

# ASPHER Report

## COVID-19 Situation Reporting across Europe

### Week of May 17<sup>th</sup> 2021

**Authors:** Pallavi Chatarajupalli<sup>1,2</sup>, Petra Andelic<sup>2,3</sup>, Ralf Reintjes<sup>1,4</sup>, John Middleton<sup>4,5,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HAW Hamburg University, Germany

<sup>2</sup> ASPHER Young Professional

<sup>3</sup> Maastricht University, the Netherlands.

<sup>4</sup> ASPHER COVID-19 Task Force

<sup>5</sup> ASPHER President

\* Corresponding Author: [john.middleton@aspher.org](mailto: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?*

ASPHER celebrates the extraordinary and dramatic falls of deaths from COVID-19 in Israel, Spain, UK and urges all countries to address their internal problems with vaccination programmes and get these sorted.

We are concerned about the [disastrous explosion of the pandemic in India](#). We call on the international community to respond to needs identified by the public health authorities in India and offer every feasible support. The situation in India presents 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.

ASPHER is concerned about the recognition of an increasing number of new variants of the SARS-COV2 virus. We believe there should be increasing 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: <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/01/28/we-need-an-equitable-and-coordinated-global-approach-to-covid-19-vaccination/>)

*The data on the transmission of variants is very limited and the criteria for sequencing of samples tested across countries is not yet standardized.*

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). 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, some countries have significantly reduced the number of deaths and the infection rate (UK, Spain, Israel, Portugal). A few countries in individual European sub-regions have started easing lockdown restrictions (UK, Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Israel, Portugal, France, Denmark, Belgium). However, some countries are still experiencing a mounting infection rate, which is a major concern (Turkey, France, Germany).

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 over three million lives to date (3,398,302) and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases has surpassed 0.1 billion (163,869,893). Individual WHO regions confirmed COVID-19 cases are as follows (2).

Table 1

| WHO Region            | Confirmed COVID-19 cases |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Americas              | 65,178,846               |
| Europe                | 53,793,992               |
| South-East Asia       | 28,960,338               |
| Eastern Mediterranean | 9,737,714                |
| Africa                | 3,418,397                |
| Western-Pacific       | 2,779,846                |

As per the WHO weekly epidemiological report, the European Region is contributing 33% of cumulative COVID-19 confirmed cases worldwide. The number of **new cases and deaths in the past 7 days has reduced by 26% and 16% respectively compared to the previous week**. In France, Turkey and Germany a high incidence of coronavirus is reported at 143.8, 107.6, 87.9 per 100,000 population respectively in two consecutive weeks (3). IHME analysis shows the declining trend in infection and death rate will continue for the next two months as a result of rising vaccination rate, and continued non-pharmacological interventions. In the regions with low levels of vaccine confidence (East Europe), the risk of transmission will be high favouring the transmission of escape variants and suggesting the need to incorporate strategies to improve vaccination rate and mask usage (4).

Vaccination plays an important role to control the pandemic, protecting against death and serious disease. There is further work ongoing to determine its effectiveness in preventing disease transmission. Research regarding the effectiveness of the vaccines is still open-ended (5). Globally a total of 1,264,164,553 vaccine doses have been administered against coronavirus by 12<sup>th</sup> May (6). The distribution of vaccine is unequal among countries and regions. **The share of the population who received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine is 30.56% in high-income countries and is 0.36% in low-income countries (Figure 11)** (7). Although differences exist within the countries, accessibility and vaccine hesitancy are also important factors to be looked into affecting the vaccination process. A recent online survey (first round between February and March 2021) among 27 EU member states revealed that **27% of people in Europe are showing unwillingness to receive the vaccine**. Especially, age groups between 18-34 years are sceptical to take up vaccine because of the reason that vaccine may cause unhealthy consequences. Comparatively women (25%) are less reluctant than men (29%) to accept the vaccine. The amount of time spent on social media, taking into account as the main source of information is strongly associated with vaccine hesitancy. **The study also found that the inclination to receive the vaccine is higher in Northwest Europe and Scandinavian countries and the contrast is seen in South-East Europe**. In Malta, Denmark and Ireland the proportion of people likely to get vaccinated are above 70 at 72.9%,73.5%,76.6% respectively and the willingness is above 60% in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Finland. **Bulgarians are found to be more reluctant with 48% mentioning that very unlikely to get vaccinated** (8) (9).

The following table shows daily new confirmed coronavirus cases, deaths, an estimate of the effective reproduction rate (R), the share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19 across European countries as reported on 17/05/2021 (table 2) (10).

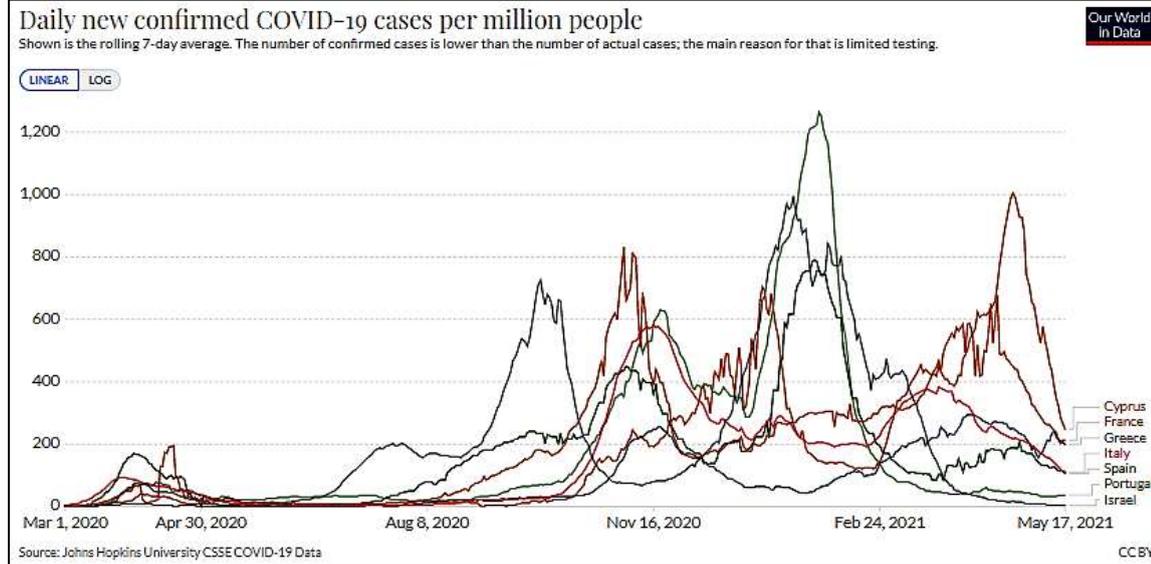
Table 2

| WHO Europe region      | Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases/mill people rolling 7-day average | Daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths/mill people rolling 7-day average | Effective reproduction number estimate (R) | Share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19 |
|------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Sweden                 | 414.94   | 1.44  | 0.96                                       | N/A   |
| Lithuania              | 390.43   | 3.52  | 0.92                                       | 16.6%   |
| Georgia                | 301.21   | 5.87  | <b>1.00</b>                                | 0.4%  |
| Netherlands            | 293.93   | 1.02  | 0.77                                       | N/A   |
| Latvia                 | 289.62   | 4.24  | 0.98                                       | 6.7%  |
| Cyprus                 | 248.40   | 1.63  | 0.60                                       | 13.1%   |
| Andorra                | 232.96   | 0.00  | 0.91                                       | 6.1%  |
| Slovenia               | 219.41   | 1.92  | 0.84                                       | 14.3%   |
| France                 | 213.08   | 2.38  | 0.82                                       | 13.5%   |
| Estonia                | 201.98   | 2.05  | 0.83                                       | 13.5%   |
| Croatia                | 200.41   | 8.18  | 0.69                                       | 7.7%  |
| Greece                 | 199.84   | 5.24  | 0.98                                       | 15.6%   |
| Belgium                | 185.13   | 1.73  | 0.82                                       | 12.3%   |
| Denmark                | 181.35   | 0.15  | <b>1.09</b>                                | 18.5%   |
| Luxembourg             | 173.22   | 0.91  | 0.88                                       | 13.8%   |
| Turkey                 | 139.93   | 2.83  | 0.63                                       | 13.0%   |
| Switzerland            | 129.81   | 0.48  | 0.86                                       | 14.8%   |
| Kazakhstan             | 122.11   | 0.21  | 0.98                                       | 4.0%  |
| Montenegro             | 121.23   | 4.09  | 0.77                                       | 5.4%  |
| Serbia                 | 119.81   | 2.52  | 0.67                                       | 26.1%   |
| Germany                | 119.55   | 2.16  | 0.75                                       | 11.4%   |
| Belarus                | 117.39   | 1.04  | 1.11                                       | N/A   |
| Ukraine                | 112.83   | 5.60  | 0.87                                       | <0.1%   |
| Italy                  | 109.37   | 2.99  | 0.72                                       | 14.7%   |
| Spain                  | 105.31   | 1.64  | 0.86                                       | 15.7%   |
| Czech Republic         | 102.06   | 2.69  | 0.72                                       | 10.4%   |
| Hungary                | 91.49  | 7.69  | 0.64                                       | 28.5%   |
| Austria                | 90.95  | 1.40  | 0.65                                       | 12.3%   |
| Poland                 | 75.90  | 6.19  | 0.61                                       | 12.3%   |
| Armenia                | 75.88  | 4.05  | 0.70                                       | N/A   |
| Bulgaria               | 73.79  | 6.13  | 0.69                                       | 6.1%  |
| Norway                 | 65.30  | 0.18  | 0.81                                       | 10.9%   |
| Russia                 | 58.71  | 2.47  | <b>1.03</b>                                | 6.7%  |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 55.43  | 8.23  | 0.64                                       | N/A   |
| Kosovo                 | 55.21  | 1.77  | 0.46                                       | N/A   |
| Slovakia               | 49.01  | 4.89  | 0.76                                       | 12.5%   |
| Ireland                | 48.63  | 0.58  | 0.42                                       | 29.9%   |
| Monaco                 | 47.32  | 0.00  | 0.60                                       | N/A   |
| North Macedonia        | 46.22  | 8.30  | 0.53                                       | N/A   |
| Kyrgyzstan             | 45.50  | 1.12  | <b>1.02</b>                                | N/A   |
| Azerbaijan             | 44.83  | 1.32  | 0.70                                       | N/A   |
| Romania                | 41.29  | 3.99  | 0.66                                       | N/A   |
| Moldova                | 40.94  | 2.69  | 0.78                                       | 0.8%  |
| Portugal               | 37.00  | 0.22  | <b>1.05</b>                                | 13.8%   |
| Finland                | 35.66  | 0.28  | 0.94                                       | 5.3%  |
| United Kingdom         | 32.88  | 0.16  | 0.97                                       | 30.3%   |
| San Marino             | 16.84  | 0.00  | 0.40                                       | 52.3%   |
| Albania                | 13.85  | 0.94  | 0.63                                       | 7.8%  |
| Iceland                | 12.14  | 0.00  | 0.78                                       | N/A   |
| Uzbekistan             | 9.11   | 0.03  | 0.92                                       | N/A   |
| Malta                  | 8.41   | 0.00  | 0.31                                       | 33.4%   |
| Israel                 | 3.33   | 0.18  | 0.53                                       | 58.9%   |
| Tajikistan             | 0.00   | 0.00  | 0.00                                       | N/A   |

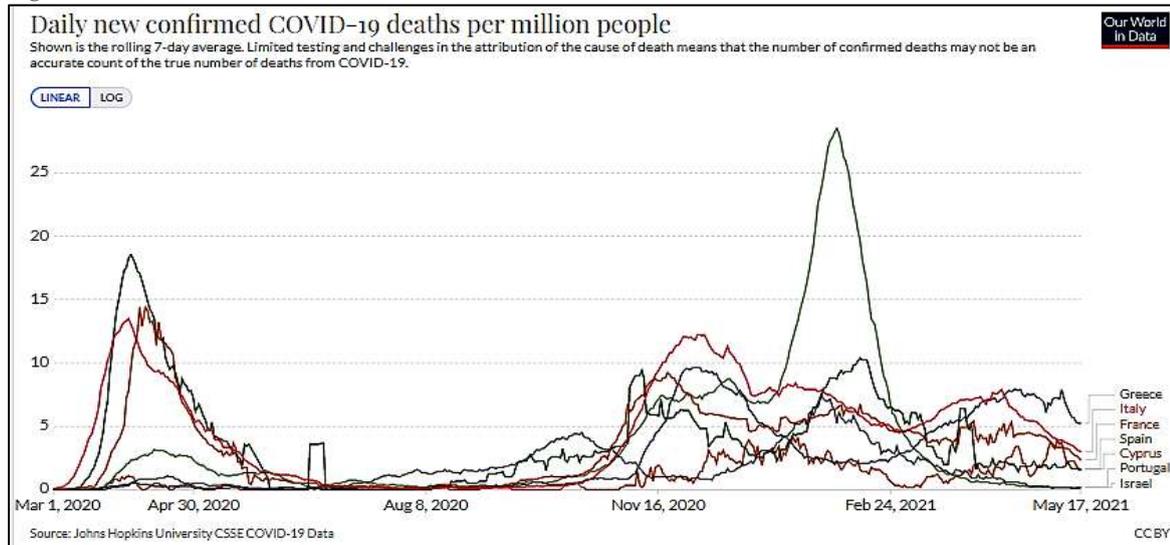
- **In Greece-** The 7-day moving average of daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths are 194.49 and 5.39 per million population as of 18<sup>th</sup> May (11). The country is moving towards easing restrictions. On 17<sup>th</sup> May, nursery schools are reopened. Vocational schools of apprenticeship and laboratory courses that demand physical attendance can continue operating with mandatory self-test once a week on Mondays before attending the classes (12). **The self-test once a week is also a compulsory requirement for those employed in the private sector** in the domain of Joint Ministerial Decisions such as catering, salons, hairdressers, education providers, etc (13). Nearly 3 million people in Greece have received the vaccine against COVID-19. **Hesitancy towards vaccination is resulting in the slow vaccine drive in Greece.** In particular, above 80 years age group and health care workers, the vaccination rate is 64.1% and 65.1% which is below the EU median 77.6% and 79.7% respectively according to ECDC (14). **The government has announced the expansion of vaccine centres by converting the polyclinics, private clinics and diagnostic centres for June (15).**
- **In Latvia-** Infection rates are slowly decreasing by 6.2% in the past two weeks. The daily average of new cases detected was 574 during the past week. **The reproduction number also decreased from 1.05 to 0.88. However, people hospitalized have increased by 2.2% this week.** The Ministry of Health of Latvia is **considering providing vaccinated people with several benefits**, including more freedom to gather, attend events and do sports. This will happen from the 1st of June (16). Also, people who are fully vaccinated are exempted from maintaining two meters distance and wearing a protective mask while at the workplace and indoor meetings for not more than 20 people with a mandatory vaccine certificate or proof of recovery from COVID-19 (17).
- **In Bulgaria-** Between 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> May, 457 and 36 new COVID-19 case and fatalities were reported respectively (677 new cases and 84 fatalities reported the previous day) (18). The National Center of Infectious and Parasitic Diseases, Bulgaria is closely monitoring the spread of variants which revealed that the **new generation cello genomic sequencing of samples tested during the second week of May isolated the presence of the British variant (19). Eight out of 28 districts in Bulgaria are in COVID-19 ‘orange zones’ (25 districts were in COVID-19 ‘red zones’ the previous week) (20).** As of 18<sup>th</sup> May, 17.5% of the population of age group above 60 years have received at least one dose of vaccine and 10.5% are fully vaccinated (21). **Intending to encourage vaccination among minority groups and far reachable areas, the ministry of health in collaboration with the European Commission in Bulgaria has initiated vaccine campaigns by delivering information with the help of health mediators using information materials (22).**
- **In the United Kingdom-** The Indian coronavirus variant is spreading further in the UK, with 86 local authorities reporting 5 or more confirmed cases. **In total there are 2,323 confirmed cases and it accounts for almost 30% of the sequenced samples in the UK.** To control the spread of this variant, second doses of vaccines are accelerated for the age group above 50 years and vulnerable population. Also, the capacity of the testing units and vaccine centres is expanded in the regions with a high surge in the variant detected in India, special PCR testing method is developed for quick detection of the variant (within 24hours) (23).
- **In the Netherlands-** Between 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> May, the number of people newly tested positive for COVID-19 reduced by 25%. **The positive cases decreased from 270.2 / 100.000 (10<sup>th</sup> of May) to 204 / 100.000 (18<sup>th</sup> of May). The number of hospital and ICU admissions dropped by 21% and 24% respectively compared to the week before (24).** Because of this declining trend, the government decided to **enforce step 2 of the opening plan on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May.** It entails the reopening of the fitness with a capacity of 30 people, libraries, theme parks and zoos (25).
- **In Sweden-** The country is leading among WHO European countries with high daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases rolling 7-day average at 414.94/million people. However, **the death rate is low compared to other regions (Table 2).** The weekly epidemiological data (10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> May) suggests the number of **new infections and hospitalizations are showing a declining trend** same as the week before. Variations were noticed in the incidence among age groups this week. Between 10-19 years and 40-49 years, a high incidence was reported (26). **Vaccine rollout in Sweden is in phase 4** in almost all the regions prioritizing age group below 65 years (27). By 20<sup>th</sup> May, 41.2% of the population in Sweden have been vaccinated with the first dose and 12.9% with the second dose (28).

**Mediterranean Region:**

**Figure 1**

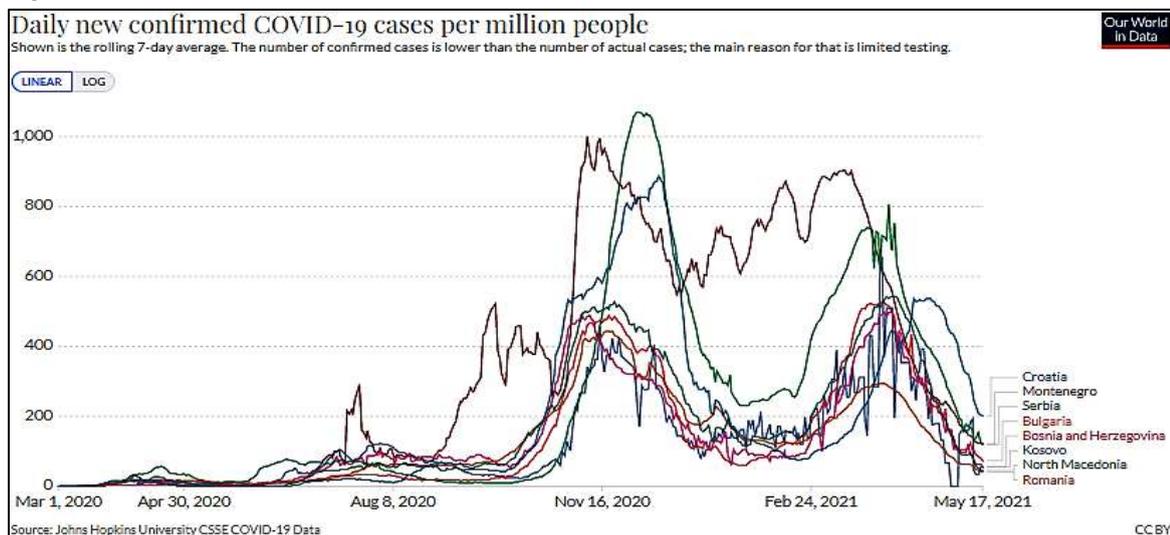


**Figure 2**

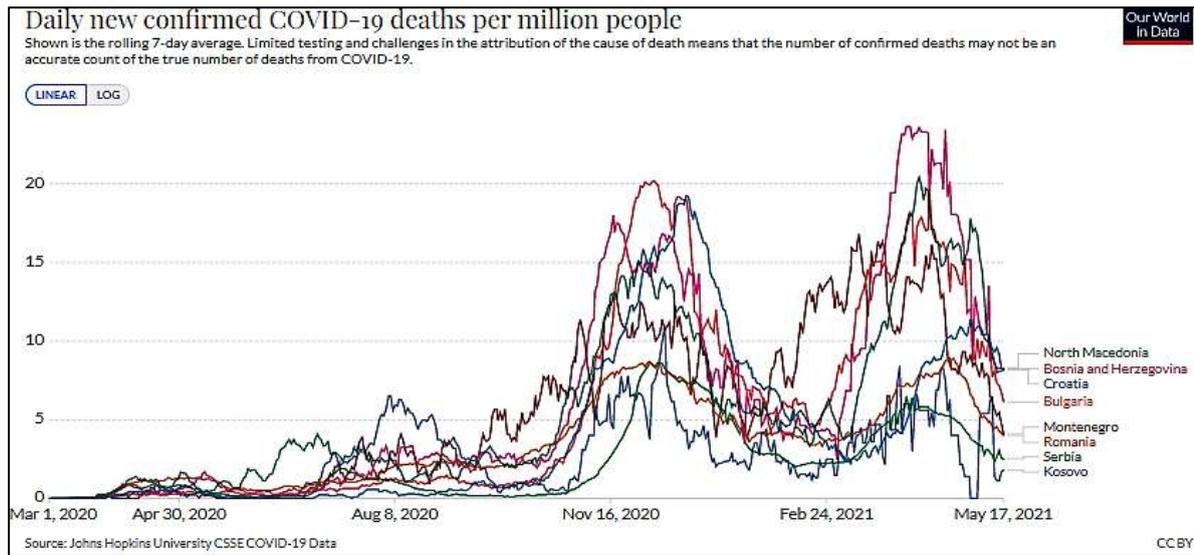


**South-East Europe Region:**

**Figure 3**

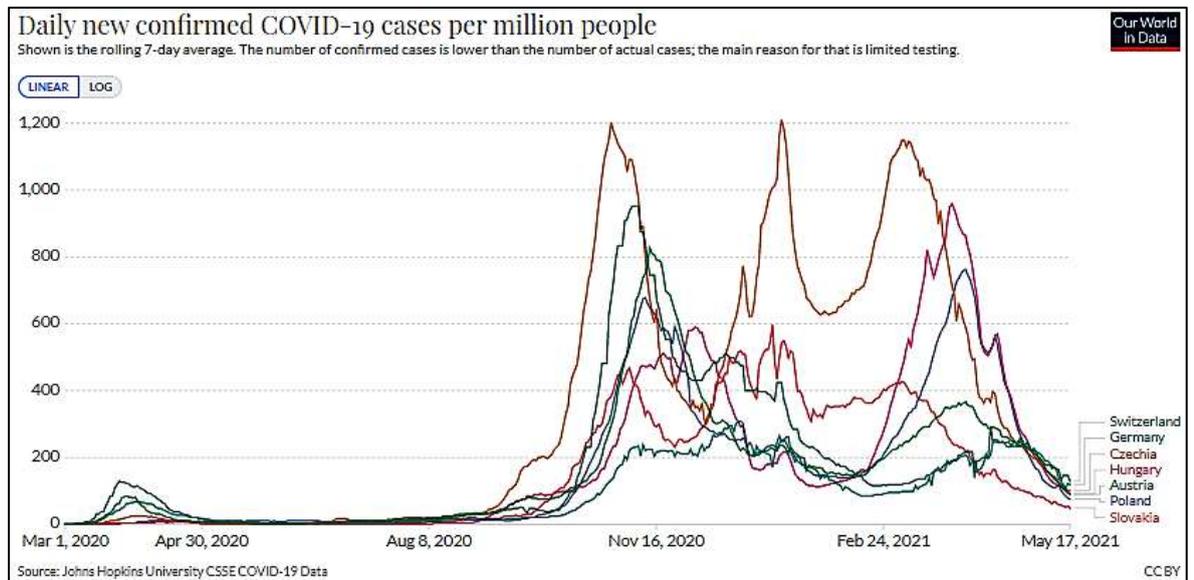


**Figure 4**

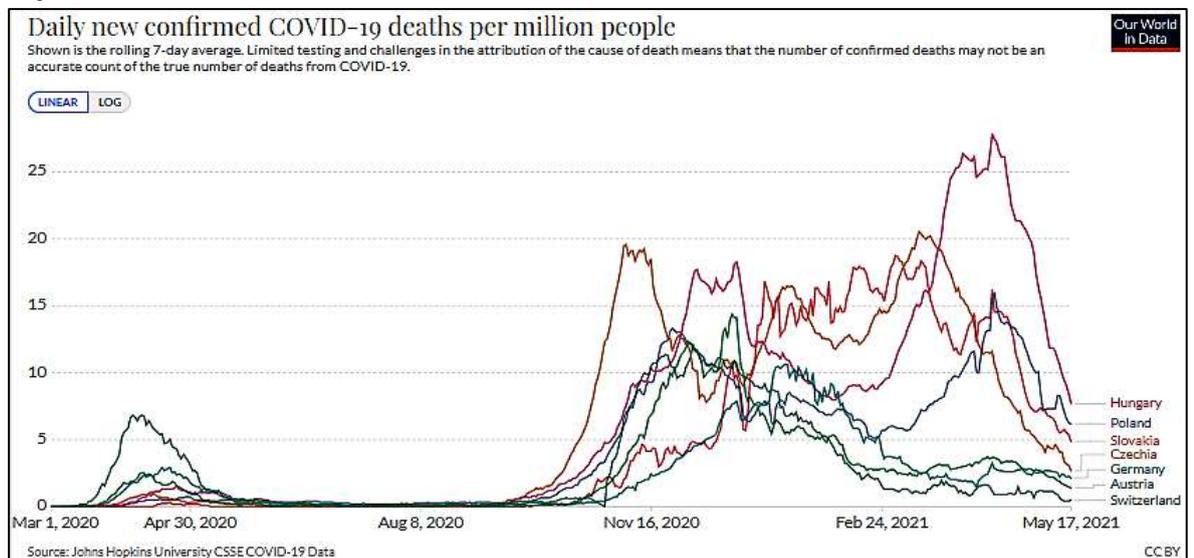


**Central Europe:**

**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**



**Baltics and Nordic countries:**

Figure 7

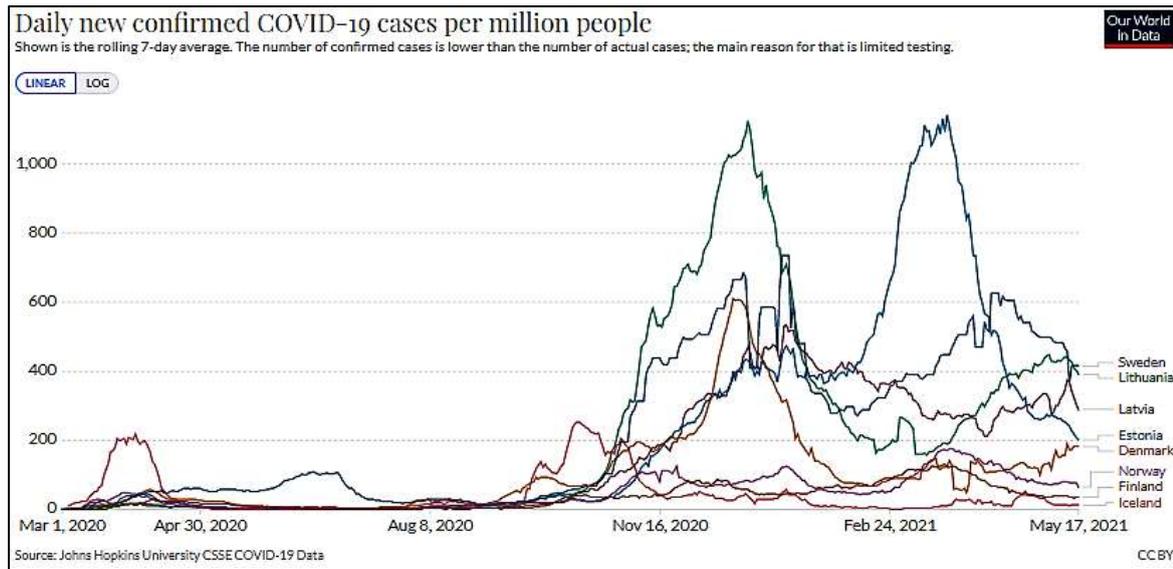
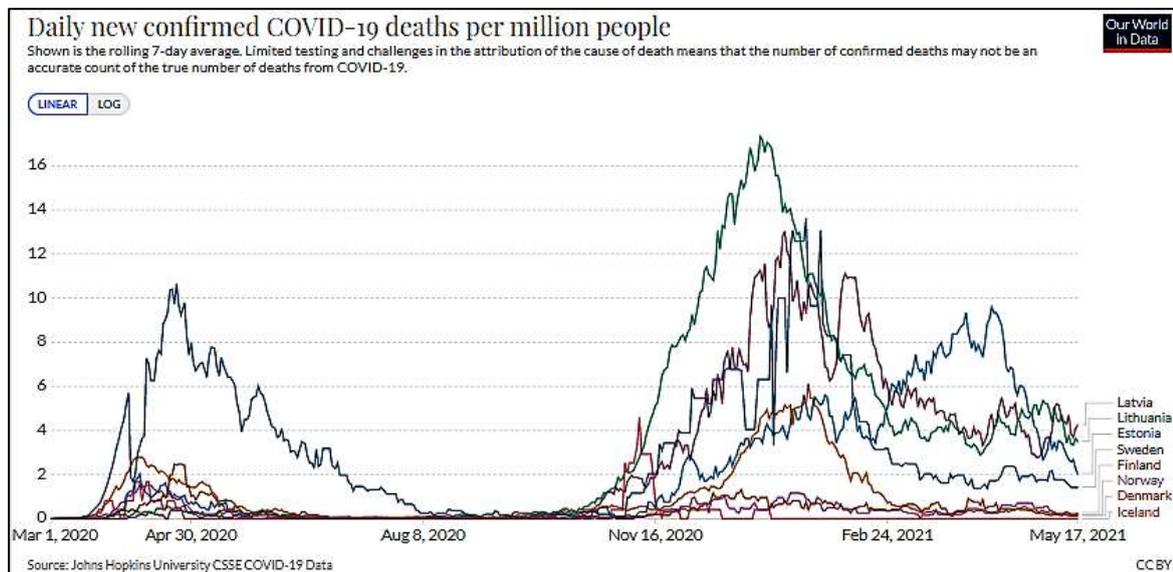


Figure 8



**Northwestern Europe:**

Figure 9

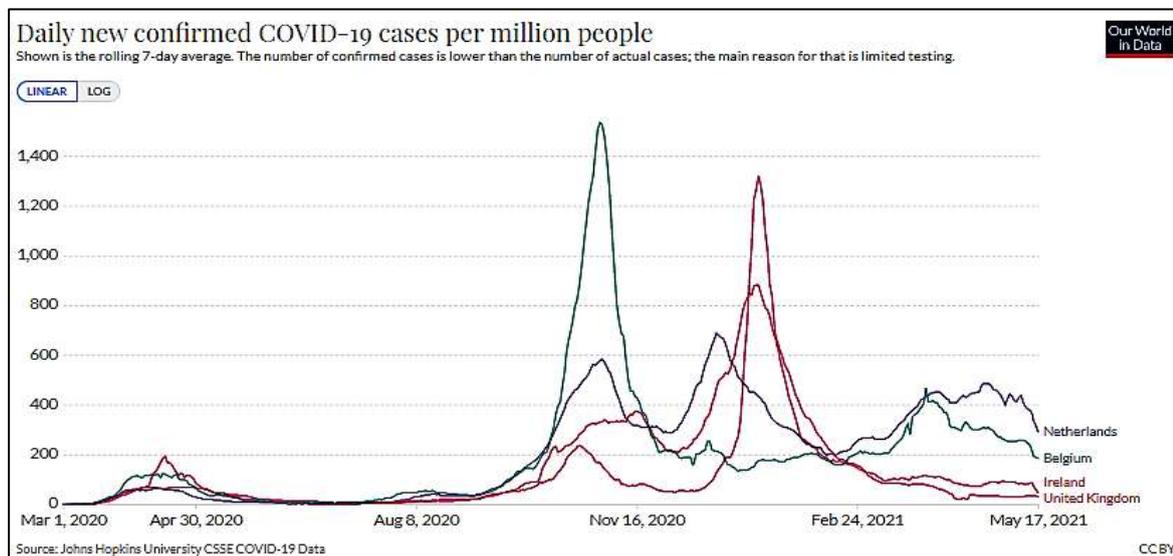


Figure 10

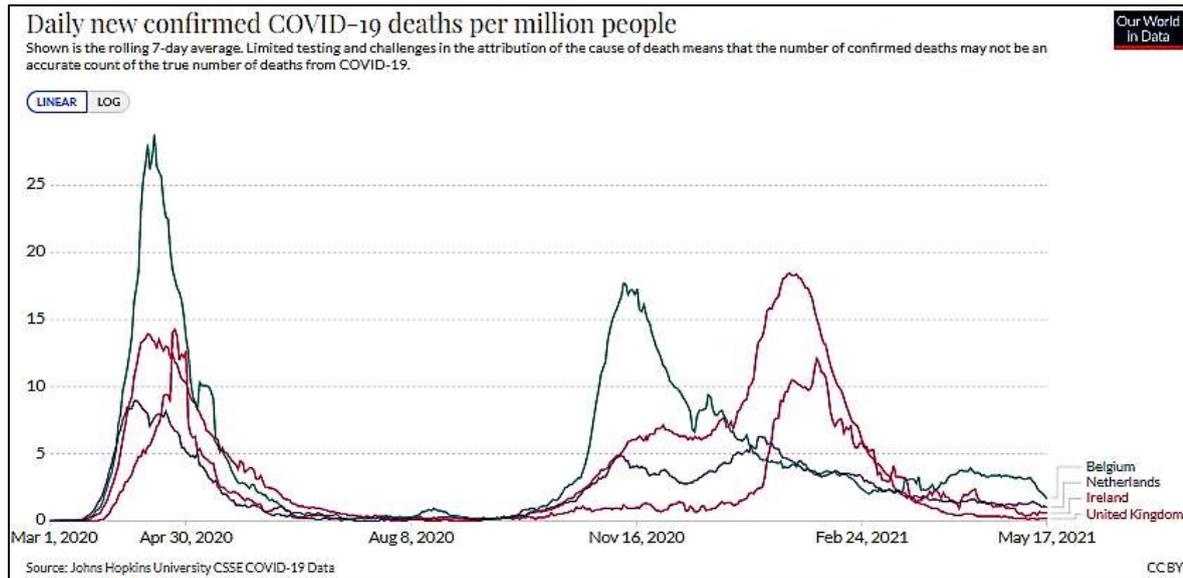
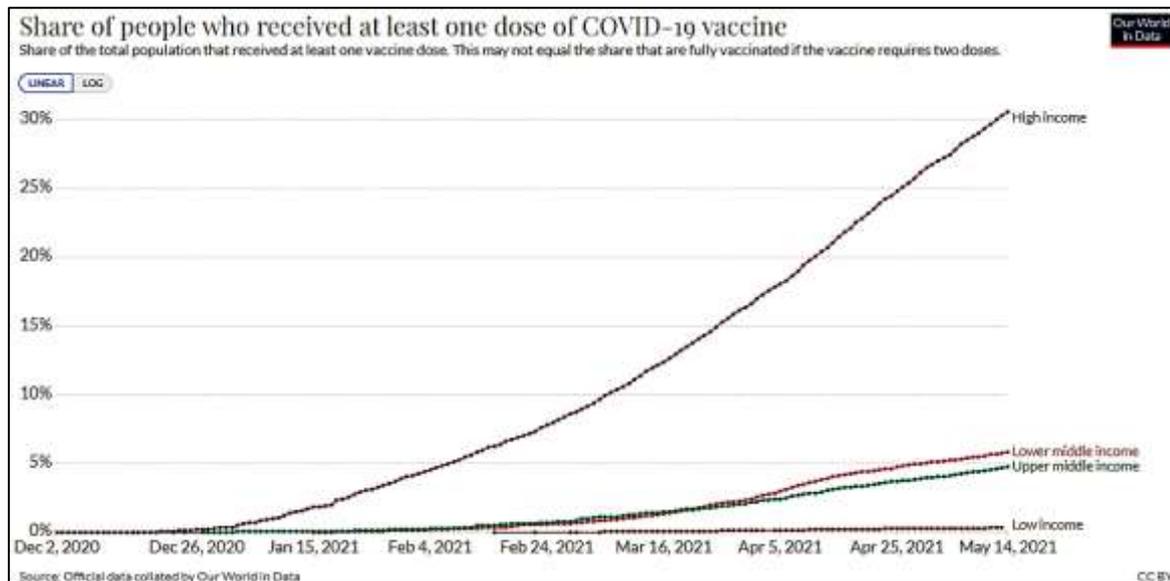


Figure 11



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