

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?

The Delta variant is the dominant variant in most of the European Region. A high level of protection against morbidity and mortality caused by COVID-19 and its variants can be attained by completing the 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 the 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 initiated administration of third vaccine dose to the individuals above 12 years age who have completed two vaccine doses 5 months earlier. In the UK, the plan is set to give third vaccine jab to those who were vaccinated in phase 1 of the vaccination program. 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 a noticeable level of immune response after three doses of the Pfizer vaccine. A similar response is observed in almost 100% of healthy individuals after the first dose of the 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 ‘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 (4,636,153) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases are now above two hundred million (225,024,781). 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	86,674,208
Europe	67,458,925
South-East Asia	42,243,539
Eastern Mediterranean	15,267,808
Western-Pacific	7,579,614
Africa	5,829,923

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 and the number of new cases have declined by 2% and 5% respectively compared to the previous week (3).

IHME analysis shows the current epidemiological trend across Europe is divergent. The Delta surges are declining after peaking in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and few countries in the Mediterranean region. Whereas the transmission seems to be increasing in Bulgaria, Montenegro and Azerbaijan. There are no Delta surges yet in Poland, Czechia and Hungary. By early December, two-thirds of the population will become immune to the Delta variant. Hence IHME estimated that the rate of transmission in this winter could be lesser compared to the former. The influencing factors of the current epidemiological trend would be, rise in infection rate due to school reopening’s without appropriate measures and emerging variants which might escape natural immunity or immunity acquired through vaccination. To minimize the speed of transmission, countries should focus on increasing vaccination rate and adopting sustainable epidemic measures by schools. Improving health resources is also an important strategy to avoid burden on hospitals in winter due to COVID-19 and flu epidemic (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 13/09/2021 (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	1080.10	3.27	63.21%
Montenegro	886.64	8.19	31.31%
Serbia	825.81	3.72	41.73% *
Georgia	569.81	13.14	15.22% *
United Kingdom	499.85	2.07	64.67%
Switzerland	465.87	0.61	54.54%
Slovenia	406.57	0.96	45.16%
Kosovo	340.22	11.23	18.54%
Lithuania	317.44	5.26	58.48%
Estonia	310.79	1.19	43.20%
Albania	295.22	1.44	24.69%
Turkey	275.24	2.92	47.78%
Ireland	274.68	1.23	70.92% *
North Macedonia	237.47	12.35	30.55%
Norway	229.83	0.13	63.55%
Azerbaijan	223.17	3.56	30.35%
Austria	222.16	0.62	58.68%
Bulgaria	218.74	10.61	18.01%
Croatia	212.10	2.52	40.49%
Bosnia And Herzegovina	210.07	6.96	N/A
Greece	207.30	4.00	56.48%
Latvia	206.30	1.91	42.40%
Kazakhstan	198.74	4.57	31.09%
Belarus	190.04	1.24	N/A
Armenia	186.84	4.52	4.06% *
San Marino	180.62	0.00	71.53%
Cyprus	176.80	2.57	60.51%
Moldova	173.00	3.23	18.24%
Belgium	168.56	0.64	71.74%
Monaco	148.21	0.00	N/A
France	145.16	1.44	63.26%
Netherlands	141.63	0.36	63.46% *
Luxembourg	124.45	0.45	N/A
Germany	124.00	0.47	61.74%
Russia	122.81	5.25	27.30%
Portugal	117.06	0.79	81.10%
Romania	116.58	2.40	27.26%
Sweden	105.34	0.15	N/A
Iceland	89.87	0.00	N/A
Spain	86.04	1.42	75.56%
Finland	86.02	0.21	56.72% *
Italy	81.45	0.92	64.24%
Denmark	79.99	0.54	74.09%
Malta	78.01	1.11	80.95%
Ukraine	71.90	1.57	11.24%
Slovakia	67.05	0.23	40.51%
Andorra	49.86	0.00	N/A
Czech Republic	34.87	0.11	54.58%
Hungary	28.43	0.41	57.60%
Uzbekistan	18.43	0.16	N/A
Kyrgyzstan	13.88	0.43	8.00%
Poland	12.29	0.17	50.55% *
Tajikistan	1.47	0.00	13.1%

*data available at the latest on 12.09.2021

United Kingdom: The number of people who tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 7 days (8 to 14 September) dropped by 14.3%, whereas the number of deaths during the same period rose by 1.6% (8). Since the beginning of vaccine rollout in the UK, 89.1% have had a single dose of vaccine and 81% received two doses. **The joint committee on vaccination and immunization is proposing a third vaccine dose starting in September with Pfizer/BioNTech for phase 1 vaccine recipients** as the vaccine provides fair booster effectiveness (and the choices would be a half dose of Moderna; if contraindicated, Oxford or AstraZeneca is an option). The goal of the booster vaccination program is to extend the protection offered by the vaccine as well as to bring down the severity of illness during autumn (9) (10). In England and Scotland, a **school-based vaccination program is planned for children of age group 12 to 15 and one dose of Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine will be offered**. Before vaccine administration, the health care staff will obtain consent from the parent/guardian/carer (11) (12).

Switzerland: The number of newly reported COVID-19 cases and the hospital occupancy rate has been rising in Switzerland. The incidence is high among unvaccinated 10-29 year olds. To reduce the burden on hospitals the government has imposed stricter rules such as **mandatory Covid certificates to enter restaurants, bars, fitness centres, cultural facilities and all indoor events. The ruling will be in force until January 24, 2022.** The face mask rule has been abolished for participants attending the above-said venues. The Covid certificate requirement may also be introduced at Universities. In such instances, there will not be any limit on the capacity of the classroom and face mask is not necessary. **From 1st October, free tests to obtain a Covid certificate are no longer available.** By September 14, nearly 53% of people in Switzerland were fully vaccinated with two jabs (13) (14).

Lithuania: The rolling 7-day average of daily newly confirmed COVID-19 cases in Lithuania is 317.44/mill people, which was 255.67 the previous week. By 13th September, 58.48% of the population in Lithuania are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (15). **Currently, Poland and Czechia are the only regions under Lithuania's green list** (16). Recently, the **testing rules for students have been changed**. Students of higher education and vocational training should undergo a test every 7 to 10 days instead of 48 hours and the rule will continue until mid-October. Also, it is possible to get a National Certificate after a rapid antigen test. From 13th September, it is **no longer necessary to hold a National Certificate for students to utilize public transport** to reach school. This applies to students above 16 years of age (17).

Israel: **The government has revised regulations for the event of Yom Kippur that are valid until the end of September.** Rapid tests are made available at designated areas and will operate for two days - 15 and 16 September. The Green Pass Scheme is kept on hold for outdoor swimming pools, worship places under Purple Badge Scheme also Green Pass Barcode scanning will be omitted by the worship personnel (18). The results of the Long-Covid survey among children (3 to 18 years) in Israel revealed that the likelihood of long-term symptoms is associated with increasing age. The proportion of participants who suffered from long-term symptoms among age 12 to 18 years (4.6%) is higher than the participants of age group 3 to 6 years (1.8%). The study also found a correlation between symptomatic illness and the possibility of experiencing long-term symptoms (19).

Slovenia: Between 13 and 14 September, Slovenia recorded 1364 new COVID-19 cases, 347 hospitalizations, and 6 deaths. The 7-day rolling average number of new cases continues to show exponential growth (20). The share of persons over 18 who have received the first dose of vaccine is 58%, which is 49% of the whole population. The share of persons over 18 who have received a full vaccine course is 53%, which is 44% of the whole population. On 15 September, **a new RVT (Recovered - Vaccinated - Tested) rule ordinance entered into force, which requires that the RVT rule must be met by all persons** who are service users or are involved in or present in providing services. The revised definition of the RVT rules brings Slovenia in line with most other European Union Member States (21).

Croatia: Between 13 and 14 September, Croatia recorded 1835 new COVID-19 cases and 603 new hospitalizations (22). The 7-day rolling average number of new cases continues to increase (23). **The share of persons over 18 who have received the first dose of vaccine is 52%, which is 43% of the whole population.** The share of persons over 18 who have received a full vaccine course is 49%, which is 40% of the whole population. Between 1 and 15 September, a new decision on necessary epidemiological measures

was in force which – among other measures – prohibits events and gatherings attended by more than 100 people in one place, unless the event is attended only by persons with EU digital COVID certificate (24) (25).

Bulgaria:

Between 13 and 14 September, Bulgaria recorded 2029 new cases and 83 deaths (26). In the last 14 day period (1 September to 14 September), **the relative share of patients admitted for hospital treatment with completed vaccination course is 7.2% of all hospitalized with COVID-19, and 0.3% admitted for intensive treatment** (27). The proportion of the population who have received a full vaccine course is 18% (28). As of 7 September, anti-epidemic measures are in force, which – among other measures – prohibit most gatherings of more than 30 people indoors or 60 people outdoors and encourage remote work. Face-to-face education is allowed, subject to distancing measures for up to 10 people in a room (29).

Romania:

Between 14 and 15 September, Bulgaria recorded 4004 new cases and 83 deaths (30) The proportion of the population who have received a full vaccine course is 27% (31) On 5 September, the government extended the state of alert to combat the spread of COVID-19, which permits most businesses and services to operate subject to social distancing and capacity restrictions, and extends the facemask mandate indoors and in crowded outdoor areas such as fairs, markets, or public transport stations and all indoor public spaces. As of 13 September, **the government will implement a pilot project attempting to detect persons infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus with the support of specially trained canine teams on arrival at the Sibiu and Cluj international airports** (32).

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 13th September 2021:

Mediterranean Region:

Figure 1:

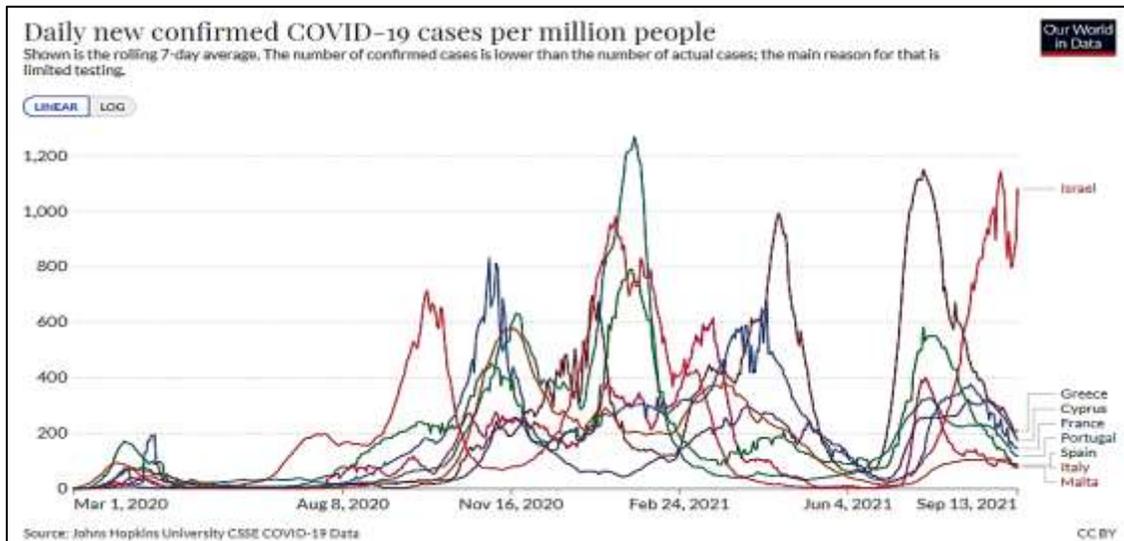
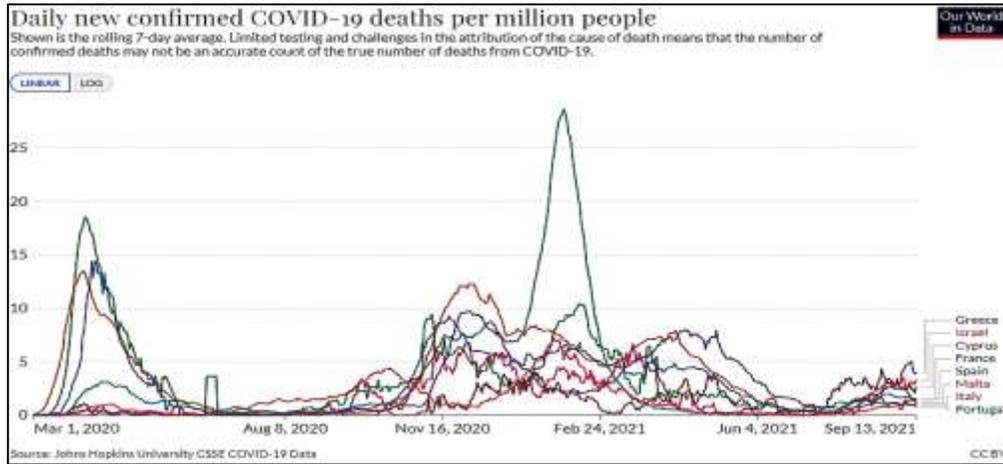


Figure 2:



South-East region:

Figure 3:

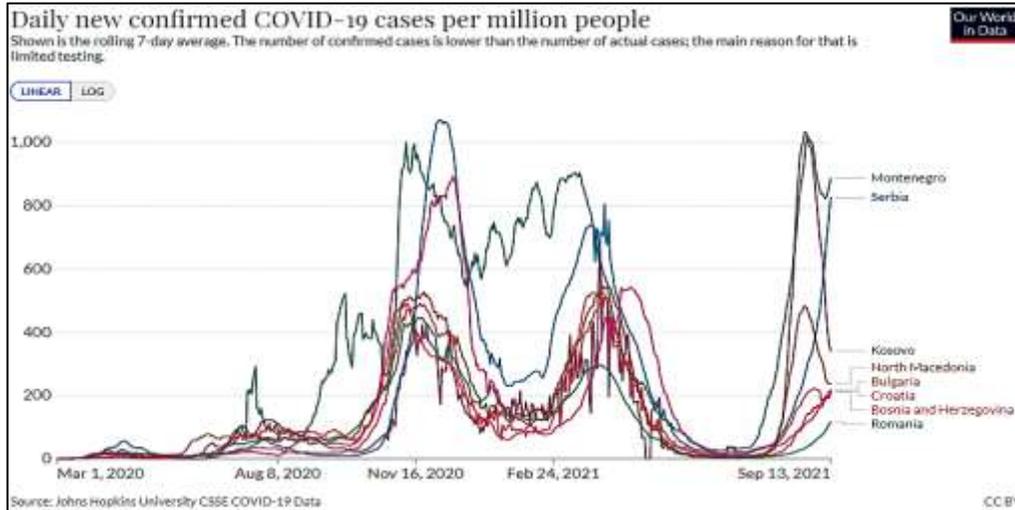
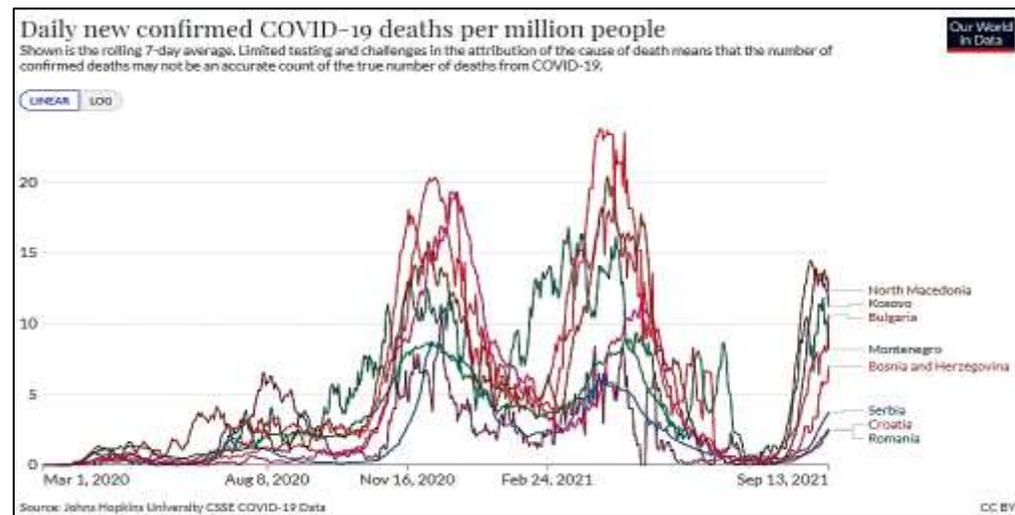


Figure 4:



Central Europe
Figure 5:

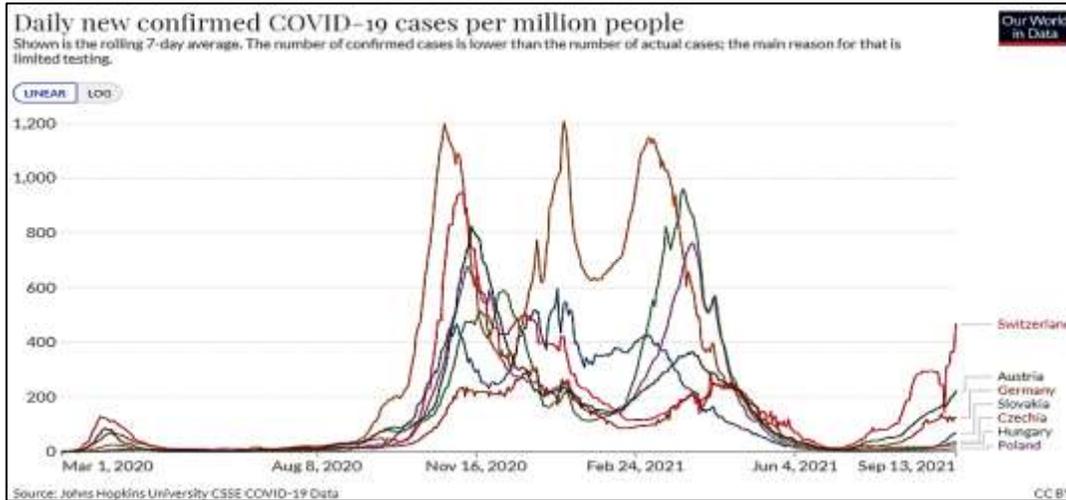
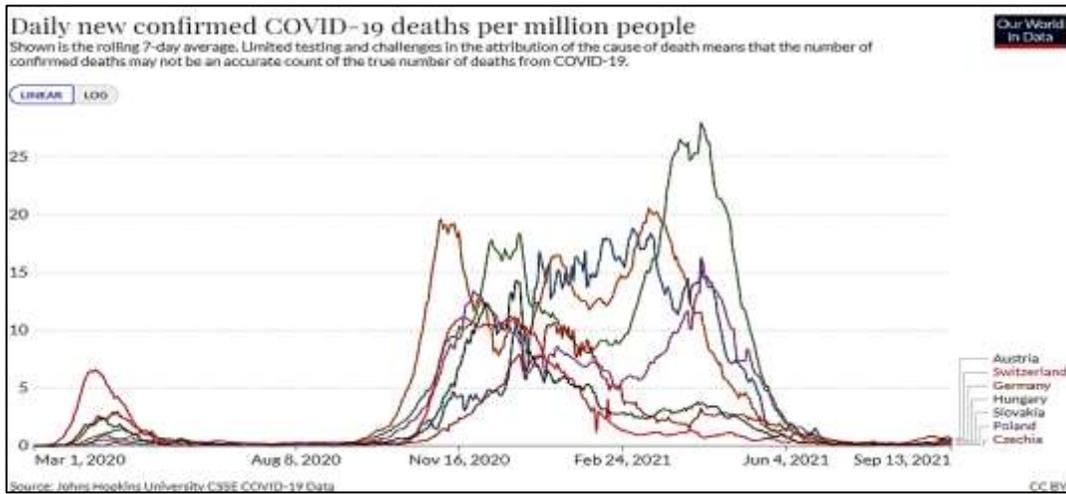


Figure 6:



Baltics and Nordic Countries:
Figure 7:

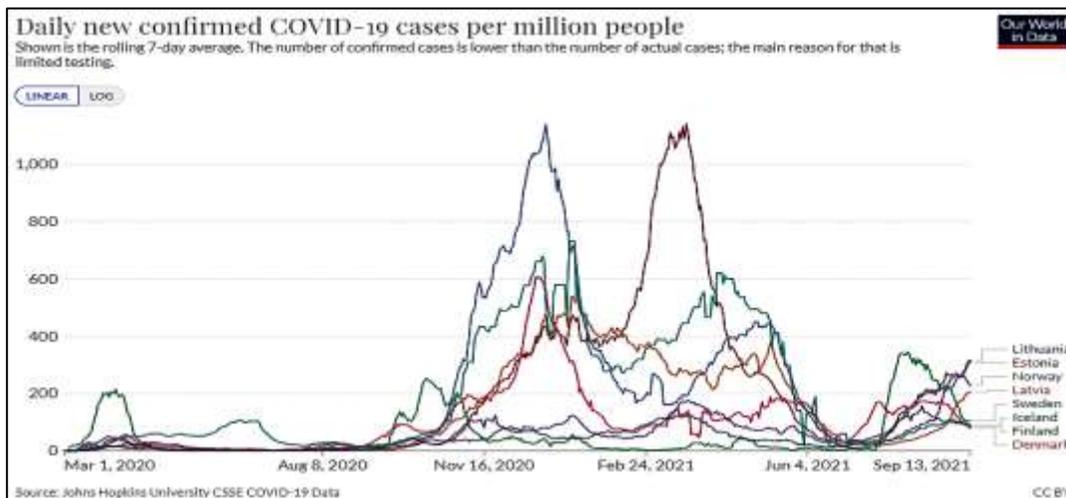
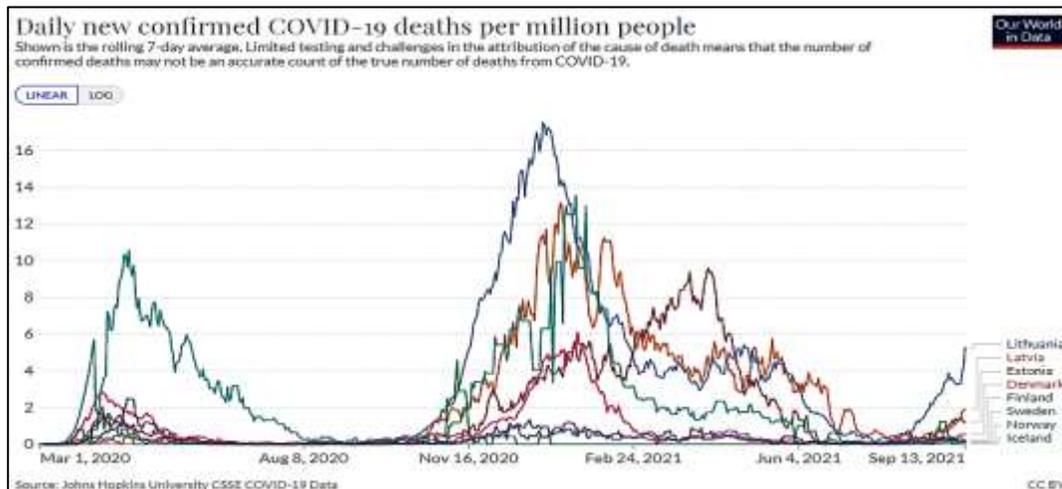


Figure 8:



North-western Europe:

Figure 9:

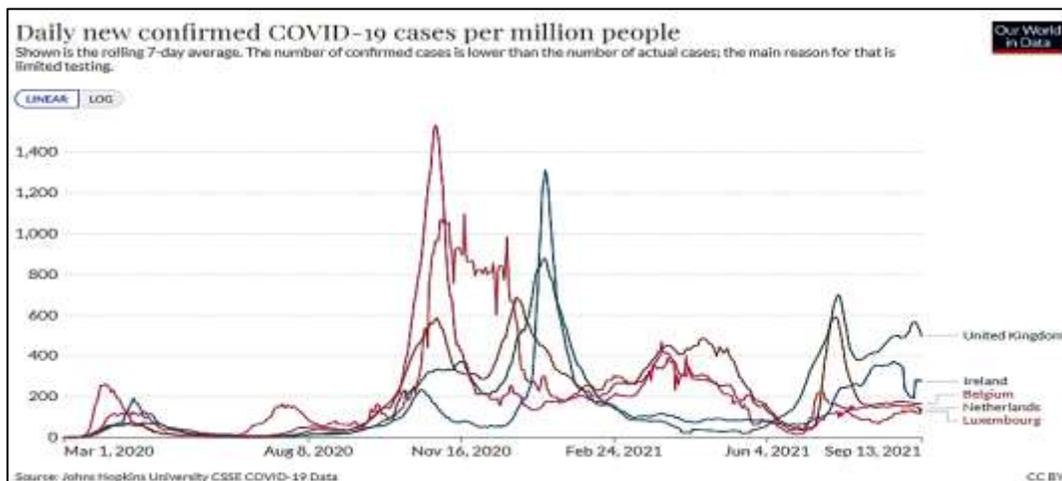
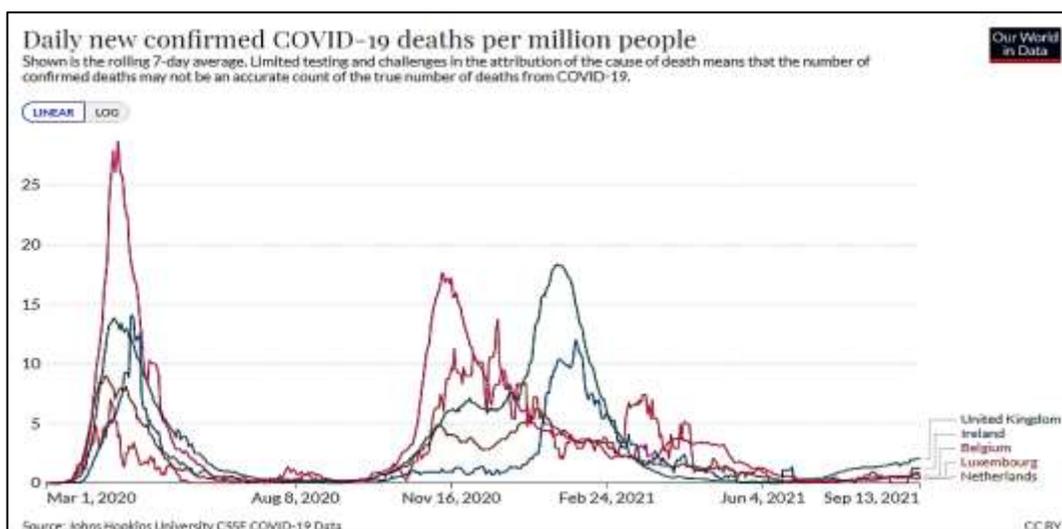


Figure 10:



Central Asia:
Figure 11:

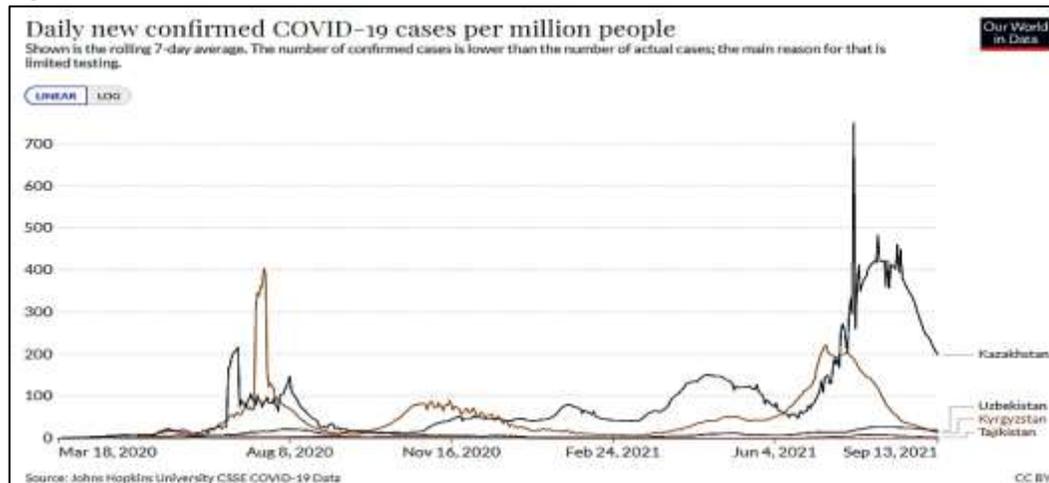
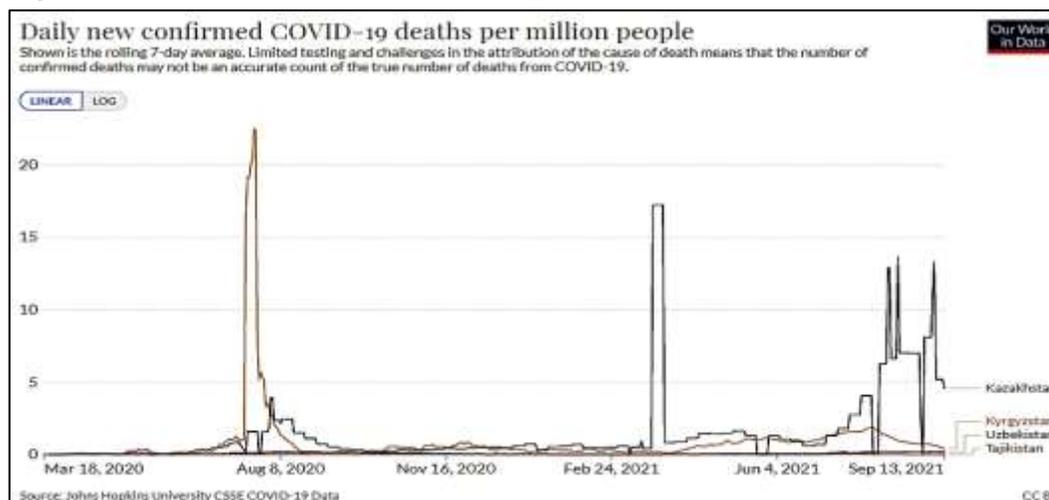


Figure 12:



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