanwhile, the Covid-19 vaccination rate is stalling in the Netherlands. The number of vaccinated people in many EU countries increases currently by 1% per day, while the Netherlands experiences an increase of 0.05%. During August, the vaccination rate in the Netherlands increased from 68.3% to only 69.2%. The Ministry of Health expects that the vaccination rate may increase after September 20, the date the government plans to abandon social distancing in exchange for more access testing (19).

Ireland:

Plans to lift most of Ireland's Covid-19 restrictions by October 22nd have been announced. The only measures that will remain in place will be mask-wearing and self-isolation. Most restrictions will be loosened during September already. From September 1, all public transport will return to 100% capacity. Organised indoor events and mass gatherings will return from September 6 by when 60% of people are vaccinated. Organised outdoor events and mass gatherings will go up to 75% of venue capacity. On September 20, workers can return to their workplaces on a phased basis (20).

Romania:

On August 30, the Romanian government agreed to offer around 20 euros in meal vouchers to people getting vaccinated. The offer applies to anyone who gets vaccinated from this week onwards. People who are already fully vaccinated will be allowed to enter a lottery promising cash prizes. The campaign is funded by the budget from the Health Ministry. The campaign aims to encourage as many people as possible to get vaccinated soon. Romania has a vaccination rate of 31.8%, which is the second-lowest of the EU. Many people still did not get vaccinated due to scepticism about the vaccine. If the scheme is found

to be successful, it will be extended (21). Due to the low vaccination pace, Romania donated over 2 million and resold over 1.1 million vaccine doses to other countries. Thereby, they suspended deliveries from Pfizer/BioNTech and AstraZeneca this month (22).

Latvia:

More than half of the population over 12 years old has received at least one Covid-19 jab in Latvia. 51.78% of the population has received one dose and 44.95% has completed the vaccination process (22). **A booster shot against Covid-19 has been recommended for people who are considered to be immunocompromised.** Patients with high immunosuppression caused by disease or therapy may not have produced an optimal immune response after two vaccines. With the Delta variant circulating these patients could be at risk of severe symptoms or hospitalization. The booster dose can be carried out by any approved vaccine, regardless of the vaccine used for primary immunization (23).

Kosovo:

Due to a surge in positive Covid-19 cases in Kosovo, **the start of the school year will be delayed by two weeks.** Thereby, a curfew will be installed from 10 p.m. until 5 a.m. starting on August 31. Nonessential staff won't be allowed to work at public and private institutions until September 13. After September 13, employees will have to be vaccinated or get tested to be allowed to enter their workplaces. Currently, a quarter of the population is vaccinated, but the hospitals remain under a great deal of pressure (24).

Belgium:

An average of 2,049 new COVID-19 cases were detected per day from 24 to 30 August, a 5% increase compared to the previous week and the number of deaths decreased by 12% (25). The virus reproduction rate also rose to 1.2 (25). By 1st September, Belgium has fully vaccinated more than 8.1 million people representing 70.7% of the total population (26). From 31st August, the testing mandates were changed for travellers to Belgium. It is mandatory to get a test on days 1 and 7 if the individual is travelling from a red zone in a non-EU region irrespective of their vaccination or recovery status. For individuals travelling from red zones in the EU region, a similar testing rule applies if they do not hold any vaccination or recovery certificate (27).

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 30th August 2021:

Mediterranean Region:

Figure 1:

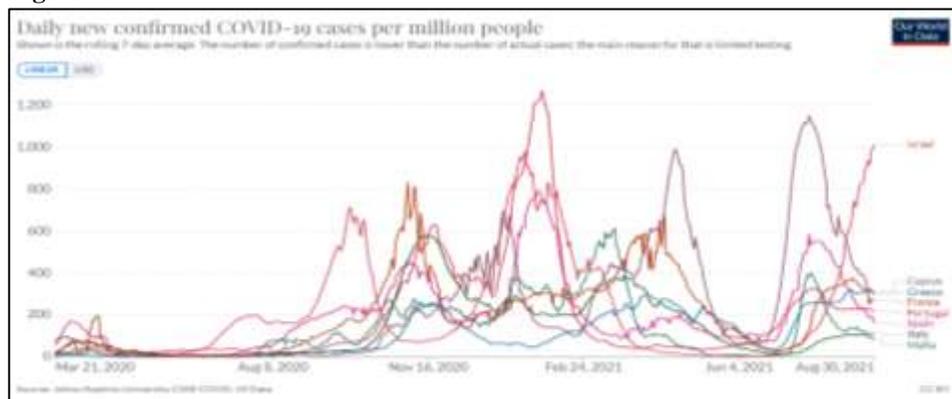
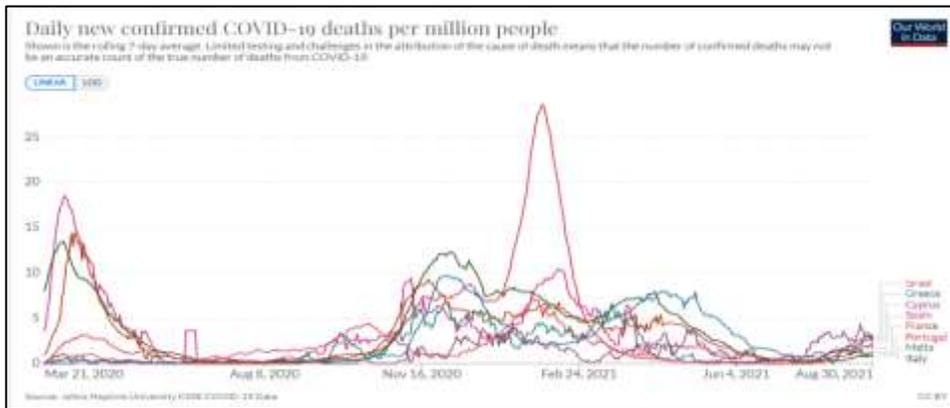


Figure 2:



South-East region:

Figure 3:

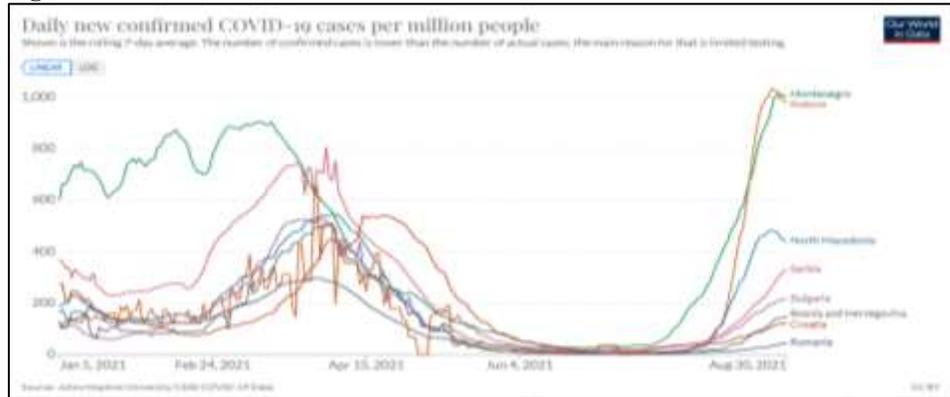
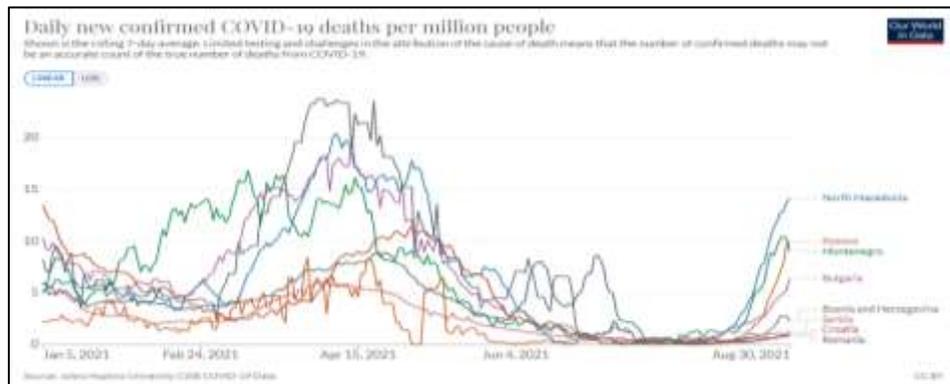


Figure 4:



Central Europe

Figure 5:

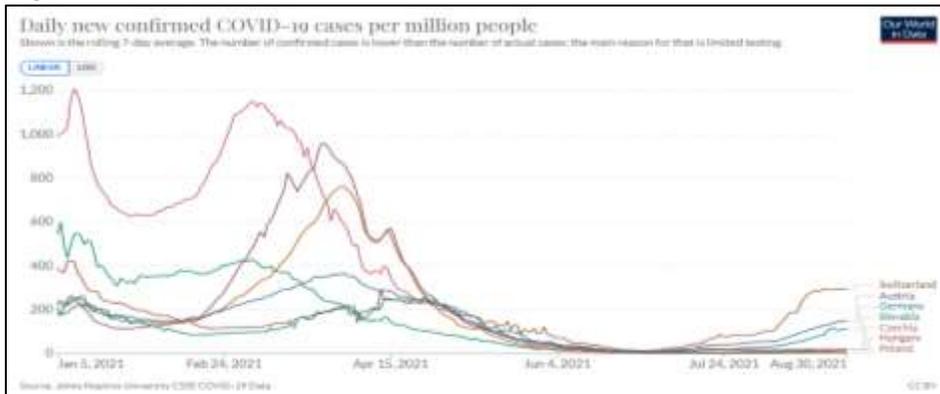
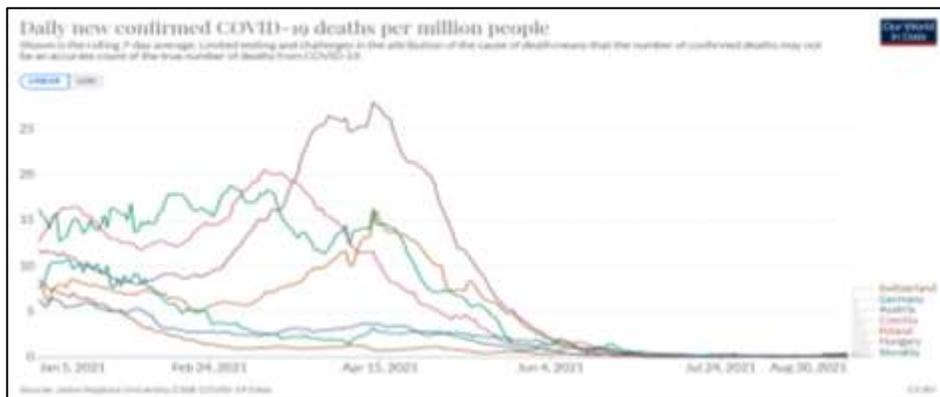


Figure 6:



Baltics and Nordic Countries:

Figure 7:

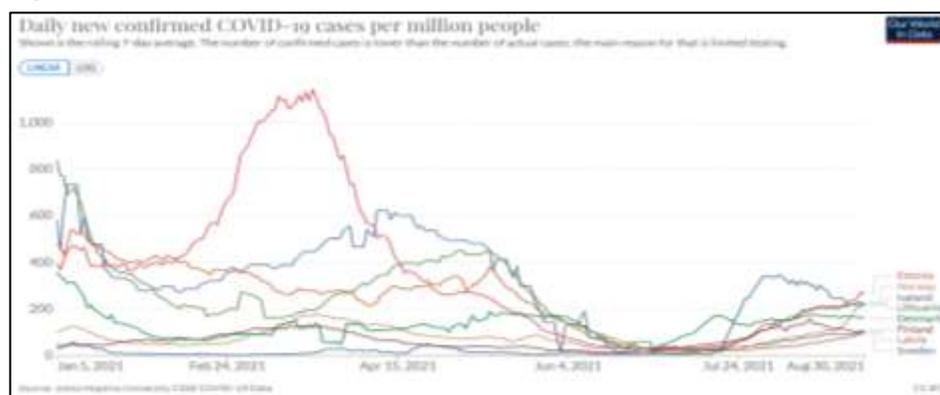
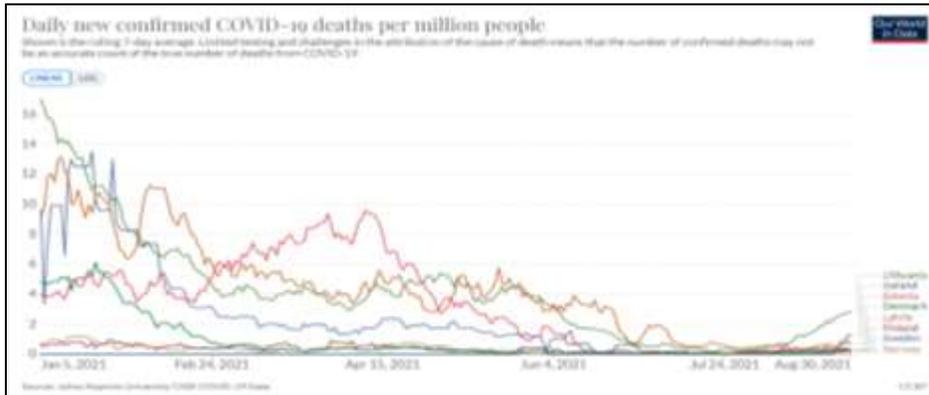


Figure 8:



North-western Europe:

Figure 9:

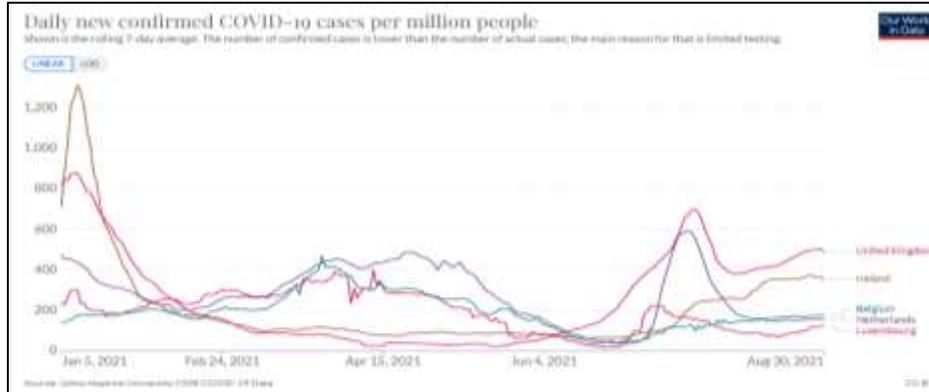
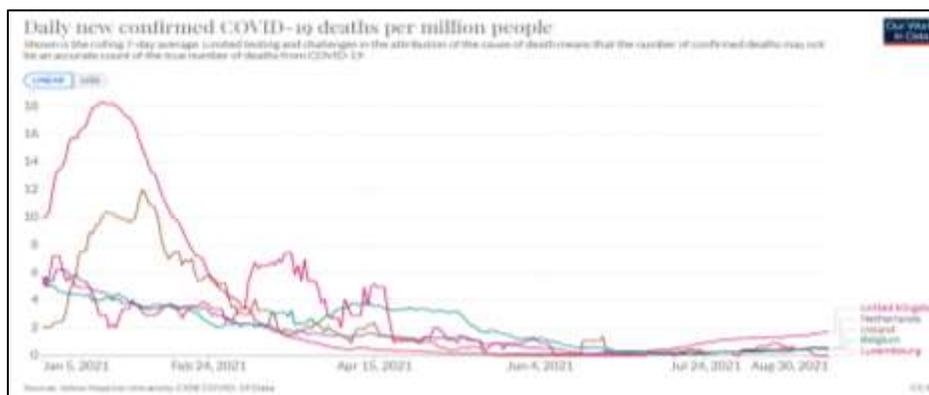


Figure 10:



Central Asia:

Figure 11:

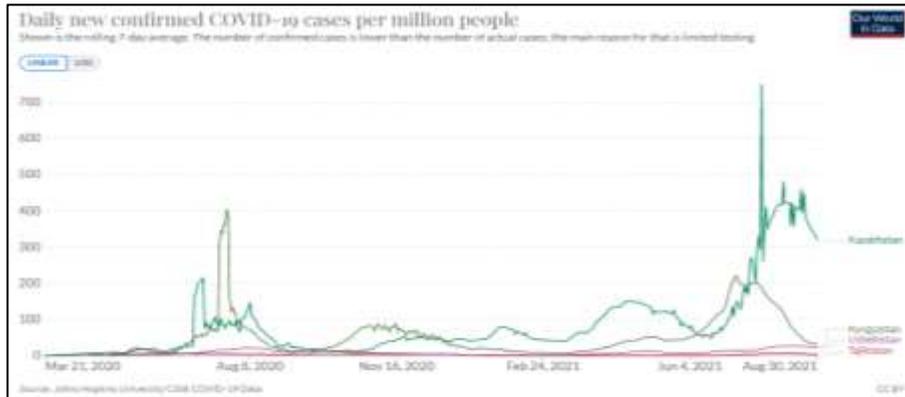
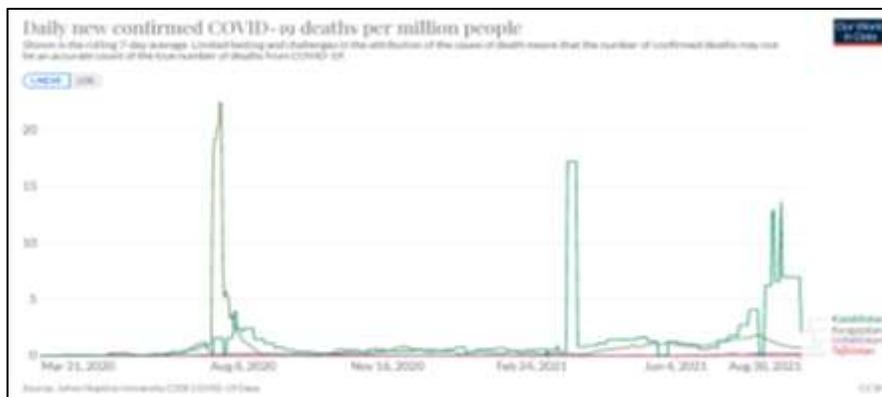


Figure 12:



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