



# COVID-19: WHO European Region Operational Update

## Epi Weeks 37–38 (7–20 September)

### Current global situation:

At the end of Week 38, over 30 million cases of COVID-19 and 950 000 deaths were reported to WHO from 216 countries and territories. 2 million new COVID-19 cases were reported between Weeks 37 and 38, the highest weekly tally recorded till date. Increases in the number of weekly cases of COVID-19 were noted across all WHO regions, with the exception of Africa. Overall, the Americas remain the most affected, although proportionately, the contribution of Asia and Europe to daily new cases continues to increase.

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

### Current situation in the Region:

Within the WHO European Region, 5.2 million cases of COVID-19 and 230 000 deaths have now been reported. Weekly cases of COVID-19 in the Region continue to rise – with over 300 000 new cases recorded in Weeks 37 and 38. Improved surveillance and rising trends in cases mean that overall numbers now far exceed cases reported in the first months of the pandemic.

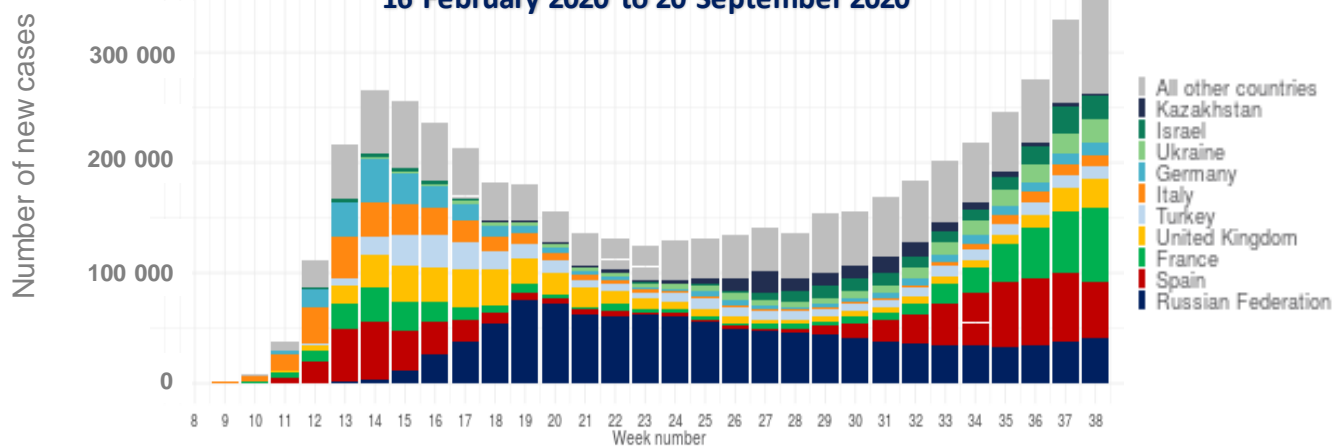
Over half of the countries in the Region are now experiencing accelerated COVID-19 transmission, with some seeing early signs of increased hospitalization and COVID-19-related deaths.

#### Week 38 Epi Snapshot\*

- **65%** of cases were reported from **6** countries: Spain, France, the Russian Federation, Israel, the United Kingdom and Ukraine.
- **88%** of deaths were in people aged >65 years and **57%** of all deaths were in males.
- **95%** of deaths were in people with at least one underlying condition, with cardiovascular disease as the leading comorbidity (76%).

\*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 20 September 2020**



Please refer to the [WHO Daily Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-2019\) Situation Reports](#), the [WHO European Region Dashboard](#) and the [WHO European Region Surveillance Bulletin](#) for further information.

## Emergency public health measures taken across the Region:

Following the resurgence of COVID-19 in the Region, many governments are faced with rising pressure to tackle the large number of cases without imposing hefty public health measures. However, this significant rise in cases has in recent weeks led many countries (*such as Austria, Denmark, Georgia, Israel, Portugal, the United Kingdom*) to re-implement or strengthen existing restrictions on social gatherings as part of the response.

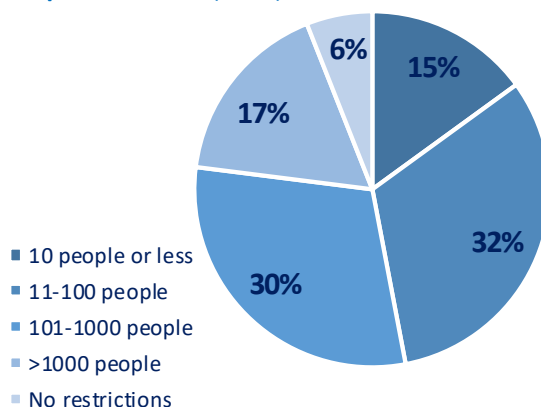
Restrictions on gatherings were among the first measures many governments implemented in early to mid-March and often the last to be lifted as countries eased out of lockdowns. Since the beginning of the pandemic, all countries in the Region have implemented some form of restrictions on gatherings.

As of 18 September, on a national level, **94%** of European Member States have in place restrictions on gatherings – varying from a ban on all types of gatherings to restrictions on large gatherings (where the limit is above 1000 people). Belarus, Estonia and Lithuania currently have no restrictions on gatherings in place.

A majority of countries that allow gatherings have also implemented sanitary measures, such as physical distancing, use of face masks or risk assessments when organizing such events. Some countries (*e.g. Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark*) permit a larger number of attendees if seated.

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

Proportion of Member States implementing restrictions on gatherings as of 18 September 2020 (n=53)



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

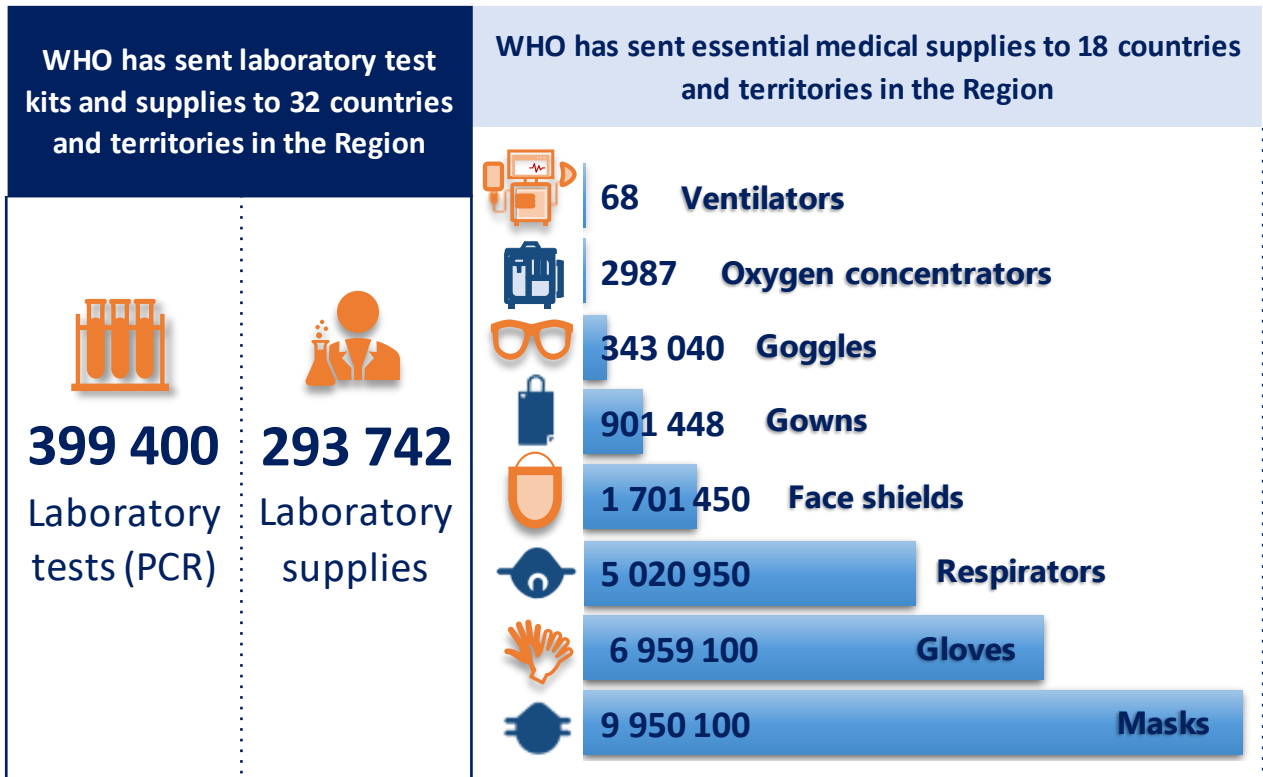
The WHO Regional Office for Europe's response is built around a [comprehensive strategy](#) to prevent the spread of the pandemic, save lives and minimize impact by targeting four areas: **prepare and be ready; detect, protect and treat; reduce transmission; innovate and learn.**

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

WHO has conducted 111 missions and deployments to 19 countries and territories in the Region



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 37 & 38

#### Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19:

This is the latest in the series of annex documents accompanying the WHO [Considerations in adjusting public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19](#). The guidance document examines school operations, including openings, closures and re-openings, and the measures needed to minimize the risk of outbreaks to students and staff.

The key recommendations centre around the introduction of a risk-based approach to school operations in the context of COVID-19. This integrates:

- the level and intensity of transmission at administrative levels lower than the national level;
- age-appropriate considerations for physical distancing;
- the use of masks in the school setting;
- comprehensive, multi-layered measures to prevent the introduction and spread of SARS-CoV-2 in educational settings.

#### Guidance for the European Region:

[Schooling in the time of COVID-19 – towards a consensus on schooling in the European Region during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Published 14 September

[Meeting report – schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, a high-level briefing for ministers of health](#)

Published 14 September

#### Global COVID-19 guidance:

[Diagnostic testing for SARS-CoV-2](#)

Published 11 September

[Antigen detection in the diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 infection using rapid immunoassays](#)

Published 11 September

[Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19](#)

Published 14 September

## 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.



In Week 37, WHO held a webinar with health-care workers in Georgia on the reuse of personal protective equipment (PPE) and environmental cleaning in health-care settings.

A focus on the use of corticosteroids as part of the latest WHO guidance in the context of COVID-19 was also conducted for health-care workers at the Gudauta hospital designated for COVID-19.

**WHO is supporting countries in developing tailored multidisciplinary approaches to care for patients with COVID-19 and helping frontline clinicians to operationalize these protocols.** In Turkmenistan, the Ministry of Health (MoH) and WHO Country Office established a joint working group on reviewing clinical treatment for COVID-19. The working group was established by the MoH to review and further develop a clinical management guide and related protocols. The first meeting with WHO to discuss updating of the treatment protocols took place on 16 September.



As of Week 38, **11 461** health-care workers in the Region were reached by WHO virtual capacity-building webinars.

There were **69 059** enrollees in OpenWHO courses related to infection prevention and control (IPC) and **19 622** in case management of COVID-19 patients, as of Week 38.



**In addition to physical risks, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed extraordinary levels of psychological stress on health workers.**

To re-emphasize the huge role of health-care workers in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO Country Office in Tajikistan supported the official opening of a three-day photo exhibition in Dushanbe dedicated to World Patient Safety Day on 17 September. Representatives from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population in Tajikistan, the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Tajikistan, Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) experts, students of the Tajik State Medical University and the general public participated in the event.



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](#).

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

WHO continues to work with national authorities to strengthen COVID-19 detection capacities.



In Uzbekistan, from 15 to 17 September, the WHO Country Office conducted a training session for national specialists from public health laboratories on how to implement the quality management system. Following this, to further support laboratories in Uzbekistan, and as part of an assessment of the sample referral system in Tashkent City, Tashkent Region and Bukhara Region, WHO experts visited laboratories, including those conducting COVID-19 testing, between 17 and 23 September.

### In focus: WHO responds to the refugee crisis in Greece during COVID-19

On the evening of 8 September, a rapidly evolving fire destroyed the Moria refugee and migration camp, Europe's largest, situated on the Greek island of Lesbos. The incident occurred after 35 individuals staying at the camp tested positive for COVID-19 following a single case identified on 2 September. Following the camp's destruction, approximately 12 500 refugees and migrants were left without shelter.

WHO offered immediate assistance and deployed a team to Lesbos to provide rapid on-the-ground support. Alongside national and local health authorities, other UN agencies and key partners, the team conducted a rapid assessment of the situation, provided technical advice on managing the evolving COVID-19 outbreak on the island, and helped define immediate steps to restore essential health services to those in need. With the announcement of a new temporary shelter for individuals displaced by the fire, a health coordination cell was activated to support critical actions, set up health services at the new site, and provide a forum to coordinate activities of local and international partners.



WHO responds to the migration crisis in Greece.  
Credit: WHO Country Office in Greece



WHO-classified EMT from Norway sets up medical facility in Greece. Credit: WHO Country Office in Greece

On 14 September, WHO's internationally classified Emergency Medical Team from Norway's Directorate for Civil Protection deployed 22 experts, including medical doctors, nurses and paramedics, tasked with supporting local authorities with the establishment of a triage, testing and isolation facility for COVID-19 patients and the provision of medical support to the people in need. WHO's Regional Office for Europe is working in collaboration with key operational partners, including GOARN, to provide further support for COVID-19 surveillance and control.



### Target 3: Reduce transmission

In the context of COVID-19, WHO provides global and regional guidance for IPC.

During 8–9 September, WHO conducted a technical support visit to the infectious disease department of Rubizhansk city hospital to support strengthening of its IPC programme. The infectious disease department of Rubizhansk city hospital has 30 beds designated for patients with COVID-19. Technical training sessions have been carried out in 27 hospitals across Ukraine, including in conflict-affected areas of the country.



### In focus: Experts from the WHO Regional Office for Europe visited Bosnia and Herzegovina from 7 to 11 September 2020

Experts from the WHO Regional Office for Europe and counterparts in Bosnia and Herzegovina shared experiences in managing the COVID-19 outbreak, collectively reviewing the response on the ground and jointly discussing next steps for managing the current and future resurgence of cases.

The team of experts assessed the current situation and provided recommendations on how Bosnia and Herzegovina can better mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic within an evolving situation. The main areas of focus included:

- strengthening core public health interventions to identify, isolate and test all cases;
- identifying and quarantining close contacts;
- ensuring the provision of essential health services;
- strengthening risk communication and community engagement (RCCE), a core public health intervention contributing to the response.



*WHO Europe team of experts in Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Credit: WHO*

The team from the WHO Regional Office for Europe provided advice on the appropriate measures to be implemented to prevent, reduce and control transmission of COVID-19, particularly during mass gatherings and school reopening. The visit was also an opportunity for the country to assess its experience of managing COVID-19 and to rethink health priorities to build a more resilient health system as part of the efforts to implement the European Programme of Work (2020–2025).

## Target 4: Innovate and learn

**WHO, together with its partners, is supporting countries in improving their emergency preparedness capacity and strengthening health system resilience and recovery, in order to build back towards a healthier, safer, fairer and greener world.**



On 17 September, with the support of United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, WHO and the Centre for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction held the first in a series of virtual UN Member State dialogues with the Central Asian Republics. This event brought together Sendai and IHR focal points to exchange experiences and lessons identified in order to advance working methods and field-proven responses against COVID-19, and discuss measures to recover and build back better. Experts from the WHO Country Office in Tajikistan provided a comprehensive presentation on the results of the COVID-19 response and the measures taken to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

**The WHO Regional Office for Europe continues to offer support to countries in implementing the WHO tools for monitoring public knowledge, risk perceptions, behaviours and trust to make their COVID-19-related response relevant and actionable.**

In Uzbekistan, the WHO Country Office and UN Information Centre continue to support the WHO #WearAMask challenge, urging everyone to help reduce transmission of COVID-19 by:

- wearing a mask that covers the nose, mouth and chin;
- observing physical distancing;
- regularly washing hands;
- staying away from large crowds;
- covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.



As of 14 September, the campaign has received **over 350 photos and two videos from people in Uzbekistan and overseas**, including students, children, bloggers, journalists and civil servants. Social media posts are published on the UN social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook).

As of Week 38, **25 countries** in the Region are implementing the findings of behavioural insights research using WHO tools.



As of Week 38, **8 countries** in the Region and **6 000 000** participants are engaged in pilot studies on message testing to understand how different audiences respond to different messages on COVID-19.

# 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.

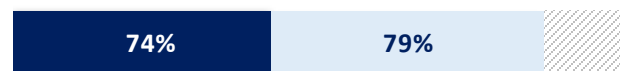
Countries with COVID-19 laboratory test capacities (target: 100%)



Countries with a functional multisectoral, multipartner coordination mechanism for COVID-19 preparedness and response (target: 100%)



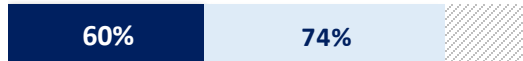
Countries with a COVID-19 risk communication and community engagement plan according to the transmission scenario (target: 100%)



Countries with humanitarian settings (n=2), which have an active COVID-19 hotline number system (target: 100%)



Countries with a COVID-19 national preparedness and response plan (target: 100%)



Countries with a National IPC Program and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) standards within all health-care facilities (target: 100%)



Countries with long-term care facilities (LTCFs), which have a national policy and/or guidelines on IPC for COVID-19 in LTCFs (target: 100%)



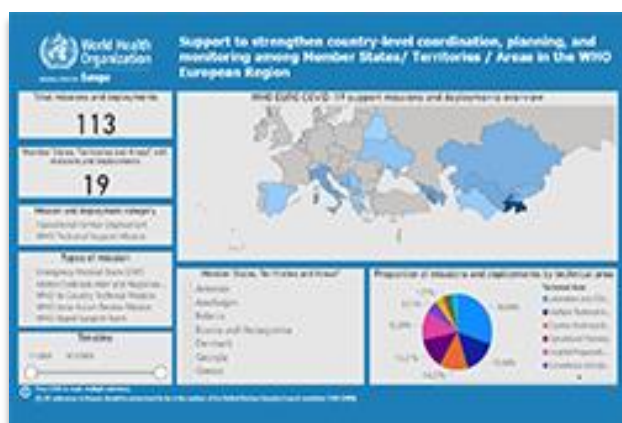
Countries with a clinical referral system in place to care for COVID-19 cases (target: 100%)



On 28 June

On 20 September

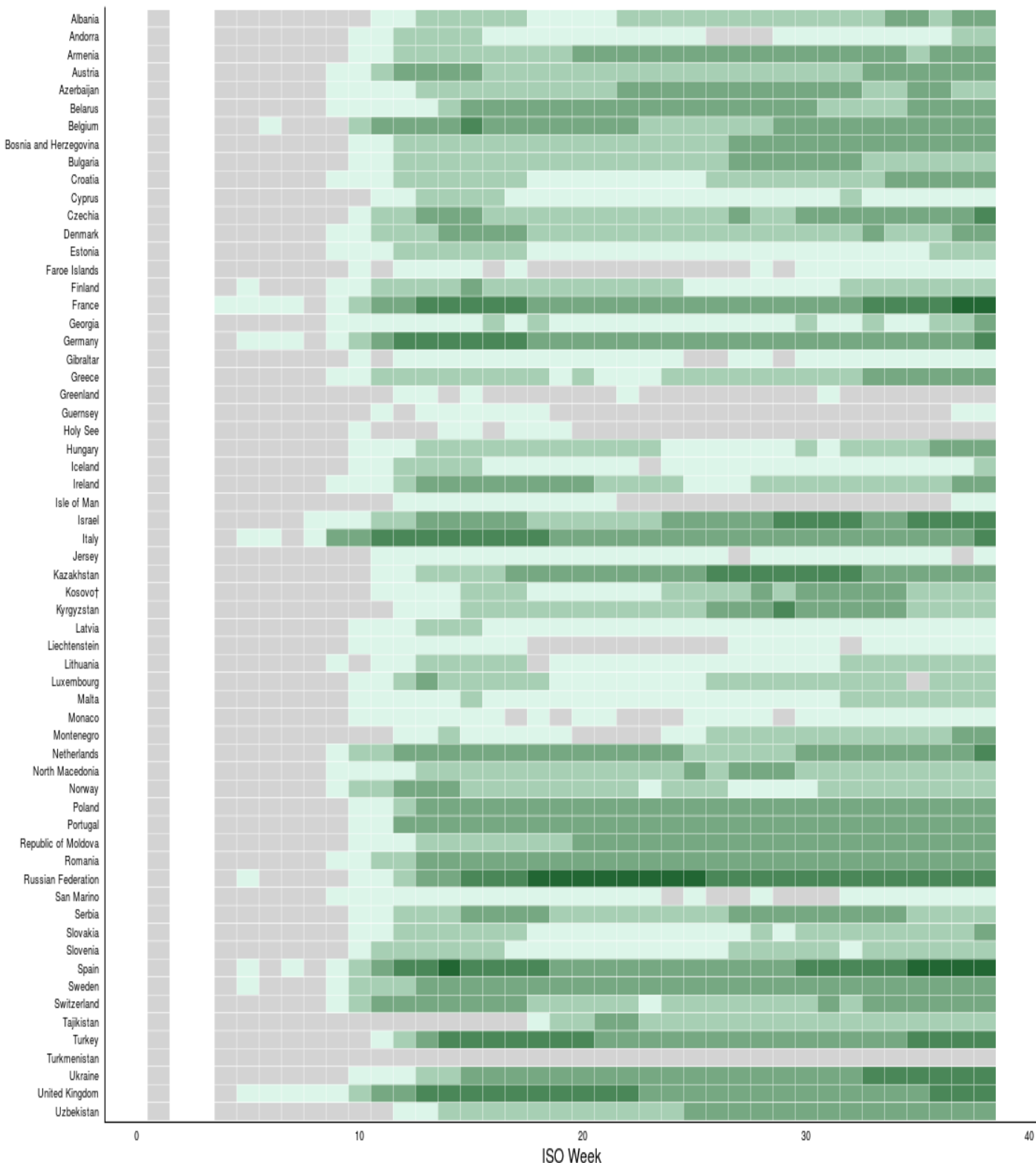
To allow for transparent communication, coordination and consistency, and to better monitor the WHO Regional Office for Europe's response to COVID-19, a [COVID-19 Country Support Dashboard](#) has been developed which, in its beta form, provides a dynamic overview and real-time display of the support 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



Number of new cases

