



COVID-19: WHO European Region Operational Update

Epi Weeks 41–42 (5–18 October 2020)

Current global situation:

As of 18 October, over 40 million cases and 1.1 million deaths have been reported globally, with over 2.4 million new cases and 36 000 new deaths reported over the past week. Increasing trends continue to be seen in Europe, which now contributes 38% of all new cases and 23% of known deaths reported worldwide. A more gradual increase is observed in the African, Eastern Mediterranean and Western Pacific regions. Declines continue to be reported in the Americas and South-East Asia; however, the incidence of new infections remains high, and collectively these two regions contribute over half of the new cases and deaths observed globally.

Please refer to the [WHO Weekly Epidemiological Updates](#) for further information.

Current situation in the Region:

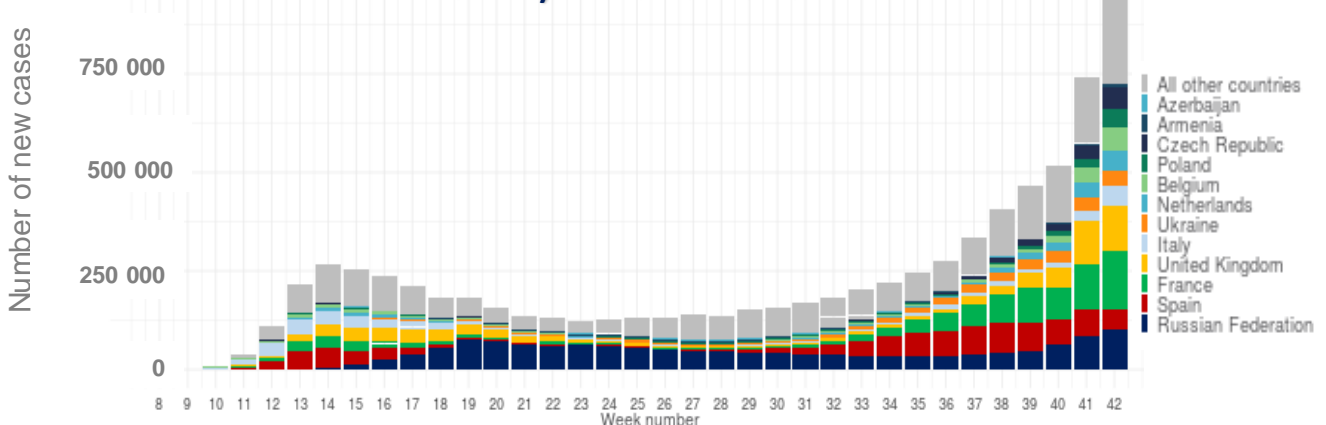
At the end of week 42, over 8 million cases of COVID-19 and more than 250 000 known COVID-19 deaths have been recorded in the European Region. A rapid increase in both cases and deaths continue to be reported, with over 927 000 new cases reported in week 42 – a 25% weekly increase in cases compared to week 41. The Region is currently reporting over three times more cases per day compared to the first peak in April, with hospital admissions rising, although the number of daily deaths remains five times lower than in April.

Week 42 EPI Snapshot*

- **73%** of cases were reported from 9 countries: France, the United Kingdom, Russian Federation, Spain, Belgium, Czech Republic, Italy, Netherlands and Poland.
- **88%** of deaths were in people aged >65 years and 56% of all deaths were in males.
- **96%** of deaths were in people with at least one underlying condition, with cardiovascular disease as the leading comorbidity (83%).

**based on total records with available data*

Number of COVID-19 cases reported by Epi-Week in the WHO European Region, 16 February 2020 to 18 October 2020



Please refer to the [WHO European Region Dashboard](#) and the [WHO European Region Surveillance Bulletin](#) for further information.

Emergency public health measures taken across the Region:

In the European Region, as incidence of COVID-19 continues to rise, regional and national tightening of public health and social distancing measures are being triggered in a growing number of countries. These include mandatory mask-use policies, school closures and restrictions on gatherings, international travel and the operation of businesses.

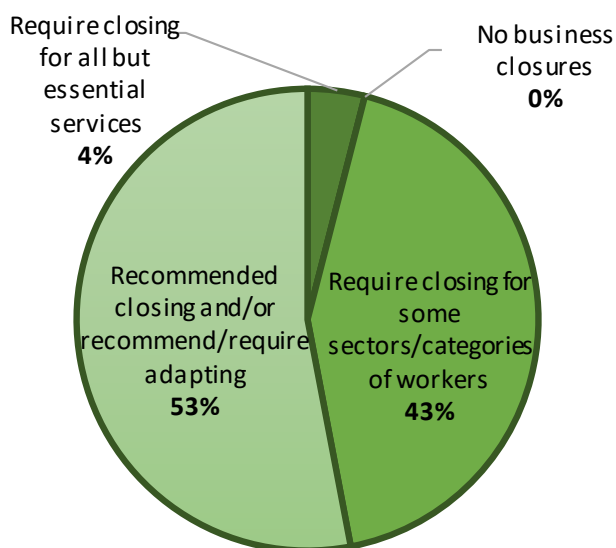
Since the start of the pandemic, the approaches taken by Member States to prevent virus transmission in workplaces have varied both across and within countries. While a small number of countries have re-implemented full closure of all but essential businesses, most countries have required partial changes (e.g. shorter opening hours) of certain sectors, and/or the implementation of infection prevention and control (IPC) measures.

As of 16 October, all Member States in the Region have some public health measure in place for the operation of businesses. A majority (**96%**) have recommended or required the closure of non-essential businesses and/or the adaptation of IPC measures in workplaces, or the closure of businesses in specific sectors or for some categories of workers.

Kazakhstan and Israel have, since August and September, respectively, required the closure of all but essential services. In many cases where businesses have been made to close, they have moved to remote modalities or work-from-home procedures, where applicable.

Please refer to the [COVID-19 Health Systems Response Monitor \(HSRM\)](#) for additional information.

Status of business closure as percentage of Member States across the WHO European Region, n=53



WHO Regional Office for Europe's response to COVID-19:

The WHO Regional Office for Europe's response is built around a [comprehensive strategy](#) to prevent the spread of the pandemic, save lives and minimize impact by targeting four areas: **prepare and be ready; detect, protect and treat; reduce transmission; innovate and learn.**

Key figures: Responding to COVID-19 in the WHO European Region

WHO has conducted 137 missions and deployments to 21 countries and territories in the Region



112

In-country technical support missions

15

Rapid support teams



3

Virtual country missions



1

Intra-action review mission

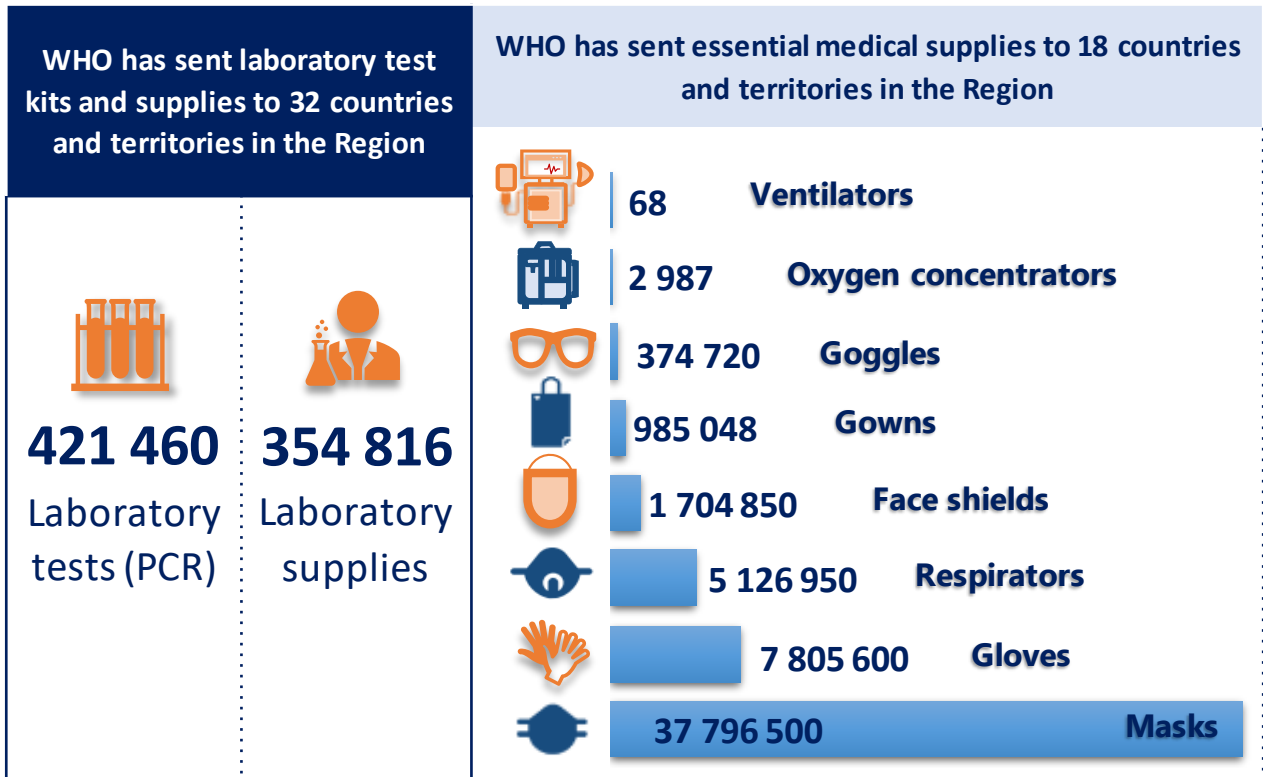


25

Operational partner deployments



For additional information on missions and deployments, please see the WHO/Europe COVID-19 Country Support Dashboard for [Pillar 1: Country-level coordination, planning and monitoring](#).



For additional information on essential supplies delivered, please see the WHO/Europe COVID-19 Country Support Dashboard for [Pillar 8: Operational Support and Logistics](#).

New WHO technical guidance published in weeks 41 and 42

 **Strategic considerations in preparing for deployment of COVID-19 vaccine and vaccination in the WHO European Region**

This strategic document (available [here](#)), published on 9 October, outlines the key strategic considerations in preparing for deployment of COVID-19 vaccine and vaccination. It provides guidance for ministries of health, their agencies, national immunization technical advisory groups/committees and relevant public and private sector authorities in countries of the WHO European Region.

The objective is to allow Member States to identify and address any critical gaps in effective deployment of COVID-19 vaccines.

As new scientific evidence and information related to COVID-19 vaccines become available, a detailed operational guidance and related tools will follow for vaccination and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines in Member States of the Region.

Guidance for the European Region:

[Operational considerations for influenza surveillance in the WHO European Region during COVID-19: interim guidance](#)
Published October 2020

[Setup and management of COVID-19 hotlines](#)
Published October 2020

Global COVID-19 guidance:

[Handbook for public health capacity-building at ground crossings and cross-border collaboration](#)
Published 12 October 2020

[The impact of COVID-19 on mental, neurological and substance use services](#)
Published on 5 October 2020

Target 1: Prepare and be ready

The WHO Regional Office for Europe supported Member States as they prepared for their first cases of COVID-19 and continues to provide support in preventing transmission.



As of Week 42, **12 433** health-care workers in the Region were reached by WHO virtual capacity-building webinars.

109 888 individuals completed OpenWHO courses related to IPC and case management of COVID-19 patients, as of Week 42.



For further information on the types of support provided, please refer to the WHO/Europe COVID-19 Country Support Dashboards for [Pillar 6: Infection Prevention Control](#) and [Pillar 7: Case Management](#).

In focus: WHO Europe strengthens laboratory capacities in Uzbekistan

Efficient laboratory systems with well-functioning, sustainable laboratory services, operating according to international principles of quality and safety, are an essential part of strong health systems and are crucial for facing such a public health event as the COVID-19 pandemic. A mission was conducted from 10 September to 15 October, during which 16 laboratories were assessed for their capacity and capability to test for SARS-CoV-2 and 8 laboratories were assessed for their sample referral system.

To address identified gaps and further strengthen laboratory capacities, four training sessions were conducted:

- on assessment using the WHO Laboratory Assessment Tool tailored to COVID-19;
- for training of trainers in the laboratory quality management system based on ISO 15189;
- in laboratory quality management for regional laboratory staff;
- for training of national mentors.

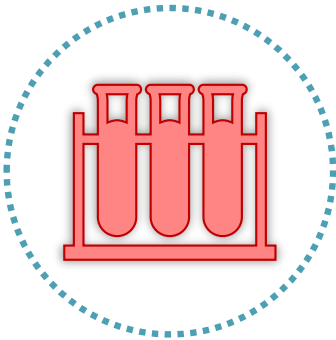


*Regional laboratory assessment
Credit: WHO Country Office Uzbekistan*

During this mission, a workshop was also conducted to support laboratory staff from national and regional laboratories to elaborate a training package for new staff and documents allowing the record of these training sessions. Further support to the Sanitary Epidemiological Surveillance service (SES) was provided through the development of a national testing strategy for COVID-19 and by reviewing its needs regarding equipment for the national public health laboratory system.

Target 2: Detect, protect and treat patients with COVID-19

WHO continues to work with national authorities to strengthen COVID-19 detection and diagnostic capacities to rapidly identify cases and prevent them from turning into clusters.



The WHO Country Office in Ukraine, in coordination with the Public Health Center, conducted a joint monitoring mission on COVID-19 epidemiological surveillance among Oblast laboratory centres in Kyiv city and Kyiv, Poltava, Kharkiv, Lviv and Ternopil Oblasts. Between 12 and 16 October, two teams were deployed to assess and document current practices of the COVID-19 surveillance data management systems and identify the weaknesses and strengths of the systems to guide further capacity-building activities.

In focus: Laboratory mission, strengthening COVID-19 diagnostic capacities in Albania, 19–24 October 2020

The WHO Country Office in Albania is working to support COVID-19 laboratories by providing training and conducting assessments on the diagnostic capacity for COVID-19. Albania has one national reference laboratory at the Institute of Public Health in Tirana, which works on the detection of SARS-CoV-2 and one subnational laboratory at the University Hospital "Mother Teresa".

WHO laboratory experts were deployed from the WHO/Europe Health Emergencies Programme, Balkan Hub Office, to Albania from 19 to 24 October. They visited the national laboratory of microbiology at the University Hospital "Mother Teresa" in Tirana, which recently started working on the detection of SARS-CoV-2. The mission aimed to strengthen diagnostic capacity for COVID-19 by performing an assessment of the laboratory to identify gaps and develop a set of recommendations to address these gaps.

The University Hospital "Mother Teresa" laboratory attended a COVID-19 biosafety training on rapid diagnostic testing facilitated by the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The training also covered aspects of the latest WHO COVID-19 biosafety guidance.

The WHO team will also meet with representatives from the national reference laboratory and the Institute of Public Health to discuss implementation of quality management in the laboratory and provide standard operating procedures (SOPs) developed by the WHO Europe team. It will also provide advice and guidance for scaling up laboratory testing for SARS-CoV-2 and testing strategies for joint surveillance of influenza and COVID-19.



Target 3: Reduce transmission

In the context of COVID-19, WHO is committed to working with all countries to strengthen surveillance and contact tracing, providing technical support and implementing WHO tools.



On 5 October, WHO deployed a team of WHO experts to the Republic of Moldova for a three-week technical mission to support the strengthening of COVID-19 surveillance in the country as well as implementation of the [Go.Data outbreak investigation tool](#) used for field data collection during public health emergencies. By the end of week 42, the Go.Data platform had been configured in the National Agency for Public Health in the Republic of Moldova.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 12 October, the WHO expert deployed to provide technical support in the areas of surveillance and contact tracing met with the Institute of Public Health (IPH) in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and recruits from the ongoing Contact Tracing Project in the entity. The importance of contact tracing in the COVID-19 response was presented and discussed, with the IPH also presenting to WHO the results of and recent updates from the project's first-phase of implementation.

Target 4: Innovate and learn

World Mental Health Day was officially marked on 10 October and, in the context of COVID-19, attention was given to the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of at-risk groups. These included older people, children and adolescents, various groups at increased risk of violence, people already being treated for mental health disorders, and health professionals.

In North Macedonia, in support of this important segment of collective health, the Psychiatric Clinic in Skopje has been actively involved in promoting mental health. The clinic has opened several hotlines for different target groups. Since March this year, over 4500 telephone conversations have taken place to provide psychological support to citizens during the pandemic.



In addition, an assessment has begun of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic's restrictive measures have had on mental health, led by the Italian Association for Social Psychiatry in coordination with the University Clinic for Psychiatry in North Macedonia and supported by WHO. It will serve as a basis for developing appropriate health interventions.

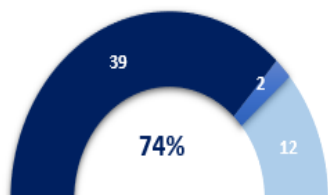
As of 15 October, **13 countries** in the Region are currently enrolling patients in the WHO Solidarity Trial.



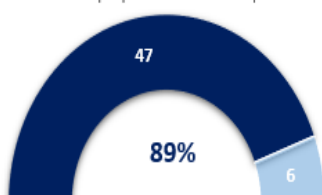
Continuously monitoring regional readiness:

The WHO Regional Office for Europe is monitoring readiness and response capacities in the Region. Indicators are used to monitor the global and regional situation, priority countries with operational support provided by the international community, and WHO's response.

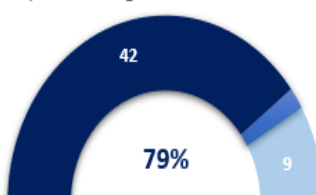
Countries with a COVID-19 national preparedness and response plan



Countries with a functional multi-sectoral, multi-partner coordination mechanism for COVID-19 preparedness and response



Countries with a COVID-19 risk communication and community engagement plan according to transmission scenario



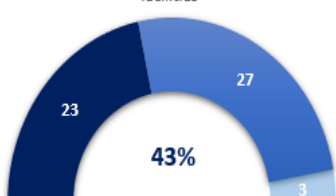
Countries with humanitarian settings which have an active COVID-19 hotline number system



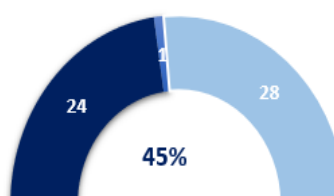
Countries with COVID-19 laboratory test capacities



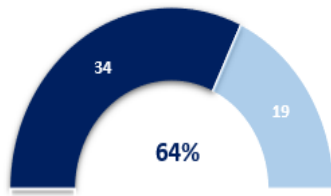
Countries with a National IPC Program and WASH Standards within all healthcare facilities



Countries with Long-Term Care Facilities (LTCF) that have a national policy and/or guidelines on IPC for COVID-19 in LTCF

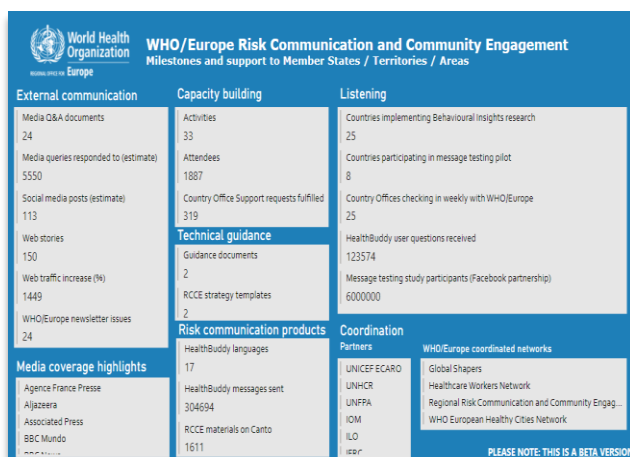
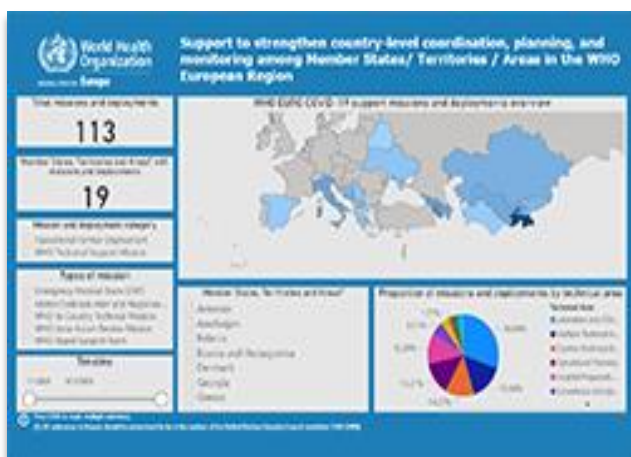


Countries with a clinical referral system in place to care for COVID-19 Cases



■ Yes ■ No ■ Missing data

To allow for transparent communication, coordination and consistency, and to better monitor the WHO Regional Office for Europe's response to COVID-19, a [COVID-19 Country Support Dashboard](#) has been developed which, in its beta form, provides a dynamic overview and real-time display of the support that has been provided to Member States across the Region since January 2020 and throughout the response to the pandemic – aligned to the 9 pillars of the [Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan \(SPRP\)](#).



COVID-19 heatmap of the WHO European Region:

New cases by ISO week

