



World Health  
Organization

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**

# A timeline of WHO's response to COVID-19 in the WHO European Region

A living document (Version 2.0 from  
31 December 2019 to 31 December 2020)



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# Foreword

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2020 was a year that will be remembered for generations, for having put the lives and livelihoods of everyone into an unprecedented stress test. Health system and emergency response had to be urgently and radically reshaped to address public needs, while the links between health and the economy have been shown to be greater than we could have ever imagined. The past year has put health firmly at the heart of social values, including equity, solidarity and participation.

Health care workers at all levels have dedicated their lives to saving patients, without respite. The WHO Regional Office for Europe has facilitated deployments of health professionals and organized shipments and cargos of medical supplies between countries throughout the WHO European Region. The concept that nobody is safe until everybody is safe has been the key to this response; this has been historical.

Equity and solidarity in action are at the heart of WHO's work in emergencies. Since the beginning of this pandemic, our focus has been on assisting countries in preparing and responding to emergencies, taking stock of international capacity and resources, and leaving no one behind. The response team set up in the Regional Office has joined hands with our country offices and subregional hubs to make a difference where it matters: where people are falling ill and systems are becoming overwhelmed. Together, we have worked non-stop to protect every person in the Region; unity of feelings and purpose was unprecedented, as well as the call to solidarity and equity.

At the start of the outbreak, the Regional Office established a list of six referral laboratories across the Region to provide testing capacity support to laboratories in other countries. Overall, the Office organized 168 expert missions across the Region. These missions included eight deployments of Emergency medical teams (EMTs) to share knowledge and practice in handling COVID-19

patients: a Polish EMT, comprising medics who had been on the frontline of COVID-19 treatment in Italy, travelled to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to share their experiences with their peers. Missions also included 24 Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network deployments to provide assistance in countries: a team of German, Russian and British experts has been working closely with their peers in Tajikistan to strengthen disease surveillance and laboratory systems. We provided training for over 32 000 professionals, facilitating knowledge exchanges on laboratory testing, patient care and infection prevention and control, risk communication and community engagement, and protection of vulnerable populations, and we engaged a network of 2 000 young volunteers to help young people track and address rumours and exchange evidence-based information.

We know that challenges remain; COVID-19 vaccines are offering us a way to emerge faster from this pandemic. However, this promise will never be realized unless we ensure that all countries and all people have access to vaccines, delivered equitably, deployed effectively, and accepted by the public, especially those at highest risk of the disease.

"United Action for Better Health", the European Programme of Work (EPW), emphasizes the importance of leaving no one behind and of supporting capacities for effective health leadership, with equity and solidarity at its core, while fostering engagement with all levels and sectors of government, as well as with communities.

Building strong, sustainable, equitable and responsive health systems and making our societies better prepared is in everybody's interests. Thinking ahead, in September 2020, I convened the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development to advise us on how to rethink the future by taking stock of the impacts of

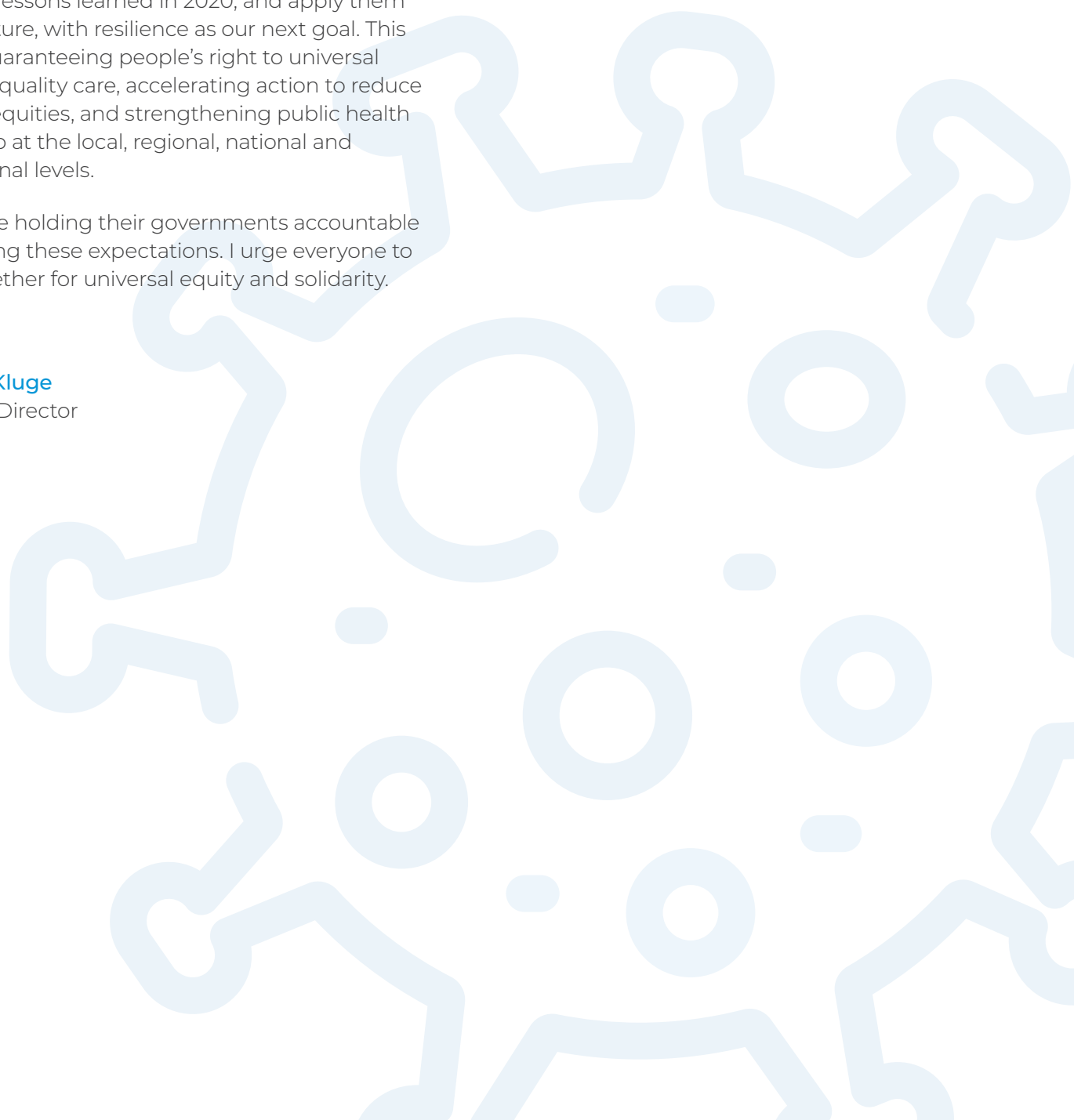
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the pandemic. I look forward to the Commission's recommendations, which will be issued in September 2021.

As we enter the second year of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to bring with us all the lessons learned in 2020, and apply them for the future, with resilience as our next goal. This means guaranteeing people's right to universal access to quality care, accelerating action to reduce health inequities, and strengthening public health leadership at the local, regional, national and international levels.

People are holding their governments accountable for meeting these expectations. I urge everyone to work together for universal equity and solidarity.

**Dr Hans Kluge**  
Regional Director



# Foreword

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This is not just another foreword, at least not for us. We write this at the end of an unprecedented year when we have been challenged like never before, both personally and professionally. It comes as an opportunity to reflect on the year that is behind us and to build the future that lies ahead.

This reflection brings to mind some successes and many hopes; it also raises challenges and uncertainties. More than anything, it brings to the fore the faces and voices of all those in WHO's regional and country offices who dived into the response with heart and soul. This timeline is a tribute to each of our colleagues who has put their own needs aside to dedicate themselves to saving lives; and who continue to do so.

24 January 2021 marks one year since the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in the WHO European Region, just one day after we formally established the Regional Incident Management Support Team (IMST). We can still remember the telephone call confirming that COVID-19 had been detected in our Region. It was a call that we were expecting and were ready for: we had set our priorities, established our response team and worked with our country teams.

The speed of the outbreak was dramatic and so too was the reaction by IMST, the response arm of the Regional Office's Health Emergency Programme (WHE) established only three years previously. By the end of March, IMST had deployed over 50 teams to countries to plan and prepare for the onslaught of the virus, thereby pre-empting the spread of the virus. This rapid response did not happen overnight; it was carefully built on the solid foundation of preparedness action that had been strengthened over decades.

The extensive influenza infrastructure was immediately repurposed for the COVID-19 response. European regional networks were activated to ensure rapid detection, confirmation and description of the first cases, working hand in glove with our ally in Europe, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Understanding the clinical presentation of this novel virus and its transmissibility and severity of infection was at the basis of developing optimal prevention and control strategies. A decade of building skills in risk communication and community engagement formed the background for targeting rapid action and engaging people.

Working with countries to contain the pandemic and minimize its socioeconomic impacts has been at the core of our work since the first day. The subregional hub-and-spoke structure established just 18 months prior to the pandemic in the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia, has been our anchor in these countries. This innovative "country business model" put us ahead of the curve before the emergency hit, so that we could serve neighbouring countries facing similar challenges and requiring similar solutions.

The pandemic response has, like nothing before, illustrated the operational side of WHO's role in emergencies, a role played in particular by regional and country offices, alongside the normative functions of headquarters. It has translated into 168 missions deployed across the Region, over US\$ 42 million-worth of critical supplies delivered to COVID-19 frontlines, and 134 training sessions to over 25 000 health care workers. This mammoth effort has been presented in an online regional situation dashboard, featuring data on COVID-19 cases and deaths from every country in the WHO European Region and showing the public health and social measures implemented. By the end of December 2020, the dashboard had received over 8 million views.



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From the very beginning of the pandemic, the Regional Office embedded recovery and building back better in its response efforts and plans. This is the emergency cycle that can virtuously self-perpetuate: lessons from the COVID-19 response can teach us how to improve our preparedness for emergencies and, most of all, our resilience; namely, our ability to bounce back and prevent such events in future. This cycle of learning and improvement needs to penetrate to every corner of our societies as a collective effort; it needs to be taken up by every sector of government and every level of community. It needs a combination of strong structure and human touch.

Resilience will be our goal as WHO and its Member States prepare to reshape the way we protect people from health emergencies throughout the Region and around the world.

**Dr Dorit Nitzan**

Regional Emergency Director

**Dr Catherine Smallwood**

Incident Manager COVID-19

# 1.

## Introduction

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31 December 2020 marked a year since the WHO Regional Office for Europe received notice about cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology (unknown cause) detected in the People's Republic of China. Since receiving that notice, and throughout the ensuing COVID-19 pandemic, WHO has been working continuously, with partners, to support Member States in preparedness, readiness and response.

This “living” document presents an update to the first timeline covering the first half of 2020 (version 1.0, EUR/RC70/Inf.Doc./7 – September 2020). It describes the continuation of the Regional Office's response to the ongoing pandemic, and includes updates in light of new information.

Note: This document highlights the response operations led by the Regional Office (WHO/Europe). It showcases a wide range of the activities that WHO/Europe has initiated and participated in to support the WHO European Region in line with the needs of the evolving situation. Separate documenting work will be dedicated to the support provided to individual Member States, and the support provided through WHO country and liaison offices and the teams belonging to the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (WHE) hub-and-spoke structure in priority countries and areas in the WHO European Region.

### Background

The COVID-19 response in the WHO European Region has been built on several decades of preparedness work. This work has been undertaken against the backdrop of the legally binding [International Health Regulations \(IHR\) \(2005\)](#), reinforced by the creation of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (WHE) in 2016.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the [Pandemic Influenza Preparedness \(PIP\) Framework](#) and recent accelerated efforts to implement [IHR core capacities](#) have contributed to this foundation of [preparedness](#).

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the WHE can be found in document [A69/30](#), as presented to the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly in 2016, and the [Action Plan to Improve Public Health Preparedness and Response in the WHO European Region 2018–2023](#), adopted by the Regional Committee for Europe at its 68th session in 2018.

## 2. Overview

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The summary below lists the key figures and timelines of the main activities that took place from 31 December 2019 to 31 December 2020 in preparing for and responding to COVID-19 in the WHO European Region. This is a living document and will be updated.

On 31 December 2019, the WHO Representative Office in the People's Republic of China picked up a public bulletin issued by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission on cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology (unknown cause) detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China.

The WHO Representative Office notified the IHR Regional Contact Point for the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific about the bulletin and provided a translation of it. At around the same time, the emergencies Programme at WHO headquarters received an email report from ProMED on the cluster of cases.

Building on years of preparedness work, in particular [repurposing](#) the extensive influenza infrastructure built up over decades and further strengthened after the H1N1 influenza pandemic of 2009, European regional networks were activated to ensure the rapid detection, confirmation and description of the first cases in Europe, to understand the clinical presentation of this novel virus and its transmissibility and infection severity and to develop the optimal prevention and control strategies. This required the establishment of workstreams on surveillance and monitoring, [laboratories](#) and virology, infection prevention and control, clinical management, and country preparedness. [Readiness](#) activities also quickly became a priority for the Region, in addition to continued support to WHO country and liaison offices and to Member States and areas on

matters such as essential health services delivery, medical supply chains, risk communications and community engagement, protection of vulnerable populations, and vaccines.

### **The response in numbers (select figures):**

For a detailed quantitative overview of the support activities provided to individual Member States, please refer to the [WHO/Europe's COVID-19 Country Support Dashboard \(beta version\)](#).

### **As at 31 December 2020:**

- WHO/Europe has conducted 168 missions to 22 countries and areas, including 32 partner deployments through the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) and deployment of emergency medical teams (EMTs).
- Supplies worth US\$ 42 million have been procured for 29 countries and areas in the Region. These supplies include over 7.8 million gloves, 40 million masks, 5 million respirators, and over 600 000 laboratory and diagnostic supplies, including reverse transcription–polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test kits, laboratory supplies and swabs. Supply procurement is based on assessment and prioritization of the needs of Member States and areas, in the context of COVID-19.

- The WHO Regional Director for Europe has issued 44 [statements](#) and published over 350 [Tweets](#) regarding COVID-19.
- WHO/Europe has held over 300 virtual capacity-building webinars and online training modules in English and Russian, with a wide reach for experts in Member States and areas on topics such as laboratories and sero-epidemiology (over 1000 participants engaged), infection prevention and control and clinical management of COVID-19 patients (13 262 participants from 19 Member States and territories engaged), risk communication and community engagement (more than 2 300 participants engaged), and protection of vulnerable populations (3 234 participants engaged). As well as on contact tracing, epidemiology and surveillance, forecasting and surge calculation, quality assurance, hospital readiness, public health measures, and more.
- There have been over 170 [web stories](#) and 25 guidance documents published by WHO/Europe. In addition to the selected publications included in the timeline below, all of the technical guidance on COVID-19 that WHO/Europe has supported Member States in implementing can be found on the WHO/Europe [website](#).
- WHO/Europe created a COVID-19 Regional situation [dashboard](#) on 20 February 2020, which is updated daily. The dashboard, which now displays Regional, national, and subnational data, as well as a new public health and social measures index, has become one of the most visited pages in the history of the WHO/Europe website. By the end of December 2020, it had received close to 8.2 million visits. A total of 39 detailed surveillance [reports](#) had also been published on a weekly basis.
- WHO/Europe and WHE have used innovative approaches to overcome the unprecedented travel restrictions and country lockdowns, such as [virtual missions](#) (the first of their kind) and webinars, and by joining cargo and other humanitarian flights in order to be able to assess countries and areas.
- New platforms and tools (Behavioural Insight survey, HealthBuddy+ and Global Shapers) were launched to gather perceptions and behavioural insights and provide accurate and relevant information.
- WHO/Europe has promoted and facilitated learning for Member States, to help them optimize critical opportunities for improving the COVID-19 response, in both the immediate and the long term. In addition to convening platforms and discussions, WHO/Europe developed the intra-action review, a learning tool and process, which was undertaken in three countries in 2020 (Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova and Uzbekistan).
- Strategic partnerships have been fostered with hundreds of international, regional, national, and local partners to promote a multi-sectoral response in the Region. New platforms have been established to coordinate the response (such as the WHO-UN-RCM Coordination Platform, the Regional Working Group on COVID-19 vaccination, joint WHO-ECDC networks for laboratory and COVID-19 surveillance in the Region).
- WHO/Europe has continuously monitored and supported the readiness and response capacities of countries in the Region. Indicators have been used to monitor the global and regional situation, priority countries with operational support provided by the international community, and WHO's response. These indicators and further information about WHO/Europe's response can be viewed in the [WHO European Region Operational Updates](#).







# Timeline

All events listed in the timeline are given in Central European Time unless stated otherwise.

Note that the dates listed for documents are based on when they were finalized and time-stamped.

# 31 December 2019

WHO/Europe receives notice of a cluster of cases of atypical pneumonia in China.

On 31 December 2019, the WHO Representative Office in the People's Republic of China picked up a public bulletin issued by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission on a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology (unknown cause) detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The WHO Representative Office notified the IHR Regional Contact Point for the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific about the bulletin and provided a translation of it. At around the same time, the emergencies Programme at WHO headquarters received an email report from ProMED on the cluster of cases.

That evening, WHO/Europe shared information received through the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), building on existing cooperative arrangements.

A healthcare worker wearing full personal protective equipment (PPE), including a white hooded gown, large clear goggles, a white face mask, and yellow gloves, is performing a nasal swab test on a patient. The worker is holding a blue swab stick and is positioned near the patient's nose. The patient is lying down, and only the back of their head and ear are visible. The background shows a window with a white frame. A blue banner with the word "JANUARY" in white capital letters is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

# JANUARY

### 5 January 2020

Information regarding the cluster of atypical pneumonia cases is reviewed and shared with Member States.

WHO shared detailed information about a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause through the IHR (2005) Event Information System, which is accessible to all Member States. The global event notice provided information on the cases and advised Member States to take precautions to reduce the risk of acute respiratory infections. WHO also published the first global Disease Outbreak News on the cluster that same day. It contained a risk assessment and advice, and reported on information given to the Organization by the authorities in the People's Republic of China about patient status and the public health response to those cases.

In the following days, WHO/Europe, together with ECDC, rapidly reviewed the risk to the WHO European Region, and followed up with information and support to Member States, with regard to the global event notice.

### 7 January 2020

Laboratory capacities in the Region are quickly assessed.

WHO/Europe and ECDC moved quickly to identify laboratory needs and capacities in the Region. Laboratories are part of the strong influenza-related infrastructure built over decades and strengthened after the H1N1 pandemic of 2009, guided by the global [Pandemic Influenza Preparedness \(PIP\) Framework](#), and the WHO/Europe [Better Labs for Better Health](#) initiative.

### 9 January 2020

WHO/Europe initiates daily coordination meetings to guide readiness.

Seven coordination meetings took place before the official activation of the Incident Management Support Team (IMST) on 23 January, after which daily emergency management meetings took place. During the first meeting, the team discussed next steps, including roles and functions under the WHO Emergency Response Framework (ERF) and coordination with key European partners, such as ECDC and the European Commission.

WHO reported that Chinese authorities have determined that the outbreak is caused by a novel coronavirus.

### 10 January 2020

The first news stories on the novel coronavirus are shared with Member States and the public.

WHO/Europe began publishing regular news stories on the novel coronavirus (over 170 stories by 31 December 2020), highlighting the impact of WHO's work in the Region and individual countries and areas. These stories also give a voice to the people working behind the scenes, such as WHO staff, health care workers and donors. The topics of these stories have since included all components of the response.

First package of technical guidance materials is shared.

WHO published a comprehensive package of global guidance documents for countries, covering topics related to the management of an outbreak of a new disease, such as surveillance and laboratory, clinical management, infection prevention and control, and risk communication. In following days, WHO/Europe further distributed this available guidance through the regional influenza network.

### 12 January 2020

A new surveillance database is launched to harmonize data reporting regarding the novel coronavirus.

A new ECDC–WHO/Europe novel coronavirus surveillance database, developed in the preceding days, went live.

### 13 January 2020

The first PCR assay for the novel coronavirus is published.

WHO published a first [protocol](#) for a RT-PCR assay by a WHO partner laboratory to diagnose the novel coronavirus. WHO/Europe translated and disseminated it to Member States.

### 14 January 2020

The GOARN operational partnership network is activated.

Following coordination activities including a first teleconference on 2 January 2020, the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) was [activated](#) to ensure that all regional partners, including those of the European Region, were on alert and ready to respond when needed.

### 16 January 2020

Periodic updates on the latest laboratory resources for the new virus are initiated.

The WHO/Europe High Threat Pathogens team launched its weekly updates to Member States and areas through the regional influenza laboratory network regarding the latest resources in the area of laboratory diagnostics for the new virus. The updates, which were published in English and Russian, covered topics such as testing methods, challenges and solutions, and referral laboratories and were shared through the network over subsequent weeks.

### 17 January 2020

Engagement with the European Commission's Health Security Committee begins.

WHO/Europe participated in the first weekly meeting with the European Commission's [Health Security Committee](#) regarding the outbreak in Wuhan, China.

GOARN initiates the Go.Data platform in the context of the novel coronavirus.

The Institute of Public Health in Tirana, Albania, began the implementation process for the Go.Data field data collection platform developed by GOARN. Go.Data helps manage complex data in outbreaks such as COVID-19. The tool focuses on case data (including data received from labs on cases, hospitalization and other variables through a case investigation form) and contact data (including contact follow-up). The main outputs from this versatile platform are contact follow-up lists and chains of transmission.

### 21 January 2020

Updated information on the novel coronavirus is shared with all WHO country and liaison offices.

An updated package of materials and sources of information on the novel coronavirus was shared with all WHO country and liaison offices in Europe.

Laboratory-confirmed cases exported from China had by now been reported to WHO in Thailand (n=2), Japan (n=1) and Republic of Korea (n=1); it was important for European Member States and areas to ensure that they were ready, should cases occur in the European Region.



**23 January 2020**

The regional IMST is activated, a day before reporting of the first case in the European Region.

Following the first meeting of the IHR Emergency Committee for COVID-19 held on 22-23 January 2020, the WHO Health Emergencies Programme in WHO/Europe formally activated the IMST for the Region. The IMST supports all countries and areas in the Region and coordinates WHO's country-focused responses. Through the WHO health emergency preparedness and response hubs and country and liaison office teams, WHO/Europe has been providing direct support to countries and areas in coordination with United Nations country teams and other operational partners.

**24 January 2020**

Readiness of Member States and areas is reviewed.

Country and liaison offices reviewed readiness checklists and guidance for contingency planning via a teleconference convened by WHO/Europe.

First cases of the novel coronavirus in the WHO European Region are confirmed in France.

The first three cases of the novel coronavirus in the WHO European Region were confirmed in France. The cases had travelled from the People's Republic of China.

*Note: In this document, information regarding cases reflects the most recent WHO data (continually monitored and updated)*

**25 January 2020**

WHO/Europe organizes a teleconference with authorities in France to discuss the details of the first confirmed cases in the Region.

WHO/Europe called for a teleconference with authorities in France to discuss the details of the three confirmed cases, and the actions taken and planned. Representatives of ECDC were invited to join the teleconference, which became the first of the almost daily country teleconferences with affected Member States and areas organized by WHO/Europe jointly with ECDC during the following weeks.

**"Novel coronavirus outbreak:**

Preparing now as one" – the Regional Director issues a first public statement regarding the novel coronavirus.

WHO/Europe issued the first public statement on the novel coronavirus: "Novel coronavirus outbreak: Preparing now as one". The Regional Director's statement outlined the importance of being ready at the local and national levels to detect cases, test samples and carry out clinical management. This was the first of 44 statements that have been issued by the Regional Director by the end of December 2020.

**26 January 2020**

An enhanced surveillance database for the novel coronavirus goes live.

Additional surveillance for the WHO European Region was established through the launch of The European Surveillance System (TESSy) for nCov. WHO/Europe together with ECDC, and in collaboration with surveillance networks in Member States, has been coordinating weekly data collection from EU and non-EU countries. The results from this and other surveillance mechanisms are published in rapid risk assessments, surveillance reports, dashboards and other publications.

**27 January 2020**

Fifteen countries and areas in the Region are identified for priority support.

WHO/Europe identified 15 priority countries and areas in the regional response. Prioritization was based on hazard mapping, vulnerability and health system maturity. Countries and areas in the Region with other acute or protracted emergencies were also included as priority countries and areas, given the complex nature of the response in those settings.

**28 January 2020**

First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Germany.

### 29 January 2020

WHO/Europe begins sending a daily digest of information and guidance on the novel coronavirus.

A first “daily digest” of new guidance was shared with country colleagues, along with a detailed update on the situation in the Region. The daily digest has become a key tool for ensuring that WHO country and liaison offices and of the Regional Office are kept abreast of guidance, tools and communications issues.

**First cluster of novel coronavirus cases confirmed in Germany, with local transmission in Bavaria.**

Following the identification of a cluster of novel coronavirus cases in Bavaria, Germany, WHO/Europe and ECDC held almost daily calls with Federal and state health authorities to share information on the evolution of the cluster and understand transmission pathways. This cluster was also linked to further cases in Spain.

**First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Finland.**

### 30 January 2020

The WHO Director-General declares the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).

After reconvening the IHR Emergency Committee, the Director-General accepted the Committee's advice and declared the COVID-19 emergency a PHEIC.

**First shipments are sent to WHO reference laboratories.**

The first shipment of COVID-19 test samples arrived at reference laboratories for rechecking. 59 shipments had been received from 23 countries and across the Region by the end of December 2020.

### 31 January 2020

WHO/Europe IMST develops a concept of operations (CONOPS) for the novel coronavirus in the Region.

After continuous assessment of the situation and in line with WHO's ERF “no regrets” policy, a CONOPS was developed for the different levels of the Organization. The CONOPS defined how response activities would draw from the resources available at regional hubs serving the priority countries and areas. The CONOPS also identified immediate human resource needs and surge capacity to be mobilized from within and outside the Organization.

**European EVD-LabNet/ECDC/WHO 2019-nCoV laboratory preparedness survey is completed.**

The survey found that by the end of January 2020, 31 Member States (24 of them members of the European Union or European Economic Area), countries and areas had established molecular testing capacity for the novel coronavirus.

**First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Italy.**



**FEBRUARY**

### 1 February 2020

Six national referral laboratories in the Region are identified as ready to support countries with testing.

WHO/Europe and partners established an initial roster of six laboratories in the Region to act as regional referral laboratories to provide testing support. These laboratories were located in France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Since then, the roster has been expanded, and such facilities are now called “reference labs” and function under terms of reference agreed with WHO, including support in sequencing. A network of nationally designated laboratories for testing for 2019-nCoV was also activated, primarily building on the existing laboratory network within the Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS).

First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

### 2 February 2020

First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Spain.

### 3 February 2020

The WHO Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan is rolled out.

A draft Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan (SPRP) was published by WHO. Based on an updated WHO global strategy published in April 2020, a European Region-specific strategy was developed and published.

Risk communication in countries is strengthened via a new online library.

To improve dissemination of risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) materials (e.g. posters, graphics for social media and animated videos), WHO/Europe established a publicly accessible online library of resources. Over 1 800 files and resources in 40 languages had been shared by December 2020.

### 4 February 2020

WHO/Europe convenes a call with WHO representatives, sharing key messages to ensure readiness in countries.

WHO/Europe convened a first call with WHO representatives (WRs) in the Region to share key messages as more countries confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus, in order to: (1) prepare countries for imported cases; (2) align country plans with the global SPRP; (3) prepare for scale-up; (4) emphasize RCCE; and (5) ensure WHO country and liaison office readiness. By December 2020, WRs had been convened on 34 occasions to be briefed on a wide range of timely topics.

The new Regional Director shares his first original Tweet mentioning the novel coronavirus.

A day after officially taking office (3 February), the new WHO Regional Director for Europe, Dr. Hans Kluge, shared his first Tweet mentioning the novel coronavirus. In this message, he emphasized his vision for health in Europe – “United action for better health”. By the end of the year, he had written over 300 original Tweets.

First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Belgium.

## 6 February 2020

First weekly update on international travel and trade restrictions is shared.

WHO/Europe shared its first weekly information send out on “Additional health measures in relation to the 2019-nCoV outbreak” to Member States. In line with provisions of Article 43 of the International Health Regulations (2005), WHO is sharing the information officially provided to WHO by States Parties implementing additional health measures that significantly interfere with international traffic in relation to this event.

First joint regional WHO/Europe–ECDC novel coronavirus network call is held.

The first regular regional network virtual call organized jointly by WHO/Europe and ECDC took place. These calls have involved all Member States and areas, include sharing of country experiences, and have been conducted in English and Russian. Several networks have been established, involving national experts on surveillance and epidemiology, virology and sero-epidemiology. The calls have been held every 1–2 weeks, chaired on a rotating basis by WHO and ECDC.

## 7 February 2020

A WHO/Europe website housing the latest guidance, data and stories on the novel coronavirus goes live.

Since January, over 300 guidance documents, stories and products have been shared with Member States and areas and WHO staff, and housed publicly on the new [website](#) and intranet pages launched by WHO/Europe for the novel coronavirus. Over time, technical units have continued to develop guidance, training materials and tools that address a range of topics, such as human rights and vulnerable populations. These products have addressed the impact of COVID-19 on specific groups and settings, including schoolchildren, people with disabilities, refugees and migrants, pregnant mothers and newborns, elderly people and residents of long-term care facilities, people in prisons, and people with mental health problems.

## 9 February 2020

First WHO/Europe country mission is deployed.

In a first country support mission, WHO experts were deployed to Kyrgyzstan: operational planning (9–22 February), laboratory support (23–29 February), and hospital preparedness and readiness (15–29 February).

This and subsequent WHO expert missions and partner deployments (168 by the end of December 2020) have provided tailored support for planning, preparedness and response and have covered topics such as clinical pathways and breaking the transmission chain; rapid response teams; data collection, information management and reporting; command-control and coordination mechanisms; preparedness, readiness and response; procurement and distribution of essential supplies; knowledge exchange among countries and areas and institutions; advocacy, engagement and risk communication, community engagement and behavioural insight; needs-based and solidarity-focused planning; and resource mobilization.

A detailed count of all missions can be found on the ‘Country-level coordination, planning, and monitoring’ page of WHO/Europe’s COVID-19 Country Support [Dashboard](#).

## 10 February 2020

WHO missions deploy to Serbia and Tajikistan, and Kosovo.<sup>2</sup>

On request, WHO/Europe deployed experts to Serbia, Tajikistan, and Kosovo,<sup>2</sup> to support hospital readiness activities.

2 All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



**11 February 2020**

The research and development (R&D) process for diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics for the novel coronavirus is accelerated in an R&D Blueprint meeting.

The WHO/Europe IMST took part in the R&D Blueprint meeting at WHO headquarters. The meeting brought together experts to accelerate and support research efforts geared towards containing the spread of the epidemic, facilitating care for those affected, and facilitating learning from the current response to better prepare for any future outbreak.

The disease caused by the novel coronavirus is named COVID-19.

Following best practices, WHO announced that the disease caused by the novel coronavirus would be named COVID-19 and the virus named SARS-CoV-2.

**12 February 2020**

A COVID-19 operational readiness checklist is shared with Member States and areas.

An operational readiness checklist for COVID-19 was shared with European countries and areas to facilitate readiness at the local and national levels to detect sick people, test samples of those suspected of having COVID-19, manage patients adequately, maximize infection prevention and control, and maintain open communication with the public.

Interim laboratory biosafety guidance related to the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is shared with Member States.

WHO/Europe disseminated and held training sessions for Member States on this interim global guidance. The document was then translated into Russian for further diffusion and training on risk assessment and biosafety rules to allow better understanding of this guidance.

**13 February 2020**

The Regional Director has first bilateral call with a Member State.

The Regional Director convened a bilateral call with the Prime Minister and Minister of Health of Kazakhstan to discuss COVID-19 readiness. The Regional Director has conducted numerous high-level bilateral discussions with European leaders.

A WHO mission deploys to Kyrgyzstan.

A WHO mission was deployed to Kyrgyzstan to support hospital preparedness and readiness activities there. The mission lasted two weeks and included a limited assessment of hospital readiness, involving short site visits and interviews with representatives of various levels of hospital management.

**14 February 2020**

Practical steps for quarantine are shared with WHO country and liaison offices.

WHO/Europe developed supplementary information for WHO country teams to support WHO's key considerations for repatriation and quarantine. The supplementary note provided practical steps to be followed by the ministries of health on the subject of quarantine.

**17 February 2020**

WHO mission deploys to Azerbaijan.

A laboratory support mission deployed to Azerbaijan, to assist the country with putting in place testing capacity for COVID-19.

**18 February 2020**

First WHO/Europe shipment of COVID-19 testing kits arrives in countries and areas.

PCR testing kits to help bolster testing capacities in Member States arrived in Albania, Lithuania, the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova. By the end of the year, 25,262 RT-PCR test kits had been sent to 29 countries and areas.

**WHO mission deploys to Armenia.**

A WHO mission was deployed to Armenia, to provide technical support for points of entry.

**20 February 2020**

New WHO/Europe online dashboard for COVID-19 data goes live.

An English and Russian language dashboard was established on the WHO/Europe website, providing regular daily updates on COVID-19 in the Region, and was shared with partner networks. The dashboard has become one of WHO/Europe's most valued information sharing tools concerning the evolution of the pandemic, with close to 8.2 million visits between 20 February and 31 December 2020. The dashboard and the underlying database have provided the daily number of new cases and deaths in 54 of the 55 IHR States Parties and seven areas in the Region. The content of the dashboard has been continuously improved and expanded ever since its inception.

**21 February 2020**

Special Envoy for COVID-19 Preparedness and Response is appointed.

The Director-General appointed seven [Special Envoys on COVID-19](#) to provide strategic advice and high-level political advocacy and engagement in different parts of the world. Dr David Nabarro became the Special Envoy responsible for supporting work in the WHO European Region, working in close collaboration with the Regional Director and country offices to coordinate the global response to COVID-19.

**WHO mission deploys to Georgia.**

An operational planning support mission arrived in Georgia, staying until 28 February.

First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Israel.

**22 February 2020**

Rapid spread of COVID-19 detected in northern Italy.

After alarming news on 21 February of 14 cases of COVID-19 in the Lombardy Region of Italy without any known link to previously detected cases or any travel link to China, the WHO/Europe IMST initiated through IHR channels a videoconference with Italy for 22 February, also inviting ECDC. The videoconference was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Health of Italy, Lombardy regional health authorities, ECDC, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, senior WHE leadership from WHO headquarters and the WHO/Europe IMST.

During the teleconference, WHO and ECDC received an update from the Ministry of Health of Italy and health authorities of the Lombardy Region on the increased number of COVID-19 cases, including a timeline of events and the required support from WHO and ECDC.

## 24 February 2020

### First WHO rapid response mission deploys to Italy.

A WHO rapid response mission took place in Italy, where there had been a rapid increase in cases in the previous days. WHO and ECDC experts joined forces with the Italian Ministry of Health and the Istituto Superiore di Sanità to work on clinical management, infection prevention and control, surveillance and risk communication, with a focus on limiting further human-to-human transmission. The mission was extended beyond its original dates to provide additional support in the area of infection prevention and control. A [report](#) was published about the mission. The Regional Director travelled to Italy on 25 February and held high-level meetings and a joint [press conference](#) with the Minister of Health of Italy and the European Commissioner to support the response.

Following the mission, a need was identified for longer-term engagement and collaboration with the response across Italy. WHO/Europe therefore repurposed its Office for Investment for Health and Development, Venice, Italy, appointing an emergency coordinator to oversee operations, and four additional international WHO personnel, focusing on strategic health system management, clinical management, infection prevention and control, and surveillance and epidemiology.

### First OpenWHO infection prevention control course launches

A first course on infection prevention control (IPC) was launched on the global learning platform, OpenWHO.org. WHO/Europe has helped to support Russian translation of select courses, and has promoted enrolment in the WHO European Region. By December 2020, there had been 109,888 enrolments from the Region in OpenWHO courses related to clinical management and IPC, with a course content completion rate of at least 80%.

### WHO/Europe issues a hospital emergency management checklist for COVID-19.

The checklist was distributed to Member States and areas, along with materials on hospital emergency response planning developed by the readiness function of the IMST. The aim was to support hospital readiness and preparedness, thereby ensuring that the prolonged nature of the COVID-19 outbreak in the Region would not lead to the spread of disease and increase in service demands that in turn have the potential to overwhelm the capacity of hospitals and the health system at large.

### WHO missions deploy to Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo<sup>3</sup>

- A hub coordinator mission deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina (24–29 February)
- Two technical support missions deployed, one to Montenegro (24–29 February), and the other to Kosovo<sup>3</sup> (24–29 February).

### WHO/Europe and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Europe and Central Asia Regional Office initiate collaboration on RCCE.

The joint work includes Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) projects, strategies and networks relevant to the country response, such as the [HealthBuddy](#) app that was rolled out on 19 May 2020, and the United Nations country team strategy template.

### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Switzerland.

## 25 February 2020

### Countries share best practices on infection prevention and control, with a spotlight on COVID-19.

Infection prevention and control focal points and experts from 15 Member States took part in a two-day meeting in Copenhagen, the second best-practices meeting on the implementation of the core components of infection prevention and control programmes.

3 All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

### A central messaging platform for laboratory communications activates.

WHO/Europe began to share and receive informational network messages via a global messaging platform that reaches 350 laboratory experts in 58 countries and territories (beyond the WHO European Region). The platform shares the latest laboratory and testing information and latest resources in laboratory diagnostics for the novel coronavirus. This includes guidance, new courses, GISRS updates (genetic characterization of nCoV), training workshop invitations, and more. WHO/Europe has maintained regular sharing, with a total of 52 messages sent by the end of December 2020.

### 26 February 2020

#### Laboratory Task Force for High Threat Pathogens convenes its first meeting in the context of COVID-19.

The European Region Laboratory Task Force for High Threat Pathogens held its first meeting in the context of COVID-19. Members and partners had the opportunity to provide information on COVID-19 globally and in the Region, including laboratory readiness.

#### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Austria, and Croatia.

### 27 February 2020

#### An emergency simulation exercise on COVID-19 takes place in Georgia.

WHO supported simulation exercises on COVID-19 in Georgia. More exercises were held in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

#### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Norway, the Republic of North Macedonia and Romania.

### 28 February 2020

#### WHO assesses the world as at very high risk of the spread of COVID-19.

WHO's global risk assessment was reviewed for the fourth time as COVID-19 spread. The review raised the level of risk to public health associated with COVID-19 to very high risk, for all countries and areas, including the WHO European Region.

#### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in the Netherlands and Lithuania.

### 29 February 2020

#### WHO deploys mission to Uzbekistan.

A WHO hospital readiness mission arrived in Uzbekistan, staying until 7 March.

#### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Iceland, and San Marino.

By the end of February, the WHO European Region had over 1 000 reported cases of novel coronavirus.





**ВОЗ**

TRIAL GRADE

Всемирная организация  
здравоохранения

200 PCS

**MARCH**

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## 1 March 2020

### WHO/Europe expands its media team on COVID-19.

As the European Region became the epicentre of the pandemic, the world's media focused on WHO and Europe, and the Media Office received hundreds of enquiries from agencies such as Reuters, AP, AFP, DPA, Xinhua, Aljazeera and RIA Novosti, as well as international media outlets such as the International New York Times, BBC World Service, and RFI. Every week, the media team handled over 100 interview requests, prepared over 10 interviews, and answered an average of 350 media enquiries. Media enquiries answered totalled over 5 800 by the end of 2020.

### WHO deploys mission to Tajikistan.

A laboratory support mission to Tajikistan took place on 1–11 March 2020 to support the implementation of laboratory testing capacities for COVID-19. The mission included assessments of Tajikistan's current capabilities and capacities. It also included the provision of support to the designated National Public Health Laboratory to ensure its readiness to detect SARS-CoV-2 in clinical samples by testing and verifying the SARS-CoV-2 virus testing methods.

### Lockdowns and restrictions on international travel begin across Europe.

During the first half of March, several countries and areas in the Region began to implement widespread measures, including lockdowns and restrictions on domestic and international traffic. The inability to travel both domestically and internationally had a huge impact on WHO's response operations – particularly WHO's capacity to deploy surge staff and other personnel, including staff of partner organizations, and to provide supplies to countries and areas. This affected operations across Europe for several months.

### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Monaco, Ireland, and Luxembourg.

## 2 March 2020

### WHO/Europe convenes ministerial and ambassadorial briefings to prioritize country readiness for the Region.

Ministers and ambassadors were convened in virtual briefings on country readiness. In his opening statement, the Regional Director gave an [overview](#) of WHO's work in the first two months of the response, and emphasized the right to health for all. He underscored the importance of coordination as the way forward in the COVID-19 response.

### WHO deploys missions to Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Laboratory support missions were deployed to Armenia (2–6 March), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2–4 March) and Uzbekistan, to support laboratory testing capacity for COVID-19.

A hospital readiness mission was also deployed, to Tajikistan (2–11 March), focusing on four institutions (Dushanbe City Clinical Infectious Disease Hospital, Tursunzade Central District Hospital, Hissar Central District Hospital and the Dushanbe City Clinical Children's Infectious Disease Hospital).

### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Armenia, and Czechia.

## 3 March 2020

### WHO deploys mission to Ukraine.

A mission was deployed to Ukraine (3–6 March) to support clinical management capacities and capabilities.

### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Andorra, Latvia and Portugal.

#### 4 March 2020

##### WHO deploys mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A hospital preparedness mission deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina (4–6 March).

##### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Gibraltar, Poland, Slovenia, and Ukraine.

#### 5 March 2020

##### First personal protective equipment (PPE) shipments are delivered to priority countries and areas in Europe.

Health care workers in the Region received a first shipment of PPE, which was procured with the support of partners including Azerbaijan, Germany, Kuwait, the United Kingdom, the Central Emergency Response Fund and the European Union. By the end of December 2020, 271 shipments of protective items had been delivered to priority countries and areas, overall including 38 million surgical masks, 7.8 million gloves, 5 million respirators, as well as protective goggles and gowns.

##### WHO/Europe convenes all programmes at the Regional Office to engage in the response.

WHO/Europe brought together all programmes of the Regional Office to engage in the COVID-19 response. This led to the development of cross-divisional approaches to COVID-19, using the dual-track approach to respond to COVID-19 while supporting countries in maintaining essential services.

##### WHO deploys mission and hosts simulation exercise in Kazakhstan.

A WHO mission deployed to Kazakhstan (5–6 March) and facilitated a simulation exercise to prepare for COVID-19.

##### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Hungary and Liechtenstein.

#### 6 March 2020

##### WHO/Europe switches to remote training and capacity-building for COVID-19.

A risk communications and community engagement webinar series was launched for WHO offices in countries and areas, ministries of health, public health authorities, UNICEF, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and other national and regional partner agency staff, with expert presentations from WHO and key partners including UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (USCDC), and IFRC. An initial series ran for 13 weeks with over 500 participants.

Clinical management and infection prevention and control webinars also started being conducted for different countries and areas, tailored to their needs. A first capacity-building webinar on clinical management was provided to health workers in Kosovo.<sup>4</sup>

##### GOARN experts deploy to support WHO/Europe.

GOARN lab and epidemiology experts joined the Regional Office team (6 March–30 April). Since March and through the end of December 2020, there had been 23 separate GOARN deployments to support WHO/Europe's COVID-19 response.

##### First Regional Director multilateral discussion takes place.

The Regional Director participated in a first meeting of regional partners on the COVID-19 response. There have been numerous multilateral discussions convened in subsequent months.

##### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in the Faroe Islands.

4 All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

## 7 March 2020

### WHO deploys missions to Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Hospital readiness missions deployed to Armenia (7–13 March) and Azerbaijan (7–16 March).

First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Malta, Serbia, Slovakia, and the Holy See.

## 8 March 2020

### WHO deploys mission to the Republic of North Macedonia.

A WHO laboratory support mission supported implementation of laboratory testing capacity for COVID-19 (8–9 March).

First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova.

## 9 March 2020

### New behavioural insights tool launched.

In partnership with Erfurt University in Germany, WHO/Europe launched a [behavioural insights research tool](#) for the regional and global collection of data on risk perceptions, public knowledge, trust and behaviours. By December 2020, the data collected had contributed directly to the response in 27 countries and areas in the Region. WHO/Europe provides direct support to 17 of those Member States and areas for implementation of the tool. Moreover, though the tool was developed to collect data in the WHO European Region, it has been accessed and adapted for use in countries all over the world.

### WHO deploys missions to Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

A team of WHO experts was deployed to Azerbaijan (9–13 March) to work with the national response committee and develop a three to six-month national preparedness and response plan for COVID-19, covering surveillance, hospital preparedness, clinical management, infection prevention and control, RCCE, and points of entry.

In addition, hospital preparedness missions deployed to Georgia (9–30 March) and Serbia (9–15 March); a technical support mission took place in the Republic of North Macedonia

(9–14 March); an infection prevention control mission deployed to Tajikistan (9–15 March); and a laboratory support mission deployed to Ukraine (9–13 March).

First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Albania.

## 10 March 2020

### WHO laboratory support missions deploy to Montenegro and Uzbekistan.

Laboratory support missions deployed to Montenegro (10–13 March) and Uzbekistan (10–15 March) to support implementation of laboratory testing capacity for COVID-19.

First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Cyprus and Guernsey.

## 11 March 2020

### WHO makes the assessment that the COVID-19 outbreak is a pandemic.

During a press conference, the WHO Director-General stated that the COVID-19 outbreak could be characterized as a [pandemic](#).

### WHO mission deploys to Uzbekistan.

A mission providing laboratory support arrived in Uzbekistan (11–15 March).

**12 March 2020**

WHO/Europe convenes the Twenty-seventh Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe.

At the third session of the Committee, the Regional Director made a [statement](#) on the COVID-19 situation in Europe.

[First Regional Director multilateral \(subregional\) discussion with ministers of health of western Balkan Member States takes place.](#)

The Regional Director took part in a first multilateral (subregional) [discussion](#) regarding COVID-19 with ministers of health of western Balkan Member States. Further information on subsequent multilateral (subregional) discussions can be found on the Regional Director's [Twitter](#) feed.

[First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Turkey.](#)

**13 March 2020**

[WHE convenes a new COVID-19 coordination platform with 11 United Nations agencies and the Red Cross movement.](#)

The coordination platform, which is now known as the Regional WHO-UN-RCM Coordination Platform for COVID-19 enhances coordination at country level to ensure a multisectoral response, facilitated at the regional level, harmonizing WHO and United Nations agency activities in implementing the WHO SPRP. By the end of the year, the platform met on 13 occasions.

[The first cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Albania, Jersey, Kazakhstan, and Kosovo.<sup>5</sup>](#)

**15 March 2020**

[The Regional Office switches to a remote working modality.](#)

This change in working modality reflected the lockdowns occurring across the Region at the time, and particularly the advice issued by the Government of Denmark, where the Regional Office is hosted.

[WHO/Europe publishes interim guidance for prisons.](#)

An interim guidance document regarding preparedness for, and prevention and control of, COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention was [published](#) on the WHO/Europe site.

**16 March 2020**

[GOARN operational review for COVID-19 takes place.](#)

WHO/Europe and GOARN partners from the Region participated in an operational review for COVID-19.

[WHO deploys laboratory support mission to Armenia and Kazakhstan.](#)

A laboratory support mission deployed to Kazakhstan to support implementation of laboratory testing capacity for COVID-19 (16–21 March). A mission also deployed to Armenia (16 March–14 April).

5 All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

### 17 March 2020

#### Laboratories across Europe are invited to participate in external quality assessment.

Eighty-one laboratories from 51 European countries and areas were invited to participate in the external quality assessment (EQA) of their COVID-19 testing capacity. By 13 December, WHO had distributed EQA panels for virological and serological assays to 75 laboratories in 51 countries (with an average score of 94.1%).

#### WHO deploys mission to Kosovo.<sup>6</sup>

A mission deployed to Kosovo<sup>1</sup> (17–19 March) to support clinical management and surveillance capacities.

#### The Regional Director starts weekly press briefings.

The Regional Director started weekly press briefings in English, while Russian language press conferences also took place regularly from 3 June, engaging hundreds of journalists and citizens.

#### First cases of the novel coronavirus in Montenegro and Uzbekistan are confirmed.

### 18 March 2020

#### WHO deploys mission to Georgia.

A rapid assessment of testing and treatment for COVID-19 took place in Sukhumi, Georgia, in close coordination with the United Nations Development Programme, given its established presence in the Caucasus region (18–20 March).

#### WHO launches the global Solidarity Trial.

By the end of March 2020, 76 countries globally, including 21 countries and areas in the European Region, had expressed an interest in participating in the WHO-coordinated *Solidarity Trial*. By 10 July 2020, 16 countries had been given full approval to participate, with Norway and Spain being the first countries in the world to enrol in the Trial.

### 20 March 2020

#### WHO/Europe publishes guidance and hosts call with countries and areas on routine immunization services.

WHO/Europe published guidance on routine immunization services during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Region and conducted calls with 44 Member States and areas to (1) assess the status of immunization services, (2) provide a platform to exchange information and lessons learned, and (3) provide countries and areas with tailored technical assistance and guidance.

#### WHO/Europe begins weekly risk communications check-ins with countries and areas.

WHO/Europe scaled up country and liaison office RCCE support by establishing bilateral weekly check-ins with 25 countries and areas. On average, each week WHO/Europe responds to support requests from seven countries and areas. In April, these were supplemented with weekly “meet the Communication Pillar” webinars with country and liaison offices to provide more targeted support to their COVID-19 responses.

#### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Greenland and Kyrgyzstan.

### 22 March 2020

#### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Isle of Man.

6 All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



**23 March 2020****An action plan for scaling up national laboratory capacities is developed.**

WHO/Europe produced a technical note and action plan containing advice for Member States on scaling up laboratory operations with the aim of providing reliable, timely and safe tests for the COVID-19 response. These documents complement the WHO interim [guidance](#) for laboratory testing and the [Prioritized Laboratory Testing Strategy](#). The action plan refers to scaling up laboratory capacities to perform an increased number of nucleic acid amplification tests (NAAT) for COVID-19. By the end of the year, action plans had been implemented in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of North Macedonia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

**WHO deploys mission to Uzbekistan.**

A laboratory support mission deployed to Uzbekistan (23–31 March).

**24 March 2020****WHO revises its regional response structure to meet evolving needs in countries and areas.**

WHO moved from short-term response needs towards a sustained response. The new structure further engaged staff from across WHO/Europe as the infection spread eastwards across Europe.

**25 March 2020****WHO/Europe publishes interim guidance for refugee and migrant health.**

An interim [guidance](#) document was published, intended for use by health authorities in guiding the actions taken by health care providers for refugees and migrants living in all types of settings, in relation to COVID-19.

**26 March 2020****The Regional Director requests all country and liaison offices to repurpose their work to COVID-19.**

The Regional Director reaffirmed and strengthened the implementation of emergency measures under the ERF through the full repurposing of country and liaison offices towards emergency activities.

**29 March 2020****WHO deploys mission to Spain.**

The Senior Adviser to the Director-General on Organizational Change led a [mission to Spain](#) (29 March–3 April) to learn from the rapid outbreak of COVID-19 in the country and help advise on both the national and international responses. The mission included visits to the capital and three regions, as well as to several health care facilities. It highlighted the need for countries and areas to understand that the virus can overwhelm even the most robust health systems, resulting in the need to entirely reconfigure health sectors in response.

**30 March 2020****COVID-19 Solidarity Programme is launched for the six Eastern Partnership countries.**

The European Commission supported WHO's efforts on the ground with a €30 million contribution, announced on 30 March, for six Eastern Partnership countries that are also Member States of WHO/Europe – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine – to meet their immediate needs in responding to COVID-19.

**31 March 2020****A regional approach is adopted to address vulnerable populations across Europe.**

This approach provided the basis for WHO/Europe to provide targeted support to countries and areas and health workers on psychological support, gender, and violence reduction; to set up a COVID-19 surveillance project in prisons; to address the needs of people living with disabilities, leaving no one behind; and to provide front-line service providers with technical support through a variety of networks in the Region.

By the end of March, the European Region had more than 400,000 cases of the novel coronavirus.



**APRIL**



**1 April 2020****WHO/Europe works with Global Shapers youth network to combat misinformation.**

WHO/Europe worked in partnership with [Global Shapers](#), a worldwide network of over 9 000 young, engaged and highly educated volunteers, to provide youth in the Region with accurate and timely information about COVID-19 and to monitor trends, concerns and rumours. The Shapers have engaged over 100 000 young people in their extended network so far.

**WHO/Europe shares recommendations and action points for strengthening health systems.**

Countries and areas received [recommendations](#) and [action points](#) for strengthening the response to COVID-19 by their health systems.

**2 April 2020****The European COVID-19 Health System Response Monitor is launched.**

The new [platform](#) launched on 2 April is a joint undertaking by WHO/Europe, the European Commission and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. The Monitor compiles and analyses country information collected by the public health and social measures team of the WHO/Europe COVID-19 Incident Management Support Team (IMST).

**3 April 2020****Priority countries and areas receive guidance on developing national strategies to ensure compliance with health protection measures.**

WHO/Europe launched an RCCE strategy template for national health authorities to help countries and areas ensure that people comply with health protection measures recommended by the health authorities and adopt protective behaviours. So far, 17 out of 25 targeted countries and areas have finalized or are developing the strategy.

Subsequently, on 30 April, a United Nations Country Team RCCE strategy template was launched, and by 22 June 2020 had been implemented by 12 countries and areas in the Region.

**5 April 2020****WHO deploys missions to Uzbekistan.**

A laboratory support mission deployed to Uzbekistan (5–10 April).

**WHO deploys mission to Belarus.**

An expert mission providing laboratory, operational planning and RCCE support deployed to Belarus (5–8 April). As the COVID-19 outbreak in Belarus entered the community transmission phase, the mission recommended the introduction of community-wide steps to increase physical distancing. A report was subsequently published.

**6 April 2020****WHO/Europe issues tools on forecast surge capacity and essential supply needs.**

WHO/Europe issued two technical guidance documents regarding health systems strengthening as part of the response to COVID-19. One contained recommendations on creating surge capacity for acute and intensive care, and the other on the supply of essential medicines and health technologies. These documents were published on the WHO/Europe website in English and Russian.

**8 April 2020****“Where do we stand today on COVID-19, and what have we learned?” – the Regional Director makes a statement to the Region.**

In the 15th week of the battle with COVID-19, with over 50 000 deaths and over 680 000 cases in the Region, the Regional Director made a [statement](#) to the public on lessons learned in the Region so far.

**WHO/Europe publishes a position paper on breastfeeding and COVID-19.**

A paper was [published](#) sharing guidance for safe breastfeeding.

**9 April 2020**

WHO/Europe shares updated guidance for COVID-19 in prisons.

A new [checklist](#) to evaluate preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention was published and shared with Member States and areas.

**14 April 2020**

WHO shares a COVID-19 strategy update.

WHO issued a [COVID-19 strategy update](#). Based on this updated global strategy, a Region-specific strategy was developed and updated as the situation developed.

**15 April 2020**

WHO/Europe launches a new weekly newsletter.

The weekly WHO/Europe COVID-19 [newsletter](#) was launched, providing countries and areas in the Region and the general public with a weekly overview of the COVID-19 situation in the Region, as well as WHO's ongoing preparedness and response activities and guidance for Member States and areas, health care workers, and the public.

**16 April 2020**

Steps for a safe "new normal" are outlined by the Regional Director.

The Regional Director made a [statement](#) to the public regarding the transition to a "new normal" in the Region amid the ongoing pandemic, and how this must be guided by public health principles.

**17 April 2020**

Regular calls are initiated with United Nations agencies regarding RCCE.

The WHE initiated regular calls on RCCE with UNICEF, UNHCR and International Organization for Migration regional offices, with a focus on vulnerable populations.

**18 April 2020**

WHO/Europe distributes guidance on the continuation of essential health care services.

Following the issuance of this interim guidance, a methodology was developed for rapid situation analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on essential health services delivery and a four-step approach to support countries and areas in responding to their needs was established.

**19 April 2020**

WHO-certified EMT from Poland deploys to Kyrgyzstan.

An EMT from the Polish Centre for International Aid was deployed with WHO support for a 10-day mission to Kyrgyzstan (19–28 April). The Polish clinicians included three anaesthesiologists, three paramedics, a general practitioner and an intensive care nurse.

**20 April 2020**

The Regional Director urges countries and areas to maintain routine vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the occasion of European Immunization Week 2020, the Regional Director made a statement to the public to reiterate the importance of the continuation of routine immunization services throughout the Region.

**22 April 2020**

WHO/Europe shares guidance for countries and areas on reducing the adverse financial effects of the pandemic.

WHO/Europe published key health financing actions that countries and areas in Europe can take to reduce the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as part of a broader health system response.





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### 23 April 2020

New partner coordination is established with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe regarding points of entry and transport.

Coordination was established with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) regarding points of entry and transport responses to COVID-19 in Europe, further strengthening capacities in the Region.

### 24 April 2020

WHO/Europe issues advice to countries and areas on the gradual easing of COVID-19 measures.

WHO/Europe published key considerations for the gradual easing of the lockdown restrictions introduced by many countries and areas in response to the spread of COVID-19 across the Region.

### 25 April 2020

A new weekly COVID-19 surveillance report is launched.

A weekly surveillance report was launched. Weekly data and analyses updates on new cases, new deaths, and a breakdown of cases based on age, gender, and various characteristics such as underlying conditions and occupation have been included.

### 27 April 2020

WHO deploys mission to Italy on safe hospitals for COVID-19.

An expert in safe and rational design of health facilities was deployed to Bologna and Puglia in Italy for one month to support the establishment of a severe acute respiratory infection treatment centre.

### 30 April 2020

Guidance for responsible media reporting is distributed.

Some 200 journalists received a guidance package issued by WHO/Europe for the media on accurate, ethical and responsible reporting. This was followed by a targeted briefing to over 100 English- and Russian-speaking journalists.

By the end of April, the WHO European Region had more than 1 million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus.



**MAY**

### 1 May 2020

Guidance for community pharmacists as more people seek advice on management of symptoms is shared.

Countries and areas received [technical guidance](#) to support pharmacists and other staff working in community pharmacies on the issues raised by the COVID-19 outbreak.

### WHO deploys rapid response mission to Tajikistan.

A WHO [mission deployed to Tajikistan](#) on a humanitarian flight following an invitation from the Minister of Health and Social Protection of the Population of Tajikistan. The objectives of the mission were to understand the response measures currently being taken to manage the outbreak and to provide guidance on surveillance, clinical management, infection prevention and control, laboratory and points of entry, and RCCE. A [report](#) was published.

### First cases of the novel coronavirus are confirmed in Tajikistan.

All Member States and areas in the European Region, except Turkmenistan, had now reported COVID-19 cases to WHO.

### 4 May 2020

A new regular operational update for Europe is launched.

The first regular COVID-19 WHO European Region operational update was published. These updates are publicly available summaries of the global and regional situations, emergency public health measures taken across the Region, WHO/Europe's response, and country-level gaps and challenges.

### 5 May 2020

First-of-its kind virtual mission to Armenia takes place.

A first-of-its kind virtual mission to Armenia took place via Zoom (5–7 May). Experts from WHO/Europe and the Robert Koch Institute worked with Armenian health authorities on assessing the COVID-19 situation and offered advice on the strategy for easing COVID-19 measures. Some 400 mission participants subsequently worked together in a virtual space over the course of two weeks.

### 6 May 2020

The first Central European Initiative (CEI)–WHO functional task force kicks off.

The CEI–WHO task force, a functional partnership, convened by the CEI and WHO/Europe, began work. On 15 May, the Regional Director also [addressed CEI Heads of State](#) to underline the importance of cooperation, solidarity and trust as principles for guiding the response.

### Member states share pandemic experiences and strategies in virtual dialogue.

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, WHO/Europe and Israel held a joint [virtual dialogue](#) with 55 IHR (2005) States Parties from the European Region regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, as a means of sharing experiences and strategies for response, transition and resilience.

### GOARN partners mission deploys to Tajikistan.

GOARN partners were deployed to Tajikistan in several follow-up missions (6–16 May, 13–27 June, and 22 July–13 September). In this first mission, two GOARN experts were deployed to support microbiology and virology laboratory activities and IPC.

### 7 May 2020

A latest rapid risk assessment and modelling methods are shared with countries and area.

IHR national focal points across Europe were briefed on the latest rapid risk assessment and modelling work related to COVID-19 in a meeting organized by ECDC and WHO/Europe.

### 8 May 2020

Guidance regarding health in hot weather during the pandemic is shared.

New information sheets for preventing the adverse health effects of hot weather while protecting oneself from COVID-19 were published by WHO/Europe.

### 11 May 2020

Updated risk communication tools are shared.

WHO/Europe shared with countries and areas an expanded RCCE strategy template, with a new chapter focusing on the transition out of lockdown.

### 12 May 2020

Guidance for people in prison and for people visiting prisons is shared.

WHO/Europe published new factsheets for people visiting prisons and for people in prisons.

### 18 May 2020

European leaders express the need for a strong WHO at the Seventy-third World Health Assembly.

A [draft resolution](#) on the COVID-19 response was proposed at the [Seventy-third World Health Assembly](#) (which was held virtually for the first time in history) and adopted the next day. Participants included numerous high-level representatives, including many from the European Region, such as the President of the European Commission, the German Chancellor, the French President, the Italian Prime Minister and the Spanish President.

[The HealthBuddy chatbot is rolled out to countries and areas in Europe and Central Asia.](#)

HealthBuddy, is a multilingual interactive chatbot intended to help countries and areas in the Region to access accurate information and counter misinformation surrounding the virus. This was a flagship collaboration between WHO/Europe and the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office.

[First weekly laboratory workshop is held.](#)

The first in a series of weekly workshops was conducted to allow laboratory specialists to address technical questions and share experiences.

### 20 May 2020

[Guidance on providing palliative care during the COVID-19 pandemic is shared.](#)

WHO/Europe published a guidance document, sharing experiences from Spain with regard to the continuation of palliative care during the pandemic.



**21 May 2020****Guidance on managing and preventing COVID-19 in long-term care settings is shared.**

WHO/Europe published a technical guidance document, identifying 10 policy objectives for decision-makers, policy-makers, and national or regional health authorities as they strive to prevent and manage the COVID-19 pandemic in long-term care settings.

**27 May 2020****WHO deploys virtual mission to Kosovo.<sup>7</sup>**

WHO deployed a virtual mission to Kosovo<sup>7</sup> in collaboration with the Public Health Authority of Kosovo<sup>7</sup> (27–28 May). The mission focused on reviewing current disease control measures, identifying the main activities to be reinforced to ensure health service continuity in Kosovo,<sup>1</sup> and undertaking RCCE.

**28 May 2020****WHO deploys mission to Georgia.**

A rapid response mission, including laboratory support, deployed to Sukhumi, Georgia (28–30 May).

**29 May 2020****WHO/Europe releases guidance on ensuring people-centred diabetes care during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

A guidance document was published, sharing experiences from Portugal.

**WHO/Europe releases guidance on ensuring continuity of cancer care while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

A guidance document was published, sharing experiences from Kyrgyzstan.

**30 May 2020****WHO deploys mission to Italy.**

A hospital preparedness mission deployed to Italy (30 May–31 July). With the changing epidemiological situation in Italy, support was now being directed towards repurposing facilities for regular clinical service provision while maintaining high levels of readiness for COVID management activities during the post-acute phase

By the end of May, the WHO European Region had more than 2 million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus.

<sup>7</sup> All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).





**JUNE**

**1 June 2020**

WHO/Europe shares guidance on adapting services, based on experiences from Italy.

A [guidance document](#) for health care professionals was published, regarding adaptation of services to respond effectively to coronary artery and cerebrovascular disease during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on experiences from Italy.

**3 June 2020**

Guidance regarding infection prevention and control among children and adolescents in detention facilities is shared.

WHO/Europe published a [factsheet](#) on children and adolescents deprived of liberty in the context of the COVID-19 response in the Region.

[WHO deploys mission to Tajikistan.](#)

A second rapid response mission to Tajikistan (3 June–3 July) provided emergency coordination, surveillance and laboratory support.

**6 June 2020**

[WHO-certified EMT deploys to Tajikistan.](#)

The WHO classified, Type 1 EMT, provided by the Polish Centre for International Aid, deployed to Tajikistan (6 June–27 July) to provide additional capacity for infectious disease outbreak and intensive care units. Fourteen staff worked with COVID-19 treatment departments and intensive care units at priority health care facilities identified by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population.

**8 June 2020**

[Further guidance and best practices are shared via networks such as the WHO European Healthy Cities Network.](#)

To further enhance sharing of risk communications and community engagement guidance, best practices, and resources, WHO/Europe partnered with the [WHO European Healthy Cities Network](#) and health care worker networks in the Region.

**12 June 2020**

[Global Shapers hubs is linked with WHO country and liaison offices.](#)

WHO/Europe established links between the [Global Shapers Community](#) (an initiative of the World Economic Forum) and country and liaison offices, for enhanced country-level collaboration and volunteer RCCE support.

**13 June 2020**

[GOARN deploys experts to Tajikistan.](#)

Experts from GOARN, including partners from the Robert Koch Institute, a GOARN/WHO collaborating centre, the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine, and Public Health England, deployed to Tajikistan as part of a two-week [scoping mission](#) for the deployment of [rapid response mobile laboratories](#) in rural areas of the country (13–20 June).

**17 June 2020**

[Guidance on adapting primary health care services more effectively for responding to COVID-19 is published.](#)

WHO/Europe published a guidance for primary health care policy-makers on how to adapt primary health care services to more effectively address the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**18 June 2020**

[WHO deploys virtual mission to the Republic of North Macedonia.](#)

A virtual technical support mission deployed to the Republic of North Macedonia in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of North Macedonia (18–29 June). WHO experts engaged with officials and technical staff, providing technical support and guidance on the next steps to take in all areas of the COVID-19 response.

**19 June 2020**

**A new coordination group for essential health services continuity amid COVID-19 is established.**

A new coordination group came together under the WHO/Europe IMST to provide comprehensive support to countries and areas regarding the continuity of essential health services during the pandemic. By the end of July 2020, nine countries and areas were implementing the four-step process to assess the impact of the pandemic on essential health services and undertake actions to restore any disrupted services.

**WHO deploys mission to Armenia.**

A rapid response mission deployed to Armenia (19 June–5 July) providing high-level technical support, including surveillance, hospital preparedness and readiness, and repurposing of health facilities for COVID-19, affirming the role of public health centres in the response. WHO also coordinated with international medical teams bilaterally deployed to support the country.

**22 June 2020**

**WHO deploys mission to the Republic of North Macedonia.**

An expert mission deployed to the Republic of North Macedonia (22–25 June), meeting senior health officials and religious leaders and visiting hospitals and long-term care facilities. The team supported the response to a resurgence of cases, provided advice regarding the risks associated with mass gatherings and measures that can be taken to manage those risks, and shared lessons learned from other countries' and areas' responses to COVID-19.

**25 June 2020**

**The Small Countries Initiative convened for a briefing on tourism and medicines and vaccines access related to COVID-19.**

WHO/Europe convened the 11 Member States of the Small Countries Initiative (Andorra, Cyprus, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, San Marino and Slovenia) to brief them on the current COVID-19 situation and discuss access to medicines and vaccines related to COVID-19, as well as reviving tourism.

**26 June 2020**

**WHO-certified EMT deploys to Armenia.**

A WHO-certified Italian Type 2 EMT deployed to Armenia through the WHO EMT initiative for an almost month-long COVID-19 support mission with 11 staff members (26 June–17 July). This level of EMT can provide round-the-clock emergency care with deployable field hospitals and is equipped with an operating room for emergency surgical treatments and an intensive care unit.

**29 June 2020**

**WHO mission deploys to the Republic of North Macedonia.**

A laboratory support mission deployed to the Republic of North Macedonia (29 June–10 July) to support the country's assessment of its laboratory testing capacity for COVID-19.

By the end of June, the WHO European Region had more than 2.6 million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus.





**JULY**



**6 July 2020****WHO mission deploys to Turkmenistan.**

A WHO team of experts, with the participation of the Robert Koch Institute (a GOARN partner), deployed to Turkmenistan (6–16 July). The team worked with the health authorities on all aspects of COVID-19. The WHO experts visited public health centres, health care facilities, emergency centres, laboratories and other facilities to address areas such as infection prevention and control, laboratory services, patient management, surveillance and RCCE. A debrief of the mission is available [online](#).

**10 July 2020****Considerations for mass gatherings are shared with Member States.**

WHO/Europe and the WHO Regional Office for the Americas convened countries and areas to share and learn about considerations and assessment methodologies for mass gatherings. The 440 participants and speakers discussed the considerations for holding cultural events during the pandemic.

**WHO mission deploys to Kosovo.<sup>8</sup>**

A rapid support mission deployed to Kosovo.<sup>8</sup> to support the WHO Office in Pristina and the Public Health Authority on strengthening the response to COVID-19, after a resurgence of cases.

Following the mission, WHO/Europe, with the WHO Office in Pristina, mediated a meeting between intensive care staff at the S. Orsola-Malpighi University Hospital in Bologna and intensive care staff from the University Clinical Centre of Kosovo<sup>8</sup> in Pristina, regarding mechanical ventilation case management.

**13 July 2020****WHO-certified EMT deploys to Armenia.**

A WHO-certified German Type 1 EMT from International Search and Rescue deployed for two weeks to support critical treatment needs for COVID-19. Within the team were emergency doctors, nurses, artificial respiration specialists, intensive care staff and experts in the manufacture of disinfectants.

**20 July 2020****A WHO mission deploys to Kazakhstan.**

A WHO mission deployed from 20 July to 1 August 2020 to support COVID-19 case detection by laboratory diagnostics. The mission's aim was to explore the potential causes of reported pneumonia cases that had not been laboratory confirmed as COVID-19 cases. During the mission, the team also provided advice on how to strengthen the laboratory component of the COVID-19 response in Kazakhstan.

**21 July 2020****A high-level WHO mission deploys to Azerbaijan.**

Under the auspices of the Office of the President of Azerbaijan, a WHO team of experts was deployed from 21 July to 2 August to provide recommendations and to support response planning. A previous mission had been conducted in March.

**22 July 2020****GOARN deploys experts to Tajikistan.**

An additional eight experts from the Russian Federation were [deployed to Tajikistan](#) through GOARN to support the COVID-19 response and national capacity-building efforts in the areas of laboratory practices, virology and microbiology.

<sup>8</sup> All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

### 23 July 2020

Countries and areas receive guidance for conducting intra-action reviews.

WHO/Europe distributed [guidance](#) and tools on conducting COVID-19 intra-action reviews (IARs) to countries and areas in the Region. This type of review promotes continuous learning and improvement of the outbreak response at the country level. Following the publication, the Regional Director communicated with Member States and areas to encourage the sharing of lessons learned throughout the Region. Later in the autumn, on 6 and 7 October 2020, WHO/Europe, together with ECDC, held two joint training sessions on the intra-action review process. To date, three IARs have been conducted.

### 27 July 2020

GOARN deploys a laboratory mission to Tajikistan.

A GOARN partner deployment concerning laboratory support arrived in Tajikistan, staying until 13 September.

### 29 July 2020

New WHO publication outlines actions to protect people who use drugs during COVID-19 pandemic.

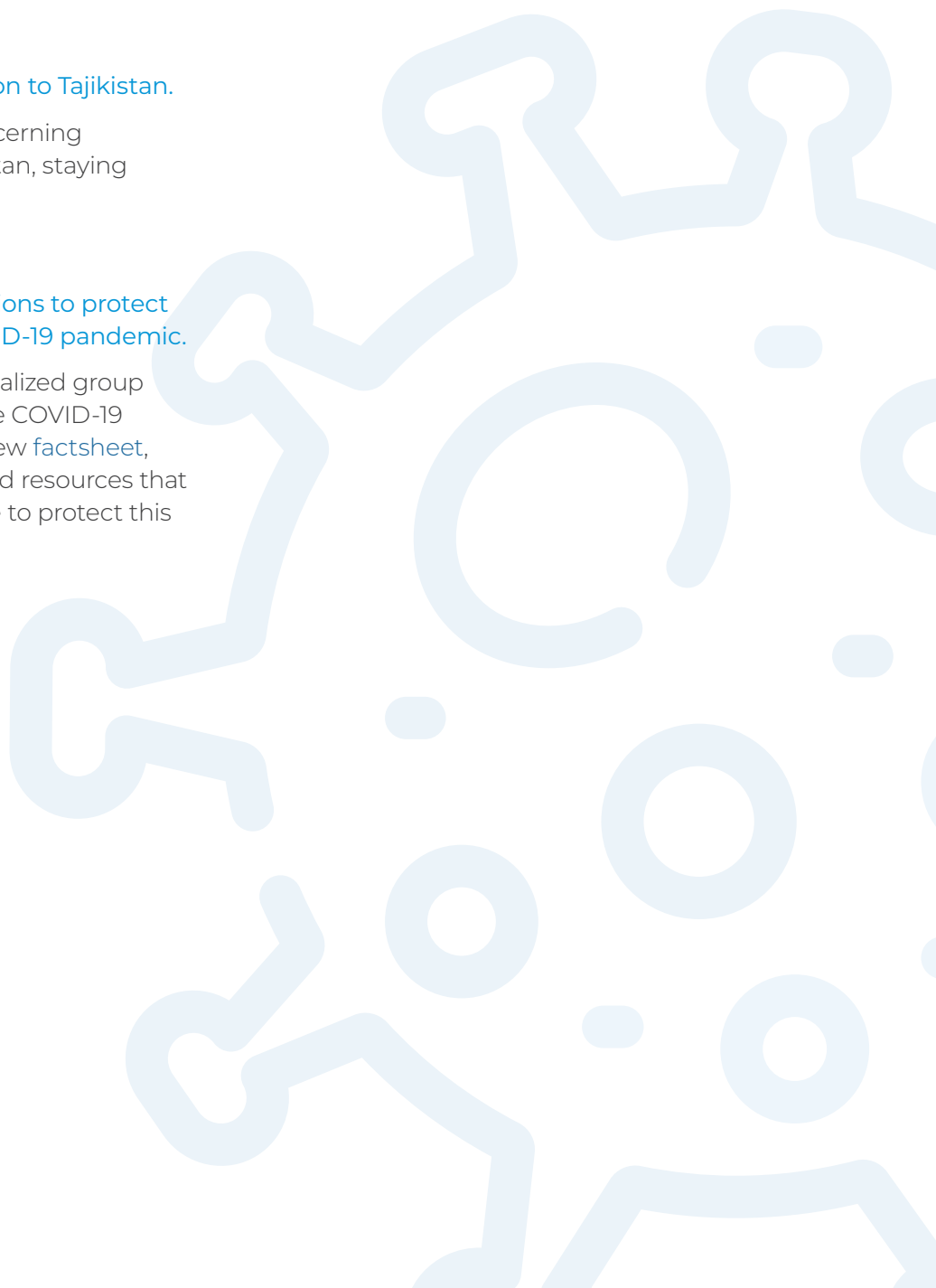
People who use drugs are a marginalized group that has been vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the publication of a new [factsheet](#), WHO/Europe shared the actions and resources that Member States and others can take to protect this vulnerable group.

### 31 July 2020

WHO shares key actions to protect children and adolescents deprived of liberty; a vulnerable population.

Children and adolescents deprived of liberty are a vulnerable group that has been further marginalized during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the publication of a new [factsheet](#), WHO/Europe shared the actions and resources that Member States and others can take to protect this vulnerable group.

By the end of July, the WHO European Region had more than 3 million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus.







# AUGUST



**1 August 2020**

**A WHO mission deploys to Italy to support hospital preparedness and readiness.**

A WHO mission deployed to Italy from 1 August to 31 December 2020 to support hospital preparedness and readiness. The mission included a rapid assessment for repurposing of designated wards for COVID-19 management, review and establishment of patient and staff movement pathways and identification of proper area for screening and triage of patients to reduce the risk of cross contamination and transmission. It also included support of the implementation of infection prevention and control core components at facility level and provide trainings on correct use of personal protective equipment and critical items management.

**5 August 2020**

**The Regional Platform on COVID-19 vaccination is established.**

To better coordinate COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination activities in the WHO European Region, a Regional Working Group on COVID-19 vaccination (RWG) was established. The RWG is a multi-stakeholder platform, overseen by the European Technical Advisory Groups of Experts (ETAGE).

The RWG allows regional and national partner agencies, national public health institutes, research institutes and academia to harness expertise, and supports Member States through tailored tools and guidance.

Five technical focus area groups were created to focus on the following issues:

1. Advocacy and resource mobilization, including equitable access
2. Immunization strategy and decision-making and monitoring
3. Vaccine supply, immunization logistics and service delivery
4. Vaccine market authorization and safety monitoring
5. Risk communication, community engagement and behavioural insights

**Review of Member States supply chain maturity begins.**

WHO/Europe convened an assessment of Member State supply chain maturity together with the UNICEF Supply Division of the national Procurement and Supply Management systems. The assessment utilized the [UNICEF supply chain maturity model tool](#), and started with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova and Uzbekistan.

**10 August 2020**

**WHO places a focus on people experiencing homelessness; sharing an overview of needs and considerations to protect this vulnerable population.**

People experiencing homelessness have been particularly at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with ongoing work, WHO/Europe published a [factsheet](#), including an overview of the measures required to protect this vulnerable population.

**12 August 2020**

**A follow-up WHO mission deploys to Kazakhstan, focusing on laboratory and COVID-19 testing.**

A WHO mission deployed to Kazakhstan from 12 to 28 August 2020, as a follow-up mission from the previous deployment in July. This mission focused on laboratory and COVID-19 testing. It included the provision of technical support, and visits to sampling sites and laboratories in Kostanay, Almaty, and Nur-Sultan. Such visits entailed discussions with national counter parts and main actors regarding the strengths and weakness of the response thus far, assessment of the overall laboratory system, and proposal of a national laboratory action plan to respond to COVID-19.

**19 August 2020**

**A WHO mission deploys to Kosovo<sup>9</sup> supports clinical management capacities and practices.**

A WHO mission deployed to Kosovo<sup>9</sup> from August 20 to 28, 2020. An infectious disease specialist conducted the mission with a focus on clinical management of COVID-19 in medical facilities as well as communities. The clinical guidelines that were recently approved in Kosovo<sup>9</sup> were reviewed, discussions were held with health care personnel, and site visits were made to observe clinical practices in hospitals and outpatient clinics in Pristina and in one region.

**20 August 2020**

**A briefing paper on challenges for marginalized groups is published.**

A [briefing paper](#) was published synthesizing common challenges that are contributing to marginalization and inequities in health and singling out specific challenges of different marginalized groups in the European Region. This paper was written for WHO/Europe by the Nobody Left Outside Initiative of the European Commission.

**21 August 2020**

**The first WHO/Europe Intra-Action Review is conducted in Uzbekistan.**

From 21-29 August 2020, a team of 9-12 technical experts and clinicians from WHO/Europe, the Robert Koch Institute (WHO-CC), Charité University Berlin, University of Frankfurt and University of Düsseldorf deployed to Uzbekistan to conduct the first intra-action review in the Region. The aim of the review was to support the investigation of the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19, and the response activities related to that outbreak. During the mission, the expert team worked closely with Uzbekistan's high-level officials, public health counterparts, and health professionals to assess the risks, understand the situation on the ground, and help improve response mechanisms.

**24 August 2020**

**Long-stay mental health institutions are highlighted in WHO/Europe's work.**

From March-June, WHO/Europe conducted a rapid assessment on long-stay mental health care institutions and the COVID-19 pandemic. The assessment results were published in a [report](#) on the web. The same day, a WHO documentary [film](#) on long-stay mental health care institutions and the COVID-19 crisis was released. The film identifies and addresses the challenges that need to be addressed for a better response and preparedness.

**A new mental health coalition to support system reforms and COVID-19 recovery is established.**

The aim of the mental health flagship initiative is to bring together a broad coalition of mental health leaders, champions, service users and other partners to improve mental health policies and practices across the Region. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a renewed focus on mental health, as the pandemic has been particularly psychologically challenging.

**A WHO Mission deploys to Kyrgyzstan to support laboratory and COVID-19 testing capacities.**

A WHO mission deployed to Kyrgyzstan from 24 August to 16 September 2020 to support laboratory and COVID-19 testing capabilities, including a training on PCR principles and support on various strategy documents.

9 All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



**26 August 2020**

**A new Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development is launched.**

In an inaugural meeting, the WHO Regional Office for Europe convened a high-level [Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development](#) to rethink policy priorities in light of pandemics. Initiated by the Regional Director, and made up of a diverse range of eminent experts, the independent Commission seeks to draw lessons from how different countries' health systems responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and make recommendations on investments and reforms to improve the resilience of health and social care systems.

**Work starts on supporting vulnerable indigenous populations in the Arctic.**

WHO/Europe convened a first informal meeting with the focal point of the Svalbard group of Nordic council to reach out and discuss the way forward in better understanding vulnerability. This included the sharing of outstanding needs and of the involvement of indigenous populations in the Arctic.

**27 August, 2020**

**For the first time, the Regional COVID-19 Dashboard provides insight into the subnational contexts of COVID-19.**

The Regional COVID-19 [dashboard](#) gained a new functionality, now being able to display subnational data. This allows for a deeper understanding of the epidemiology throughout the WHO European Region. By December 2020, the subnational data service surpassed 50,000,000 requests, and had appeared in dozens of media products in the Region.

**28 August 2020**

**A new WHO risk communications and community engagement schooling resource pack is created.**

WHO/Europe together with UNICEF created the [WHO Schooling Resource Pack](#), bringing together many existing and new materials into one place for parents, teachers and school administrators facing many questions about the start of a new school year.

**31 August 2020**

**European countries are convened in a high-level meeting on schooling during COVID-19.**

In mid-August, WHO/Europe had convened experts who compiled the existing measures and shared experiences related to safe schooling during the pandemic. The meeting was initiated to start a EURO process on gathering evidence on COVID-19, consulting with Member States, and building recommendations on school opening in COVID-19 times. This led to a [high-level meeting](#) on schooling during COVID-19 with participation of 242 participants, and co-hosted by the Minister of Health of Italy. The Italian Minister of Health proposed to make it a regular forum, which was echoed by other Member States and confirmed by the Regional Director.

By the end of August, the WHO European Region had more than 4 million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus.



**SEPTEMBER**



## 1 September 2020

**A WHO mission deploys to Bosnia and Herzegovina to support surveillance and epidemiology in the national COVID-19 response.**

An epidemiologist was deployed on a WHO mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1 September – 31 October 2020 to support surveillance and epidemiology in the national COVID-19 response. The WHO expert who was 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.

**A project creating inclusive and accessible messages for people with disabilities about COVID-19 is launched.**

Disability inclusive programming has been a key effort throughout the COVID-19 response in EURO. In September, a dedicated support project was launched by WHO/Europe to create inclusive and accessible public health messages about COVID-19 and to design communication materials supporting countries in scaling-up COVID-19 prevention, treatment, and, where required, in rehabilitation (for people recovering from COVID-19).

## 6 September 2020

**A WHO mission deploys to Kosovo<sup>10</sup> to support Go.Data implementation.**

A WHO mission deployed to Kosovo<sup>10</sup> from 6 September – 11 October 2020. The WHO-Pristina Office, with support from WHO/Europe and WHO-HQ, launched the mission to support the use of the [Go.Data](#) platform for the COVID-19 outbreak response in Kosovo<sup>10</sup>. The team worked with colleagues at the central and regional Institutes of Public Health (IPHS) to oversee the transition to the Go.Data platform from the existing excel-based data management system. The team translated Go.Data into Albanian, the local language, conducted trainings at the central and regional IPHS, and conducted daily monitoring as the system was implemented.

## 7 September 2020

**A WHO mission deploys to Bosnia and Herzegovina to advise on and strengthen the national response.**

With an evolving situation and increase in cases, a high level WHO Technical Mission was deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 7–11 September 2020. The WHO experts were deployed to support the government in assessing and strengthening the overall response to COVID-19, to advise on appropriate measures to prevent, reduce and control transmission of COVID-19 during mass gatherings and school reopening, and to strengthen RCCE. Further information can be found in "In focus" on page 6 of [COVID-19: WHO European Region Operational Update, weeks 37–38](#).

**COVID-19 strategy for the WHO European Region is published.**

An operational [strategy](#) to respond to COVID-19 and its consequences in the WHO European Region was published. This strategic document is based on WHO's global strategy update for COVID-19, covering the period February–December 2020. It holds relevance for the dynamic nature of the situation, and for the diverse contexts that exist across the Region.

10 All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

## 8 September 2020

Ministries of Transport receive the latest travel advice and points of entry guidance.

Ministries of transport from the WHO European Region received the latest travel advice and point of entry guidance from WHO and UNECE.

A survey identifies the main needs in addressing violence against women and children during COVID-19.

A needs assessments survey on Violence against Women and Children during COVID-19, was carried out from May until September 2020 with Ministries of Health's national focal points for violence and the Healthy Cities Network. The preliminary results of the survey were shared with WHO Representatives and heads of WHO country offices on 20 November 2020.

## 10 September 2020

New guidance on maintaining vaccine-preventable diseases during COVID-19 is published.

A document on mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on control of vaccine-preventable diseases was created by WHO/Europe as a supplement to the earlier guidance on routine immunization services during the COVID-19 pandemic. It continues to be reviewed regularly and updated as further evidence becomes available.

WHO/Europe's support to Member States is visualized in a new public dashboard.

WHO/Europe's COVID-19 Country Support Dashboard in its beta form went live. The dashboard provides a dynamic overview and real-time display of the support that WHO/Europe has been providing to Member States across the Region, since January 2020.

A WHO mission deploys to Uzbekistan to support laboratory and COVID-19 testing capacities.

A WHO rapid support team deployed to Uzbekistan from 10 September to 15 October 2020, to support laboratory and COVID-19 testing capabilities. The mission involved five training sessions on quality management and mentoring in the context of COVID-19, the development of a national testing strategy, and assessment of laboratories and sample referral systems in the Bukhara, Nukus, Samarkand, and Tashkent regions.

## 11 September 2020

Preparedness at the basis of effective COVID-19 response: A report on *SocialNet 2019* is released.

SocialNet 2019 was a real-life rehearsal on risk communication, community engagement and social science for the COVID-19 pandemic. A report on the timely training course was released, and a story about it published.

## 12 September 2020

Fires break out on the island of Lesbos, Greece; WHO missions deploy.

After fires almost completely destroyed the Moria Reception and Identification Center on the island of Lesbos, the Greek Ministry of Health requested support from WHO/Europe and the WHO Country Office. As part of this request, a first mission was deployed on 12–21 September to conduct a rapid assessment and provide assistance to the Greek government. Several deployments supplemented this support over the coming months. WHO/Europe has been coordinating this ongoing assistance in collaboration with key operational assets of WHO: the GOARN and Emergency Medical Teams, and a Health Coordination Cell created by WHO to support critical response activities on the ground, aimed at providing migrants and refugees access to the essential healthcare services at the new site.

## 14 September 2020

### WHO/Europe strongly focuses on contact tracing with the establishment of a new working group.

A new WHO/Europe internal cross-divisional group on contact tracing was established. This group coordinates technical support to member states based on Member State requests and identified needs across the Region. The main challenges related to contact tracing in Member States relate to lack of human resources to perform contact tracing, lack of training of contact tracers, inadequate strategies for contact tracing and inconsistent use of electronic data management systems for managing data on COVID-19 cases and contacts. The programmatic areas involved in the group are as follows: Risk communication and community engagement, epidemiology and analytics, country operations, information and communications technologies (ICT), vaccine preventable diseases and immunization, and health systems programme.

### The Regional Committee for Europe meets: COVID-19 is high in the agenda.

The 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe was held on 14 and 15 September. The Regional Committee took place virtually for the first time, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Among other topics and speakers, the Regional Director for Europe discussed the COVID-19 response thus far, and the foundations for the future beyond the pandemic.

### A Regional Youth Coalition on COVID-19 is established for risk communication and community engagement.

Building on existing relationships with Global Shapers and other youth networks, the Coalition was created to ensure two-way listening and gain inputs from youth perspectives on WHO/Europe RCCE work. This collaboration is meant to produce the first RCCE strategy targeting and engaging young people in Europe's COVID-19 response driven by young people.

### A working paper on schooling in the time of COVID-19 is published.

Following the high-level meeting on schooling held on 31 August, WHO/Europe published a working paper, targeted at decision-makers, educators and education officials. The paper serves as a reference point for national education and health authorities as they seek to plan and implement effective schooling during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

### Emergency medical team deploys to Greece to support IPC in the overcrowded Moriah camps.

As part of the ongoing response on the Greek islands of Lesvos, WHO, supported by the government of Norway, facilitated the deployment of an EMT, from 14 September to 26 October 2020. The 25-person medical team supported local authorities with the establishment of the triage, testing and isolation facility for COVID-19 patients, and provided medical support to people in need. Several deployments followed over subsequent weeks, to further support the response activities: a German EMT arrived on 24 October to take over from the Norwegian team. A further EMT and health sector coordinator were deployed, to remain onsite until the end of 2020. On 5 October, a [Rapid Response Mobile Laboratory \(RRML\)](#) was deployed by the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine through the GOARN/WHO mechanisms and with the financial support of WHO/Europe. An additional three experts from WHO and the Robert Koch Institute were deployed through GOARN to support the RRML activities. This marked the first such GOARN/WHO RRML deployment to support EMT activities on the ground.



### 15 September 2020

#### A WHO mission deploys to Tajikistan to support laboratory capacities.

A WHO mission deployed to Tajikistan from 15 September to 31 October to address laboratory and COVID-19 testing capacities. The mission involved on-site visits, trainings, and distribution of materials.

#### School reopening models vary across EURO member states, shows a WHO/Europe cross-country analysis.

WHO/Europe published an [analysis](#) reviewing the precautions taken by governments when planning the reopening of schools, to provide stability and protect against localized outbreaks. The analysis revealed that models of school reopening varied widely between Member States.

#### First meeting of the Twenty-eighth Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe convenes.

The Twenty-eighth Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC) held its first (virtual) [session](#) following the closure of the 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe. The Regional Director shared that, in the coming year, the Regional Office would continue to place emphasis on the dual-track response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which entails countries continuing to deliver regular health services while responding aggressively to COVID-19.

### 16 September 2020

#### A new Technical Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization is established.

A new working group under WHO's European Technical Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (ETAGE) was established to support evidence-based decision-making on COVID-19 immunization strategy. This group was established with members from the Vaccine Preventable Illnesses team and the Infectious Hazards Management team of WHO/Europe's IMST, and several external partners. On 11 November, a report on the group's findings was [published](#) and shared in an online meeting.

### 17 September 2020

#### Innovation on hospital readiness is piloted in Italy.

Ten working groups were set up by hospital directors of the S. Orsola-Malpighi University Hospital in Bologna, in collaboration with WHO/Europe experts, as part of the case study "the hospital of tomorrow". The study examined the critical aspects of the facility, in order to improve hospital readiness beyond COVID-19. This includes conceptual framework methodology, wayfinding, staff spaces, patients and visitors' spaces, emergency departments, high-tech logistics, flexible interior structures and ergonomic furniture, high-tech patient follow up and monitoring, systems automatization, and innovative systems. On 26 November, the first results of the working groups of the case study were presented to the hospital's directors. The wider aim is to use this study as a basis for developing training for other facilities, to help them do the same "exercise" of innovating, building or adapting after COVID-19.

#### A second policy dialogue on COVID-19 is held with Central Asian countries.

WHO/Europe, together with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and colleagues from the European Union, held a second special dialogue serving as an exchange of experiences and strategies regarding the response, transition and resilience in regards to COVID-19. It included 68 participants from Central Asian countries. The first special dialogue had been held on 6 May 2020.

### 18 September 2020

#### WHO recommendations on influenza vaccination during COVID-19 are published.

The co-circulation of influenza viruses during the COVID-19 pandemic in the autumn and winter seasons could place additional burden on health systems and severely impact vulnerable populations. WHO/Europe therefore produced and published interim [recommendations](#), with a focus on influenza vaccination in the 2020/2021 season.

## 20 September 2020

**A WHO mission deploys to Kosovo<sup>11</sup> to further support laboratory capacities.**

A WHO mission deployed to Kosovo<sup>11</sup> on 20–25 September 2020. WHO's regional hub technical laboratory officer conducted the mission to support COVID-19 laboratory efforts, involving the assessment of an established laboratory for SARS-CoV-2 detection, and of a facility with the possibility for constructing a laboratory capable of detection, to increase the area's testing capacities. The WHO expert also joined a team of laboratory staff from the Robert Koch Institute in Germany to conduct an on-site basic training on sampling, transport of samples, nucleic acid extraction and real-time RT-PCR procedures for new staff in the national reference laboratory and six regional IPH laboratory staff where new laboratories are planned for scaling up the laboratory capacities for SARS-CoV-2 detection.

**A WHO mission deploys to the Republic of North Macedonia to support the updating of the country preparedness and response plan.**

Two WHO experts were deployed to the Republic of North Macedonia from 20 September to 9 October, with the aim of reviewing the progress of, and subsequently updating, the country preparedness and response plan. The experts provided supported to staff at the WHO Country Office and members of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia in using the [WHO Partners Platform](#). They worked with government stakeholders to further strengthen planning and operational response in emergencies, and engaged with other United Nations representatives on a collective strategy to support the Government in its response to COVID-19. A second mission on point of entry took place in the following days.

## 21 September 2020

**Digitalization of immunization registers and systems for the COVID-19 vaccine in priority countries and areas begins.**

WHO/Europe began work supporting priority countries and areas on the digitalization of their immunization registers and on accommodating systems for the COVID-19 vaccine. The Republic of North Macedonia became the first country to begin this process, serving as an example, after which the support will be rolled out to other Member States. A first official meeting was held on 21 September, involving WHO/Europe technical units, the WHO/Europe IMST, representatives of the WHO Country Office in the Republic of North Macedonia and the Ministry of Health. Work will continue into 2021.

**An EMT deploys to Kosovo<sup>11</sup> to support hospital preparedness**

Combined efforts by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, WHO's Balkan Hub, and the WHO Pristina Office, helped facilitate a mission to Kosovo<sup>11</sup> from a German EMT organized by the Robert Koch Institute from 21 September to 3 October 2020. A team of 16 medical experts from Johanniter, humedica e.V., ISAR Germany

- International Search and Rescue, Charité
- Universitätsmedizin Berlin and Zentraler Sanitätsdienst der Bundeswehr deployed for two weeks, to support hospital preparedness and response activities. Another mission was deployed on 13 October to identify further needs of the response and how to address them. Further information can be found in "In focus" on page 5 of *COVID-19: WHO European Region Operational Update, weeks 39–40*.

<sup>11</sup> All references to Kosovo in this document should be understood to be in the context of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

**22 September 2020**

**A WHO mission deploys to the Republic of North Macedonia to support point of entry capacities.**

A WHO mission deployed to the Republic of North Macedonia on 22–26 September 2020 to strengthen point of entry (PoE) capacities. The WHO Regional Office for Europe facilitated training for 20 representatives from the health, transport, law enforcement and customs sectors. Participants reviewed and discussed the plans, protocols, standard operating procedures and public health and social measures implemented at PoEs in the country. Experiences from Germany and Poland were also presented, thanks to the participation of representatives from the European Union's Joint Action Healthy Gateways programme.

**Engagement with the Roma populations and other minorities is expanded.**

The vulnerable populations group of WHO/Europe held discussions with the WHO Collaborating Centre in Alicante to engage further at the wider European level regarding the impact of COVID-19 on minorities and Roma populations. The research and collaboration is part of an ongoing exchange and engagement.

**27 September 2020**

**Conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh area starts to escalate; COVID-19 support is strengthened.**

Armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, mostly in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh disputed territory, began to escalate. This is the most significant escalation since the 1990s and resulted in a rapid worsening of the health situation in the area, which was already heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict was subsequently categorized as a Grade 2 emergency under the WHO Emergency Response Framework (ERF) grading mechanism. To secure the COVID-19 response during this humanitarian emergency, WHO/Europe facilitated the distribution of supplies and deployed an EMT, followed by the deployment of several WHO emergency coordinators to Armenia and Azerbaijan until the end of the year.

**28 September 2020**

**WHO/Europe joins major partners on COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination.**

As part of the Regional Working Group on COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination that was established in early September, the European Regional COVID-19 Vaccine Coordination group was set up to ensure strategic alignment between all partners both at the intra- and inter-agency levels. The group is composed of the European Technical Advisory Group of Experts (ETAGE), Regional Immunization Partners (WHO, EC, ECDC, UNICEF, Gavi, USCDC), and chairs of the Regional Working Group's five technical focus groups. The group has met monthly since its first meeting in September.

**A WHO mission deploys to the Republic of Moldova to support laboratory capacities.**

A WHO mission deployed to the Republic of Moldova from 28 September to 2 October 2020 to support the strengthening of **laboratory capacities**. The mission focused on developing a strategy to scale up testing for COVID-19 in the country and included visits to laboratories currently conducting COVID-19 testing.

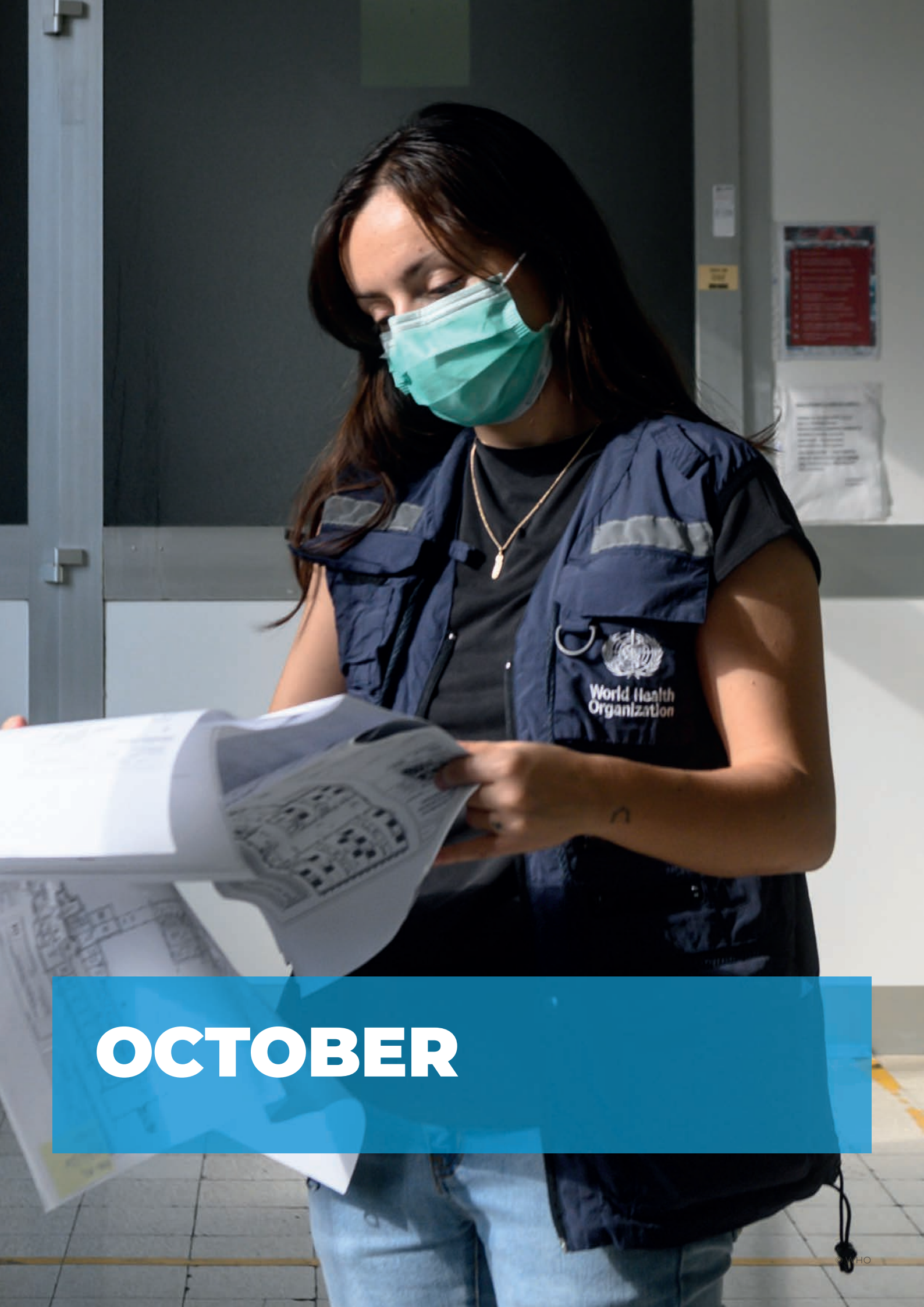
**30 September 2020**

**A WHO PoE mission deploys to Serbia, leading a cross-border training.**

A WHO mission was deployed to Belgrade, Serbia to lead a training on PoE. There were 27 participants, including representatives of various institutions involved in the cross-border movement of people and goods. The border sanitary inspection team presented the Serbian experience in implementing public health and anti-epidemic measures at the PoE.

**By the end of September, the WHO European Region had more than 6 million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus.**





**OCTOBER**



### 5 October 2020

An influenza awareness campaign is launched with a focus on co-circulation of influenza and COVID-19.

Many health systems across the WHO European Region and globally had already been stretched to their limits and had no spare time or capacity to deal with influenza. The [Flu Awareness Campaign](#) launched across the WHO European Region, supporting influenza vaccination promotion in countries and ensuring that people across the Region took informed decisions to prevent infection with influenza. Since influenza and COVID-19 can be difficult to distinguish from their symptoms alone, a laboratory test is required. The consequences of being infected with influenza and COVID-19 at the same time are not yet clear, but the importance of preventing influenza infection is a certainty, now more than ever.

[A high-level meeting on pandemic fatigue is convened.](#)

The Behavioral Insight unit and WHE/IMST at WHO/Europe convened a special high-level virtual meeting on Pandemic fatigue: reinvigorating the public to prevent COVID-19. This was to facilitate an exchange of views among Member States on the emerging challenge of pandemic fatigue in the public, and the mitigation measures that can be put in place to counter it.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe also presented a [draft policy framework](#) to guide the discussion. This document was issued in response to a request from Member States for support.

### 6 October 2020

[A WHO mission deploys to the Republic of Moldova to support surveillance capacities and Go.Data implementation.](#)

A WHO mission deployed to the Republic of Moldova on 6–30 October 2020. On this three-week technical mission, the WHO team of experts supported 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. On 18 October, an additional WHO expert was deployed to support the mission.

### 9 October 2020

[Strategic guidance on preparing for deployment of COVID-19 vaccine is published.](#)

A [guidance document](#) on preparation for the deployment of COVID-19 vaccine and vaccination in the WHO European Region was produced by WHO/Europe. The document outlines the key strategic considerations for ministries of health, their agencies, national immunization technical advisory groups and committees, and relevant public and private sector authorities in the WHO European Region in preparing for deployment of COVID-19 vaccine and vaccination in their countries.

### 14 October 2020

[WHO publishes guidance to set up hotlines.](#)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, hotlines have established a direct link between at-risk populations and emergency responders, improved responders' understanding of people's perceptions, attitudes and concerns, and provided public health advice and referral to other services. WHO/Europe published [guidance](#) on how to collect such information in a practical and ethical manner, along with best practices for running hotlines for public health emergency purposes.

**15 October 2020**

COVID-19 cases rise significantly in the WHO European Region, in an autumn–winter surge.

Confirmed cases surpassed 7 million in the WHO European Region. The Regional Director held a virtual [press briefing](#) to give an update on the COVID-19 situation.

**16 October 2020**

A new webinar series on communication for COVID-19 vaccines is launched.

WHO/Europe hosted the first in a six-part webinar series, entitled “Communication considerations for COVID-19 vaccines”. The first session served as a technical overview of the process of developing and deploying COVID-19 vaccines.

Importance of the continuation of influenza surveillance is highlighted in interim guidance.

WHO/Europe and ECDC jointly published [interim guidance](#) outlining operational considerations for supporting the continuity of national influenza surveillance systems and public health laboratories for the epidemiological and virological surveillance of influenza in the 2020–2021 season during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The document also sets out how these systems might be used to contribute to COVID-19 surveillance.

Steps for addressing vulnerability during COVID-19 are outlined in publication.

WHO/Europe published a [factsheet](#) for WHO country representatives and Member States as a practical overview of the main operational steps to address vulnerability during the COVID-19 response. The multifaceted and multisectoral set of actions in this key update were shared as the Region experienced a resurgence of cases towards the end of the year.

**18 October 2020**

A WHO clinical management mission deploys to Montenegro.

A WHO mission deployed to Montenegro on 18–23 October 2020 to provide support for strengthening clinical management of severe COVID-19 patients. The team from the WHO/Europe and the Head of the WHO Country Office in Montenegro reviewed clinical management practices in primary health care clinics and general hospitals. Recommendations were given in the broader context of the national COVID-19 response. Further information can be found in “In focus” on page 5 of [COVID-19: WHO European Region Operational Update, weeks 43–44](#).

**19 October 2020**

A WHO mission deploys to Albania to support laboratory and COVID-19 testing capacities.

A WHO mission deployed to Albania on 19–23 October 2020 to support laboratory and COVID-19 testing capabilities. This mission involved on-site visits to two national hospital laboratories to analyse laboratory capacities, identify any gaps and make recommendations with suggested action points. Further information can be found in “In Focus” on page 5 of [COVID-19: WHO European Region Operational Update, weeks 41–42](#).

**20 October 2020**

New media monitoring mechanism launches, deepening awareness of COVID-19 situations at the country level.

Following feasibility assessments in July 2020, dedicated support was put towards media monitoring using the [Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources](#) tool to capture additional information on COVID-19 in the WHO European Region. On 20 October 2020, daily media summaries highlighting key indicators of the COVID-19 situation in Member States was launched. These summaries, and the data recorded in a continuously updated tracking tool, have proved valuable for providing situational awareness of outbreaks in special populations as well as health system capacity at country level.

**21 October 2020**

A points of Entry (PoE) WHO mission deploys to the Republic of Moldova.

A WHO rapid support team deployed to the Republic of Moldova on 21–22 October 2020, providing support at PoEs. The team conducted a training session on the use of relevant WHO guidance for the safe resumption of operations at PoEs in the context of COVID-19, and to discuss the measures being put in place at airports and ground crossings across the country. In addition, the experiences of Germany and Poland on COVID-19 control were presented by a representative from the European Union's Joint Action Healthy Gateways programme. Further information can be found in "In focus" on pages 6 of *COVID-19: WHO European Region Operational Update, week 43–44*.

A WHO mission deploys to Kazakhstan to support laboratory testing capacities.

A WHO mission was deployed to Kazakhstan on 20–30 October to train national mentors for regional COVID-19 testing laboratories in verifying tests, using sample quality and conducting competency assessments of staff involved in testing.

**25 October 2020**

A WHO surveillance and epidemiology mission deploys to Montenegro.

A WHO mission deployed to Montenegro from 25 September to 20 December 2020, to support surveillance and epidemiology capacities in the national COVID-19 response.

**26 October 2020**

The first meeting of the Technical Advisory Group on schooling during COVID-19 is held.

A new regional technical advisory group held its first high-level meeting. The group, which is convened by and reports to the Regional Director, contributes to a living platform for evidence-based measures in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. This group is comprised of experts and is supported by other stakeholders in child and adolescent health and schools. In this first high-level meeting, members of the group shared assessments and provided recommendations on the way forward in schools. Coupled with assessments, these meetings provide further technical information and guidance for schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**27 October 2020**

A new webinar series on health systems during COVID-19 is launched.

A new webinar series was organized by the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, drawing on the [COVID-19 Health System Response Monitor](#), a joint undertaking with WHO/Europe. This series will look at how health systems can respond to the pandemic and what makes them more resilient to external shocks and crises.

New weekly map series visualizing transmission classification, hospital and ICU admissions information is initiated.

On release of the updated global [guidance](#) on the implementation of public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19, WHO/Europe established data collection and analysis processes to accurately define a country's transmission status, based on new indicator definitions. These were visualized using GIS mapping techniques and have been produced weekly.

## 28 October 2020

### HealthBuddy+ mobile application is launched.

WHO/Europe and the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO) launched the [HealthBuddy+](#) mobile application, designed to support public access to evidence-based information on COVID-19. Using machine learning and artificial intelligence, and relying on continuous fact-checking conducted by WHO/Europe and UNICEF ECARO experts, the application provides the latest information based on users' needs. It has three main functions: to provide accurate information, track rumors and poll opinions. By December 2020, the application had been translated to 22 languages, and had registered 175,000 interactions.

## 29 October 2020

### WHO/Europe convenes an emergency meeting of health ministers.

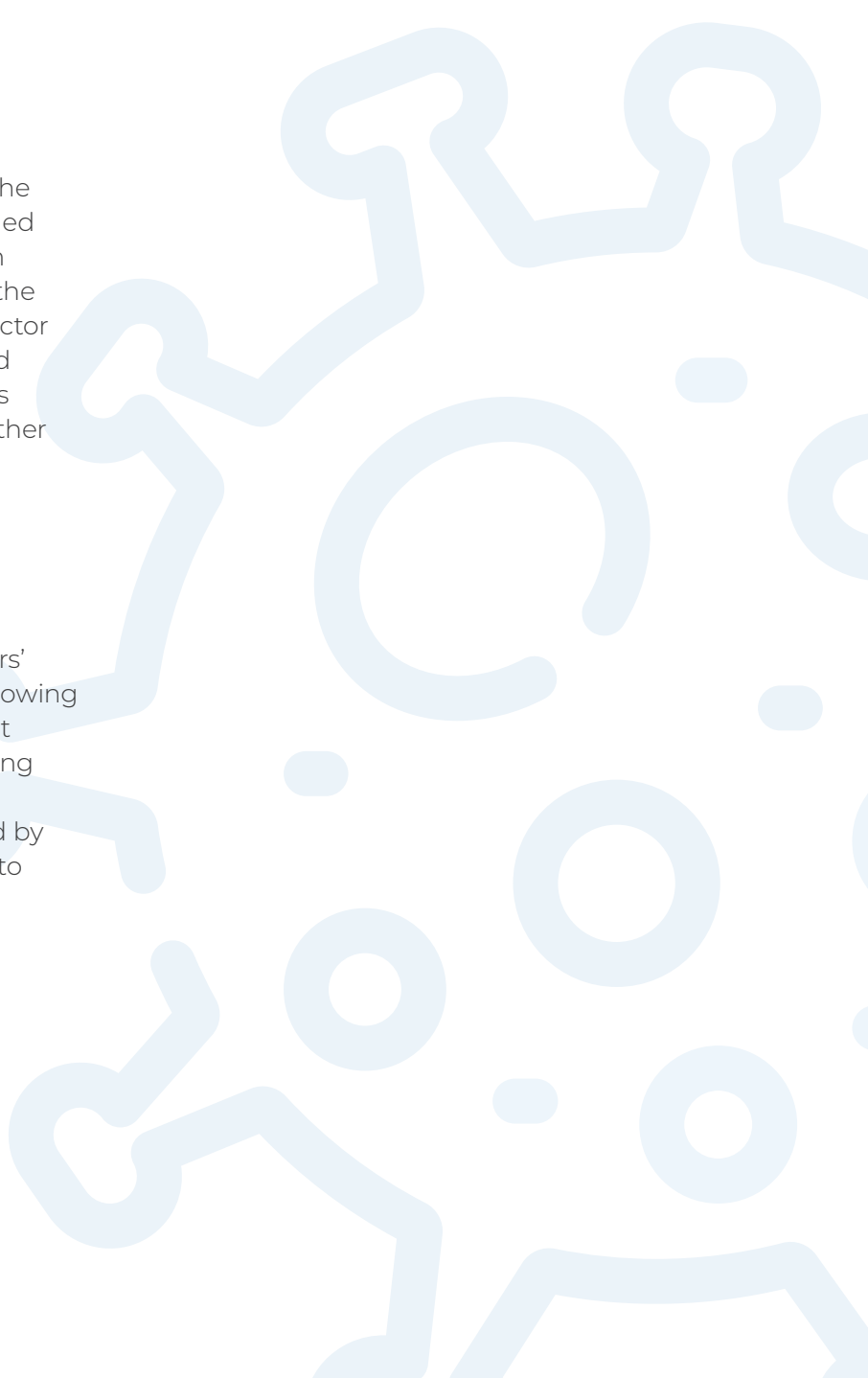
With COVID-19 cases exceeding 10 million in the WHO European Region, WHO/Europe convened an emergency meeting of the Region's health ministers to discuss COVID-19 projections for the winter season. In his [statement](#), Regional Director expressed the concerns of Member States and WHO regarding the COVID-19 situation. At this point, many Member States were asking whether they should lock down.

## 30 October 2020

### WHO/Europe's Facebook brand lift study reaches 50 million people.

A one-month study measuring Facebook users' willingness to adopt protective behaviours following exposure to WHO messages was concluded. It revealed that while digital platforms are a strong way to reach out to large population group, message delivery needs to be complemented by tailored interventions for behavioural change to enhance their effectiveness.

By the end of October, the WHO European Region had more than 11 million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus.







**NOVEMBER**

### 3 November 2020

#### A high-level meeting on COVID-19 meets influenza is convened.

WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO) and WHO/Europe convened in a meeting on the topic of COVID-19 meets influenza in the winter season. Several Member States from the Western Pacific Region shared experiences with their colleagues from European Member States, including Germany, Spain and the Russian Federation. They exchanged best practices on winter preparedness activities and measures to mitigate the spread of both COVID-19 and influenza during the winter season.

### 5 November 2020

#### A novel outbreak among mink in Denmark is reported to WHO, with ongoing response in weeks to come.

On 5 November 2020, health authorities in Denmark reported 12 human cases of COVID-19 caused by a specific mink-associated variant strain of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. WHO/Europe convened a [meeting](#) with Danish authorities and ECDC to understand and discuss the details of the findings, and offer support. Wide-ranging support was extended into the coming weeks. For example, animal-human interface experts of WHO/Europe together with ECDC initiated a survey and analysis of SARS-CoV-2 on mink farms in the Region. By 15 December, 31 Member States had responded. Risk communication support was also provided to countries to inform governments, partners and the public, with focus on farmers.

#### A new framework for regional monitoring of country preparedness for COVID-19 vaccine is launched.

To assess and monitor the preparedness status of countries in deploying a COVID-19 vaccine, WHO/Europe, in line with global and Regional guidance and frameworks (such as the [COVID-19 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework](#) and the [COVID-19 vaccine introduction readiness assessment tool](#)) created a COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination country preparedness monitoring mechanism applicable to all 53 Member States in the WHO European Region, with varying sets of indicators, recognizing the diversity of contexts in the Region. The findings from the national preparedness monitoring are

collected on a monthly basis and disseminated regularly to countries and regional stakeholders through online dynamic dashboards.

### 6 November 2020

#### Guidance on promoting the health of migrant workers is published.

[Interim guidance](#) on Promoting the health of migrant workers in the WHO European Region during COVID-19 was published. This is intended to support Member States and partners in promoting the health of migrant workers, in particular through effective approaches and best practices for enhancing preparedness, prevention and control of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as considerations for mitigating the negative socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.

### 10 November 2020

#### Public health and social measures taken by Member States are newly visualized on the WHO/Europe COVID-19 dashboard.

WHO/Europe launched a Public Health and Social Measures Severity Index to provide standardized data on the ways in which countries and areas in the European Region have sought to slow or stop community spread of COVID-19. The [methodology](#) for this Index was published on 15 December, 2020.

Enhanced visualizations incorporating the Index were made available on the WHO/Europe COVID-19 [dashboard](#). This new interactive functionality allows users to select various inputs in order to visualize COVID-19 case and death counts against select measures over different time periods. By 31 December, this updated dashboard functionality had surpassed 200 000 hits.

### 12 November 2020

#### A new website highlighting the voices of communities affected by COVID-19 is launched.

A new website was launched for selected community bloggers of the frontline initiative to leave no one behind in the COVID-19 response. The aim of the initiative is to bring together community bloggers sharing stories of first-hand experience in communities affected by COVID-19, with regard to challenges, actions and impacts and hearing the voices of those in situ.



**13 November 2020**

New automation is developed for data mining linked to the WHO/Europe dashboard.

Routine daily data mining for EU/EEA countries received from ECDC is part of the COVID-19 data sharing partnership that has been ongoing since early January 2020. Going into December, this was to be reduced to a weekly frequency. The Health Emergency Information and Risk Assessment Team evaluated alternative solutions to maintain daily data and quickly adapted data collection and data management procedures to seamlessly transition to a new method.

**23 November 2020**

WHO facilitates the deployment of an EMT to Armenia, to support overstretched facilities amid a surge in COVID-19 cases.

As part of the ongoing support to Armenia and following an official request received from the Ministry of Health for support with the surge in COVID-19 cases, WHO/Europe, in coordination with the WHO Country Office in Armenia and Armenian Ministry of Health, worked with the WHO EMT secretariat to deploy an EMT for four weeks (23 November–19 December) to support the health system response to COVID-19 and relieve additional burden on overstretched health care facilities and health workers.

A WHO laboratory support mission deploys to Kyrgyzstan.

A WHO mission deployed to Kyrgyzstan from 23 November to 30 December 2020, to support laboratory and COVID-19 testing capabilities. On-site training and assessment of regional laboratories were conducted.

**24 November 2020**

Support for prisons in the context of COVID-19 is expanded with a new mechanism and guidance.

A new interactive dashboard on COVID-19 in prisons was launched, displaying the numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths in prisons in the WHO European Region. The data is voluntarily reported by countries to WHO/Europe through the WHO Minimal Dataset in Prisons and other Detention settings.

Furthermore, two factsheets were published, containing [updated information for people in prison](#) and [for their visitors](#) to prevent and control COVID-19 in prisons.

**25 November 2020**

A social media campaign begins on violence against women and COVID-19.

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, WHO/Europe participated in a 16-day social media campaign on violence against women in the context of COVID-19. This has been a global issue, as well as one of concern in the WHO European Region.

**27 November 2020**

A second WHO/Europe intra-action review is conducted in Kyrgyzstan.

Using WHO/Europe's tools for COVID-19 intra-action reviews, the WHO Country Office in Kyrgyzstan and the Ministry of Health conducted a joint intra-action review to identify the key strengths and challenges of Kyrgyzstan's COVID-19 response. The review will help to identify practical areas for immediate course correction and sustained improvement of the ongoing COVID-19 response.

**30 November 2020**

WHO highlights surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 virus in wastewater in an expert consultation.

WHO coordinated an expert consultation, aimed at consolidating perspectives, needs, and requirements of the health sector to use data from wastewater surveillance in public health decision-making. The consultation also aimed to identify any possible concerns, questions or barriers that need to be addressed when maintaining and establishing surveillance in both national and local contexts. The first opening remark was given by WHO/Europe's Regional Emergency Director.

By the end of November, the WHO European Region had more than 18 million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus.







**DECEMBER**

**1 December 2020**

**Third intra-action review is conducted in the Republic of Moldova.**

A WHO mission deployed to the Republic of Moldova on 1–4 December, to carry out the third intra-action review in the Region. The aim of the review was to support the investigation of the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19, and the response activities related to that outbreak. The response review was conducted by a team of experts (representing all levels of the organization), and involved approximately 100 participants from key national and sub-national institutions to engage in collective analysis and learning. The review was structured in three steps according to the standardized intra-action review methodology, including sessions on what went well and what went less well in the response (focusing on root causes), what can be done to improve the response and finally what is the best way forward.

**3 December 2020**

**A WHO IPC mission deploys to Montenegro.**

At the request of the Montenegro WHO Country Office, an IPC expert was deployed to Montenegro to provide support for IPC activities on 3–12 December. The mission included a meeting with the Head of the WHO Country Office to plan activities for improving IPC and clinical management, both in hospitals and in public health centres, managed at the national level.

**5 December 2020**

**A WHO laboratory support mission deploys to Kyrgyzstan.**

A WHO mission deployed to Kyrgyzstan on 5–17 December 2020 to review COVID-19 laboratory capacities. A national testing strategy was developed with the national laboratory working group in response to COVID-19, a coordination meeting was held with partners on the ground, and training sessions were conducted on the use of serological tools such as ELISA and Ag-RDT.

**8 December 2020**

**A second high-level Ministerial meeting on schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic is held.**

This was in follow up to the high-level meeting on the same topic held on 31 August 2020. The Regional Director convened the meeting, which was co-chaired by the Minister of Health of Italy, to share the latest evidence from research on COVID-19 transmission in schools, education outcomes, infection control measures and testing for COVID-19 during lockdown, distance learning periods and opening schools for all learners.

**WHO Healthy Cities Network Annual Conference convenes, with a focus on COVID-19.**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, cities all over the world have faced particular challenges to meeting the needs of the communities, in particular the most vulnerable. During the three-day **Annual Conference** of the WHO Healthy Cities Network, participants reviewed the actions undertaken by cities to respond to COVID-19 and explore the actions to build back better. In the plenary session, interventions were made on behalf of WHO/EURO by the Regional Director and the Regional Emergency Director.

## 11 December 2020

Governments take international travel readjustment measures, and considerations for decision-making are shared.

This [analysis](#) examines the strategies that are implemented by countries across the European Region in approaches for readjusting international travel in the context of COVID-19.

[End of year high-level meeting of the Regional WHO–United Nations–Red Cross Coordination Platform for COVID-19 convenes.](#)

The partner coordination platform met for the fourteenth, and final time in 2020, focusing on Schooling in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a follow-up to the Second high-level ministerial briefing on schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, held on 8 December 2020. The previous meetings of the platform spanned a wide range of timely topics for example: vulnerable populations, socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, partner activities in the health sector (such as [issue-based coalitions](#)), Regional risk communication and community engagement support and experiences, continuity of essential health services, and COVID-19 vaccine deployment.

## 14 December 2020

[WHO/Europe is informed of a new variant of SARS-CoV-2 detected in the United Kingdom.](#)

Under the IHR (2005), the IHR National Focal Point of the United Kingdom informed WHO/Europe about a new variant of SARS-CoV-2.

On receipt of that information, WHO/Europe rapidly initiated its [response](#) in support of countries in the Region, including assessment of risks, recommendations on virological studies, sequencing and vaccination, guidance on measures and travel, and risk communication. Support was based on partner coordination and information sharing. While all viruses, including SARS-CoV-2, change over time, this variant combines several mutations, and there are preliminary signs that it may be more transmissible than other variants.

[A new assessment tool for local authorities for further protecting refugee and migrant health in the context of COVID-19 is published.](#)

WHO/Europe published an [assessment tool](#) to support municipalities and local authorities in identifying the risks and vulnerabilities that refugees and migrants face and to identify gaps where possible methods to minimize the impact of the pandemic exist so that they can be prioritized within local policy processes.

[A policy dialogue is held on community engagement in the context of pandemic fatigue.](#)

The Behavioural Insight unit and WHE convened a policy dialogue to share country experiences on how to engage communities in COVID-19 response to counteract pandemic fatigue, with a particular focus on vaccine rollout.

## 17 December 2020

[A WHO/Europe self-assessment survey and tool broaden support for prisons in the Region in the context of COVID-19.](#)

From May to November 2020, WHO/Europe undertook a survey to report on Member States' application of a self-assessment checklist tool for measuring preparedness for COVID-19 prevention and control in prisons. Responses were received from 19 Member States, including Finland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. On 17 December, a webinar was held to discuss future planning in light of the results of the report.

[By the end of December 2020, the WHO European Region had more than 27 million confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus.](#)



**World Health  
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

### **Member States**

Albania  
Andorra  
Armenia  
Austria  
Azerbaijan  
Belarus  
Belgium  
Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Bulgaria  
Croatia  
Cyprus  
Czechia  
Denmark  
Estonia  
Finland  
France  
Georgia  
Germany  
Greece  
Hungary  
Iceland  
Ireland  
Israel  
Italy  
Kazakhstan  
Kyrgyzstan  
Latvia  
Lithuania  
Luxembourg  
Malta  
Monaco  
Montenegro  
Netherlands  
North Macedonia  
Norway  
Poland  
Portugal  
Republic of Moldova  
Romania  
Russian Federation  
San Marino  
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