



World Health
Organization

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**

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

A living document (update to version 2.0
from 31 December 2019 to 31 July 2021)



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Foreword by the Regional Director

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.

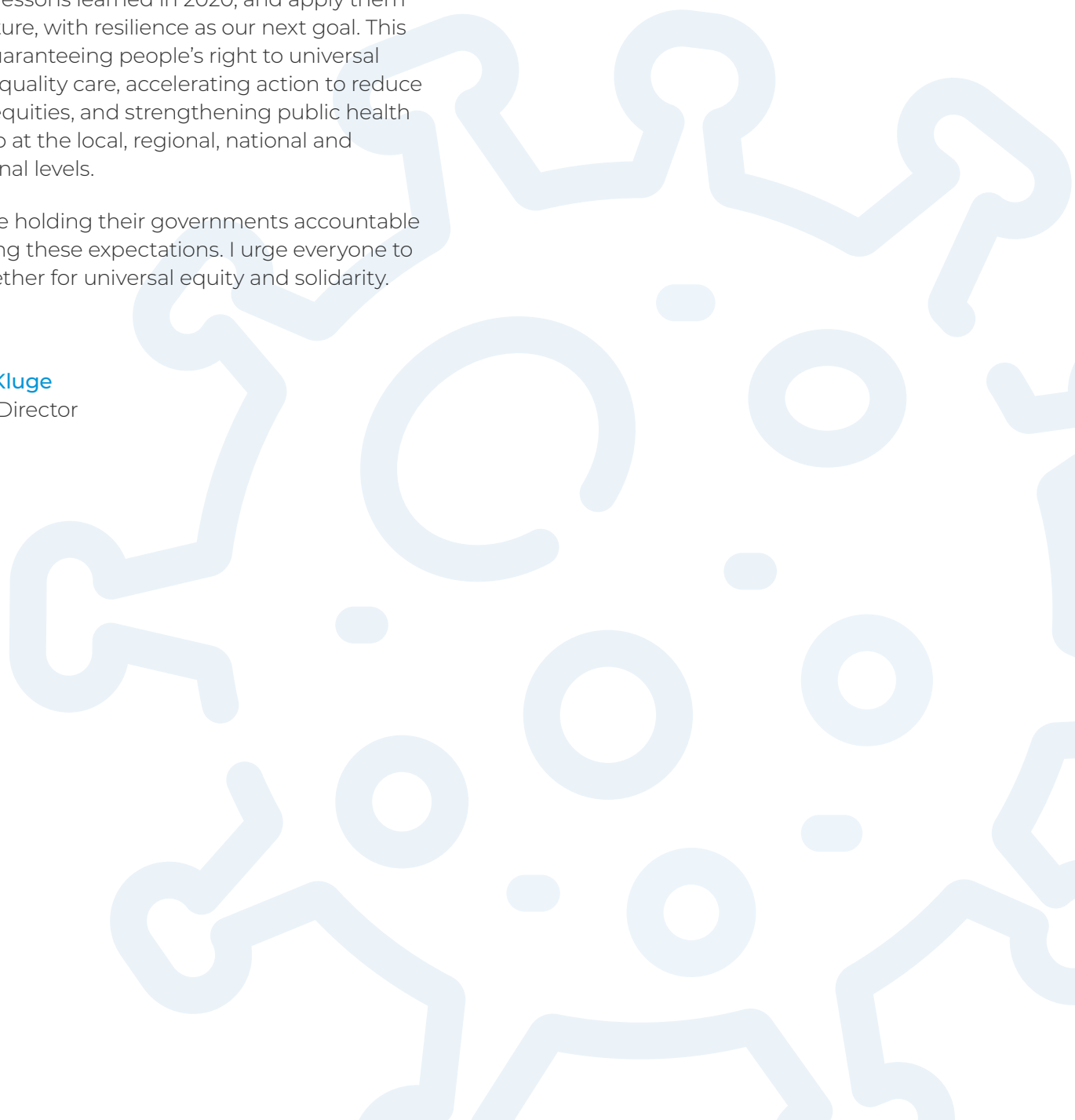
Building strong, sustainable, equitable and responsive health systems and making our societies better prepared is in everybody's interests. Thinking ahead, in September 2020, I convened the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development to advise us on how to rethink the future by taking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

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 by Regional Emergency Director and Incident Manager COVID-19

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.

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

The end of July 2021 marks almost 18 months since the WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe) received notification of cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology (unknown cause) detected in the People's Republic of China. Throughout the ensuing COVID-19 pandemic, WHO has been working continuously with partners to support Member States in preparedness, readiness, response, and early recovery.

This “living” document presents an update to the [previous timeline](#) covering from 31 December 2019 to 31 December 2020¹. It describes the continuation of the Regional Office's response to the ongoing pandemic and includes updates in the light of new information.

This document highlights the response operations led by the WHO European Region. It showcases a wide range of the activities that WHO/Europe has initiated and participated in to support countries and communities in the WHO European Region in responding to the needs of the evolving situation.

The [WHO European Region Operational Updates](#) complement this document, with in-depth features on country-level work and the broad scope of the operational aspects of the response, as well as reports from 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 efforts to accelerate the implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005). Prevention and preparedness has been included in the emergency management cycle and reinforced by the creation of WHE in 2016.² In addition, the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) Framework and recent accelerated efforts to implement IHR core capacities have contributed to this foundation of preparedness.

1 See 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). Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2021. [<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/339983>]. The update to this timeline was tabled for RC71 as EUR/RC71/INF./4.

2 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

The summary below lists the key figures and timelines of the main activities that took place from 31 December 2019 to 31 July 2021 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 WHE received an email alert 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 and readiness. Readiness activities quickly became a priority for the Region, in addition to providing 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, see the [WHO/Europe COVID-19 Country Support Dashboards](#).

As at 31 July 2021:

- WHO/Europe has supported the distribution, monitoring and administration of over 750 000 000 COVID-19 vaccine doses in Member States in the WHO European Region. On 1 February 2021, WHO/Europe launched a [dashboard](#) that monitors vaccine allocation, utilization and uptake in the Region. All countries and territories in the Region have deployed COVID-19 vaccines, with the number of nationally authorized vaccines used per country ranging from 1 to 7. In some countries, this achievement has already led to reductions in weekly hospitalizations and deaths caused by COVID-19.
- WHO/Europe has conducted 237 missions to 23 countries and areas, including 33 partner deployments through the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) and deployment of emergency medical teams (EMTs).

- Supplies worth US\$ 86 million have been procured for 31 countries and areas in the Region. These supplies include over 16 million gloves, 66 million masks, 6.2 million respirators, and laboratory and diagnostic supplies worth more than US\$ 19 million, including over 543 000 reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test kits, 164 000 antigen rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs) and other laboratory supplies. Supply procurement is based on the assessment and prioritization of the needs of Member States and areas, in the context of COVID-19.
- 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 long term. In addition to convening platforms and discussions, WHO/Europe developed the intra-action review, a learning tool and process, which thus far has been applied in five countries (Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Uzbekistan and Ukraine), with plans for application in others. Other countries, including Germany, Latvia and the Netherlands, have used the tool to facilitate intra-action reviews internally.
- WHO/Europe has held over 750 virtual capacity-building webinars and online training modules in English and Russian for experts in Member States and areas, covering a broad range of topics including: laboratories and seroepidemiology; infection prevention and control and clinical management of COVID-19 patients; risk communication and community engagement; protection of vulnerable populations; contact tracing; epidemiology and surveillance; forecasting and surge calculation; quality assurance; hospital readiness; public health measures; and more.
- The WHO Regional Director for Europe has issued 61 [statements](#) and published over 700 [Tweets](#) related to COVID-19.
- WHO/Europe has produced 63 guidance documents, which can be found on the WHO/Europe [website](#), along with relevant global publications. WHO has supported its Member States in implementing the guidance.
- WHO/Europe created a COVID-19 Regional [situation dashboard](#), which was launched on 20 February 2020 and is updated daily. The dashboard, which now displays Regional, national, and subnational data, as well as a public health and social measures index, is one of the most visited pages in the history of the WHO/Europe website. By the end of July 2021, it had received over 11.3 million visits (averaging 9 000 daily hits in May and June 2021). A total of 71 detailed weekly surveillance [reports](#) have also been published.
- WHO/Europe, and WHE in particular, has used innovative approaches to overcome the unprecedented travel restrictions and country lockdowns, such as holding meetings through virtual missions and webinars, and joining cargo and other humanitarian flights to access countries and areas.
- New platforms and tools (behavioural insight survey, HealthBuddy+ and Global Shapers) have continued to gather perceptions and behavioural insights and to provide accurate and relevant information.
- Strategic partnerships have been fostered with hundreds of international, regional, national, and local partners to promote a multisectoral response in the Region. New platforms have been established to coordinate the response (including the Regional Working Group on COVID-19 vaccination, and joint WHO–European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) networks for laboratory and COVID-19 surveillance in the Region).



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 a full-body white protective suit, hood, goggles, and a respirator mask is performing a nasal swab test on a patient. The worker is wearing blue gloves and holding a blue swab stick. The patient is lying down, and the scene is set in a clinical environment with a window in the background.

JANUARY 2020

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 2020

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.²

On request, WHO/Europe deployed experts to Serbia, Tajikistan, and Kosovo,² 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 Kosovo³

- 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 Kosovo³ (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.



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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.⁴

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.⁵](#)

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.⁶

A mission deployed to Kosovo¹ (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 2020

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 2020

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.⁷**

WHO deployed a virtual mission to Kosovo⁷ in collaboration with the Public Health Authority of Kosovo⁷ (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,¹ 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.

⁷ 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 2020

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.

A person in a white protective suit and gloves is taking a photograph of two people wearing face masks. The scene is set in an airport terminal with large windows in the background. A red stanchion belt is visible in the foreground.

JULY 2020

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.⁸

A rapid support mission deployed to Kosovo.⁸ 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 Kosovo⁸ 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.

⁸ 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.

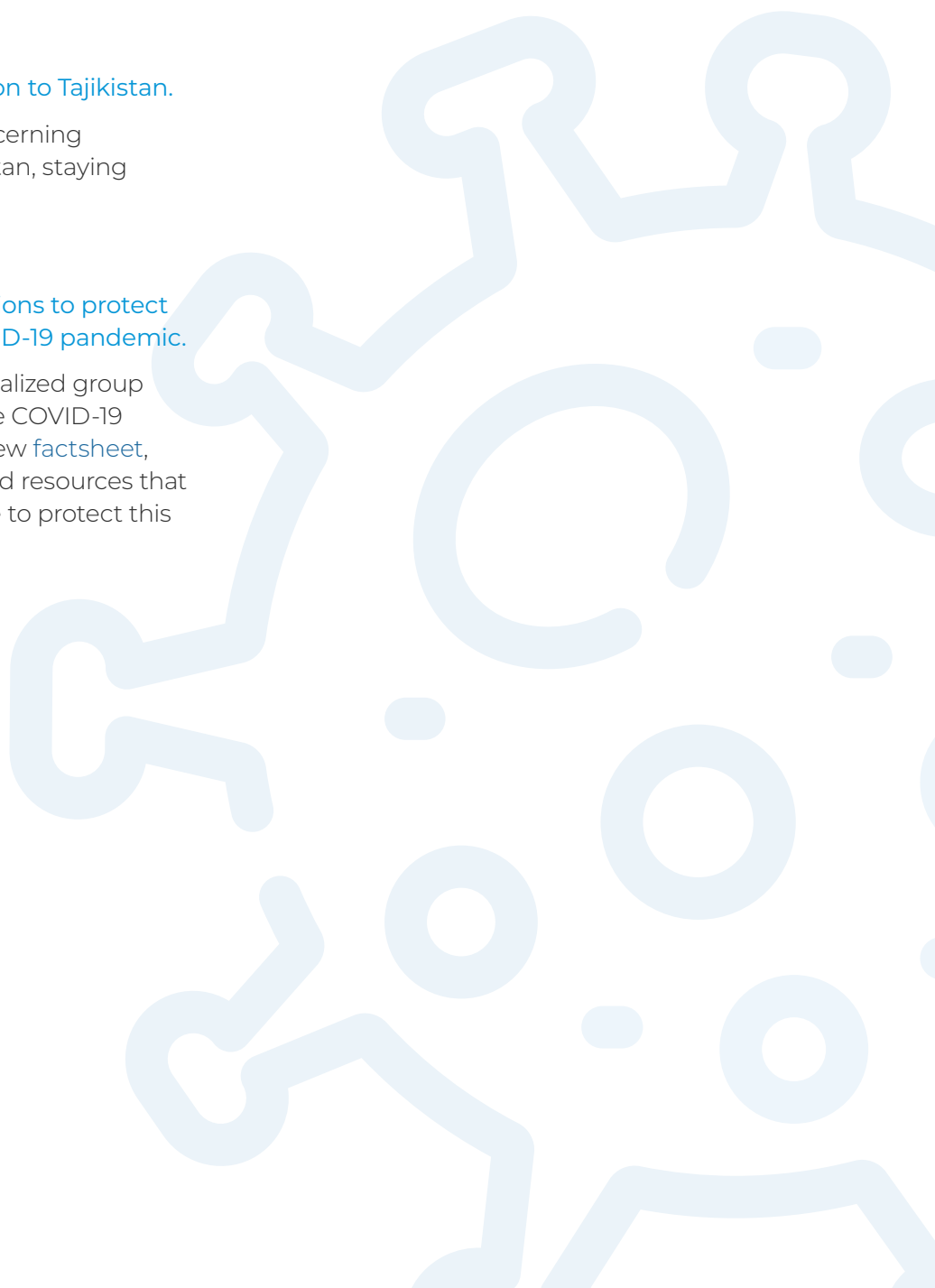
People who use drugs are a marginalized group that has been vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the publication of a new [factsheet](#), WHO/Europe shared the actions and resources that Member States and others can take to protect this vulnerable group.

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 2020

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 Kosovo⁹ supports clinical management capacities and practices.

A WHO mission deployed to Kosovo⁹ 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 Kosovo⁹ 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 2020

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 Kosovo¹⁰ to support Go.Data implementation.

A WHO mission deployed to Kosovo¹⁰ 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 Kosovo¹⁰. 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 Kosovo¹¹ to further support laboratory capacities.

A WHO mission deployed to Kosovo¹¹ 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 Kosovo¹¹ 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 Kosovo¹¹ 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*.

¹¹ 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 2020

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.

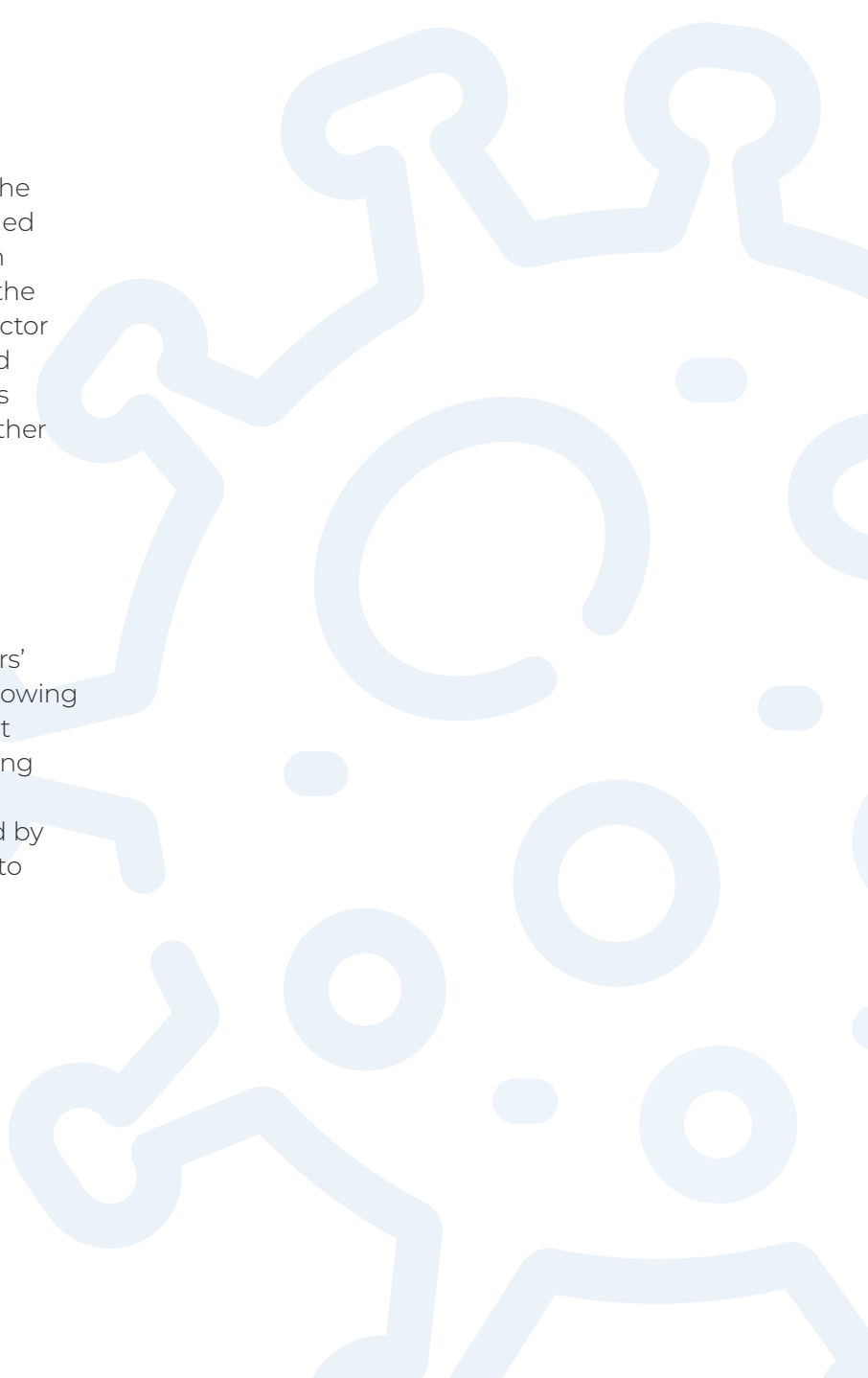
With COVID-19 cases exceeding 10 million in the WHO European Region, WHO/Europe convened an emergency meeting of the Region's health ministers to discuss COVID-19 projections for the winter season. In his [statement](#), Regional Director expressed the concerns of Member States and WHO regarding the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



A person wearing a full-body white protective suit, a black face mask, and blue gloves is walking away from the camera down a brightly lit hospital corridor. The person is also wearing green shoe covers. The corridor has white walls, a light-colored floor, and several fire extinguishers mounted on the wall. A green exit sign is visible in the distance. A blue banner with white text is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

NOVEMBER 2020

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 2020

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 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.](#)



JANUARY 2021

7 January 2021

In Week 1 of the new year, the WHO Regional Director for Europe continues bilateral calls with Member States.

On 7 January, he met with the Minister of Health of Turkey to discuss the current COVID-19 situation. This is a continuation of close work and cooperation with national leaders throughout 2020. Regular virtual calls with representatives of Member States continued well into the coming months of 2021. Note that henceforth in this timeline, the *Regional Director's bilateral and multilateral discussions with national leaders on matters specific to COVID-19 are listed individually.*

8 January 2021

A special session of the Standing Committee of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC) is convened, driven by lessons from COVID-19.

All Member States were invited to participate in this virtual [meeting](#). The aim was to present and obtain Member States' views on the Proposed programme budget 2022–2023 and its implications for the European Region, prior to the forthcoming 33rd meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board (PBAC) on 13–15 January 2021, and the 148th session of the Executive Board, scheduled to take place on 18–26 January 2021. The proposed budget increase is to be used for implementing lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, which will bolster WHE and health systems strengthening.

The Regional Director held a bilateral call with the Prime Minister of Latvia on the emerging variants and their potential impact on the pandemic, vaccination and the vaccine pipeline.

14 January 2021

As variants of concern (VOCs) spread throughout the Region, WHO promotes a coordinated and enhanced response.

Since December 2020, WHO/Europe has been monitoring and sharing critical information on the emergency and spread of SARS-CoV-2 VOCs. The variant spreading in the European Region in early 2021 was SARS-CoV-2 Alpha (B.1.1.7), which was first documented in the United Kingdom in September 2020. On 14 January, the Regional Office held a virtual briefing on the SARS-CoV-2 VOCs with the Directors-General and Chief Medical

Officers of the 53 WHO Member States in the European Region. Regular technical exchanges of real-time knowledge and information with Member States had already been taking place on a weekly basis since late December 2020. These meetings, held jointly by WHO/Europe and the ECDC, provide a platform for European countries to share their experiences and learn from each other in responding to new VOCs.

18 January 2021

WHO's response to COVID-19 and the impact of the pandemic on societies are reviewed by the WHO Executive Board at its 148th session.

The WHO European Region had eight Members on the Executive Board, and many more actively took part in the discussions. The Regional Director discussed the European Region's response to COVID-19 and the impact the pandemic has had on societies. He also highlighted the important role of WHO country offices in offering regular outreach and support to Member States.

A WHO surveillance mission is deployed to Armenia to further strengthen COVID-19 testing capacities.

From 18 January to 8 February, a laboratory expert from the WHE South Caucasus hub was deployed to Armenia to strengthen surveillance and contact tracing capacities for COVID-19, working in collaboration with the national focal points from the Ministry of Health and the National Centre for Disease Control. A nationwide assessment was conducted of all laboratories involved in PCR testing for COVID-19.

20 January 2021

WHO/Europe's Incident Management Support Team (IMST) restructures to fit evolving needs of the Region.

WHO/Europe's IMST was restructured, reflecting significant expansions to critical pillars of the COVID-19 response. These included an expanded pillar on COVID-19 vaccination and a new pillar addressing essential health services and systems (previously integrated into clinical interventions). The IMST continues to coordinate WHO's response in the Region. The IMST comprises technical experts and functional teams, covering critical incident management functions and response pillars.

20 January 2021

New risk assessment finds SARS-CoV-2 circulating widely on European mink farms.

A joint risk assessment on SARS-CoV-2 in animals used for fur farming, was conducted by WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the World Organisation for Animal health (OIE). The assessment was published in a global [report](#), with input from WHO/Europe. The report revealed significant risks for the WHO European Region, which has a particularly high level of fur farming. By February 2021, nine Member States in the Region had reported SARS-CoV-2 on mink farms (Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden).

The Regional Director held a virtual call with the Prime Minister and Minister of Health of North Macedonia on access to COVID-19 vaccines and travel restrictions in the Western Balkans.

22 January 2021

The Regional Director held a virtual call with the Prime Minister of Montenegro on the current COVID-19 situation and access to vaccines, particularly through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) Facility.

24 January 2021

One year since the first COVID-19 cases were reported in Europe.

The Regional IMST, WHO/Europe's COVID-19 response mechanism, was activated the day before the first case was reported in Europe, and was rapidly mobilized to help support countries prepare and get ready for potential coronavirus cases. Over the course of the year, the pandemic evolved rapidly across the Region. WHO/Europe published its [Operational Update. A year in review: 2020 \(2021\)](#) giving an overview of the IMST's response efforts over the course of the year, as WHO worked hand-in-hand with national authorities, operational partners, and frontline health workers to save lives and stop transmission.

25 January 2021

As part of measures to monitor the effectiveness and impact of vaccines, WHO/Europe establishes a technical forum for countries to share experiences.

With vaccine roll-out at very early stages in the WHO European Region, WHO/Europe, together with ECDC, created a technical forum for countries to share early experiences on establishing systems to monitor COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness and impact, and to provide an update on regional efforts to coordinate reporting and dissemination of data. The forum would review vaccine effectiveness studies, lessons learned and challenges faced by various countries, as well as available data, and more.

With increasing community transmission, a WHO clinical management and infection prevention and control mission deploys to Albania.

Following a request from the WHO Country Office of Albania, a technical support mission was deployed by WHO/Europe to strengthen infection prevention and control and clinical management capacities (25–29 January 2021). Albania had been experiencing community transmission after the reopening phase, similar to the trend across other European countries, with COVID-19 cases identified among staff and patients in various health care facilities. WHO experts supported an assessment of the situation and health care needs, which included visits to a number of hospitals and public health centres.

26 January 2021

Countries' health supply chains are strengthened with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WHO.

WHO/Europe and UNICEF's Supply Division, in a new joint [initiative](#), extended their support to Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Uzbekistan to optimize the performance of their supply chains for the timely delivery of medicines and health products. Acting as the lead agency for this exercise, WHO/Europe is leveraging its convening power to engage in multistakeholder consultations and conduct a government-led and participatory health supply chain assessment using the UNICEF supply chain maturity model.

26 January 2021

WHO convenes experts to strengthen SARS-CoV-2 characterization, with circulating variants as the particular focus.

The SARS-CoV-2 characterization working group held its first meeting. The group, co-founded by WHO/Europe and ECDC, brings together experts in the fields of genetic and antigenetic characterization of SARS-CoV-2, with variants being the particular focus. The participating experts are from Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

WHO's Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on safe schooling is convened to discuss VOCs and vaccines.

Following the school winter holidays, a third high-level meeting of the WHO/Europe TAG on schooling during the COVID-19 Pandemic was held. This entailed a thorough review of the COVID-19 situation, with a focus on the new variants of SARS-CoV-2, and a discussion on the possible impacts of using recently licensed vaccines in the context of schools and children's health and education.

27 January 2021

WHO/Europe supports Member States with regard to the immediate and continuous improvement of their response; a country COVID-19 intra-action review is conducted in Ukraine.

WHO/Europe head office in Copenhagen and the WHO Country Office in Ukraine supported the Ministry of Health and the Ukrainian Public Health Centre in conducting an intra-action review for the COVID-19 response in Ukraine. The review, which was conducted with both in-person and virtual participation of over 130 participants, reviewed the national functional capacity of public health and emergency response systems. It identified practical areas of the current COVID-19 response for immediate remediation or continuous improvement, and sought to update Ukraine's country preparedness and response plan.

28 January 2021

The Regional Director held a bilateral call with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria regarding the COVID-19 situation in Europe and vaccine sharing.

29 January 2021

WHO continues to promote COVID-19 hospital safety and readiness practices in Member States; a new webinar series launches.

In addition to ongoing technical support on hospital safety practices provided to individual Member States, WHO/Europe launched a new webinar series. The first webinar, held in late January, focused on managing emergency and disaster risks in hospitals during the pandemic, as well as looking at hospital vaccine readiness.

31 January 2021

A series of WHO guidance modules on vaccine planning and roll-out for Member States is published.

In January, WHO/Europe developed a series of operational guidance modules to support Member States in preparing for and implementing COVID-19 vaccination. The modules were developed by a working group convened by WHO/Europe, consisting of experts from WHO/Europe, partner agencies, academia, Member States and other stakeholders. There are five guidance modules.

- Legal and regulatory framework facilitating vaccine deployment
- Acceptance and uptake of COVID-19 vaccines
- Management structure, advocacy and resources for COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination
- COVID-19 vaccination data and information management, including monitoring of vaccine effectiveness
- Evidence-based decision-making process for developing national COVID-19 vaccination strategies

January 2021 epi summary

The WHO European Region surpassed 32.8 million cases of COVID-19 (cumulative), and 706 293 reported deaths (cumulative).

For further details on the activities conducted in the WHO European Region during January 2021, including country-level activities, see the January/February 2021 WHO European Region Operational Update on COVID-19.

GOARN

Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network



World Health Organization



FEBRUARY 2021

1 February 2021

[Vaccine uptake across the WHO European Region is newly visualized in a dashboard.](#)

The WHO Regional Office for Europe developed a dashboard to monitor vaccine roll-out in the Region. The Vaccine Programme Monitor provides an in-depth view of vaccine uptake across European countries, age groups and among health care workers. In addition, the [dashboard](#) provides an overview of the types of vaccine products being used in each country.

[WHO supports countries in strengthening rapid diagnostics, laboratory costing and monitoring; a WHO laboratory mission deploys to the Republic of Moldova.](#)

WHO/Europe has been supporting the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Moldova in expanding public health laboratory capacities and improving the overall COVID-19 response. A laboratory mission, deployed from 1–5 February 2021, held user training workshops to support the implementation of SARS-CoV-2 antigen RDTs, and laboratory costing and needs assessment tools. (Read more on page 3 of the [Weekly Operational Update on COVID-19 – 8 February 2021](#)).

[WHO mission to Azerbaijan provides assessment and practical recommendations for points of entry \(PoEs\).](#)

At the request of the Sanitary and Quarantine Service of the State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan, and in coordination with the Ministry of Health, a joint review was conducted of preparedness and response capacities for COVID-19 at key national PoEs, with an emphasis on practical recommendations.

[The Regional Director held a bilateral meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Health of Malta, in the context of a consultation with high-level advisers to the Regional Director on COVID-19 vaccines.](#)

3 February 2021

[Regional Director convenes resident Ambassadors in Denmark for a briefing on COVID-19.](#)

The session included a briefing on the current COVID-19 situation in the Region for Denmark's ambassadors and representatives of the United Nations Office at Geneva.

4 February 2021

[Post-COVID-19 recovery is the goal of the partnerships that were strengthened at the 142nd Session of the European Committee of the Regions.](#)

During 142nd plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions, the Regional Director gave a [statement](#) and signed an agreement to continue the productive partnership between the Committee and WHO/Europe, as well as to discuss COVID-19. The partnership has several aims including to ensure a robust post-COVID-19 recovery with resilient health systems and strong primary health care for thriving communities.

[Following the recent conflict, a WHO mission deploys to Azerbaijan to strengthen infection prevention and control standards.](#)

A WHO mission was sent to the main districts affected by the recent conflict in Azerbaijan. WHO experts were deployed in the field with representatives from the Ministry of Health and other partnerships. During the mission, existing infection control standards were assessed by WHO experts. Responsive training was then held with 100 staff members from seven health facilities, including epidemiologists, physicians, nurses and other health workers, covering key elements of infection prevention and control that had been identified as high priority during the assessment visits. (Read more on page 3 of the [Weekly Operational Update on COVID-19 – 13 February](#)).

6 February 2021

[Laboratory capacities are strengthened in several missions deployed in weeks 7 and 8.](#)

WHO laboratory experts were deployed for two weeks from the WHE South Caucasus hub to Abkhazia, Georgia to address laboratory capacities and testing. Another mission deployed to the Republic of Moldova (10 February) to conduct laboratory costing exercises, another to the Russian Federation (10–15 February) for a ninth mentoring mission to the Vektor laboratory, and one to Uzbekistan (15 February) to conduct lab costing and review antigen rapid diagnostic testing capacities.

8 February 2021

A GOARN partners mission deploys to Bosnia and Herzegovina to support contact tracing for COVID-19.

An ECDC field epidemiology fellow was deployed for five weeks, through GOARN, to support implementation and roll-out of Go.Data, and to provide support related to contact tracing operations.

Updated guidance on dealing with COVID-19 in prisons and other place of detention is published.

The WHO/Europe Health in Prisons Programme released updated interim [guidance](#) on preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention. The guidance provides useful information for prison staff, as well as for health and prison authorities, explaining how to prevent and address a potential outbreak of COVID-19, protecting not only those who have direct contact with the facilities, but also the population at large. This update follows the first guidance publication, issued in March 2020.

10 February 2021

The Regional Director held a bilateral meeting with the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Ambassador to Denmark to discuss COVID-19 vaccines.

The session included a briefing on the current COVID-19 situation in the Region for Denmark's ambassadors and representatives of the United Nations Office at Geneva

11 February 2021

In the largest collaboration to date, WHO/Europe and the European Union (EU) join forces to ensure the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines and vaccination in six European countries.

This collaboration between the EU and WHO/Europe was their largest [collaboration](#) in the European Region to date. The six EU Eastern Partnership countries are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

15 February 2021

As part of an ongoing deployment in the WHE Balkan hub countries to further support essential health services in the context of COVID-19, a mission was deployed to support WHO staff in Kosovo³ on 15–19 February.

17 February 2021

Mobile laboratory partners convene to review COVID-19 response operations and further develop minimum standards.

Rapid Response mobile laboratories (RRML) have been a central component of the rapid frontline response to COVID-19 and beyond. Key partners were convened to review the RRML missions deployed in 2020 to respond to COVID-19 in the WHO European Region, in order to inform the ongoing development of minimum standards for these laboratories. WHO/Europe has worked jointly with GOARN, as well as leading organizations including the Robert Koch Institute, the Russian Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Well-being (Rospotrebnadzor), the Louvain Catholic University Centre for Applied Molecular Technologies, the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine, the Bundeswehr Institute for Microbiology, and the United Kingdom's Public Health Rapid Response Team, the Institut Pasteur, the Institute for Virology at the University of Marburg, and Médecins Sans Frontières.

One year of response is discussed at high-level policy dialogues.

On 17 February, a meeting convening the Regional Director, the COVID-19 IMST and high-level representatives was held with the central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and the Russian Federation. On 19 February, the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) were convened in a similar high-level meeting. At each of these meetings, health ministers gave examples of specific aspects of the COVID-19 response that they considered a particularly pertinent representation of their country's experiences. Participants were also briefed on and discussed current developments related to their subregions.

The Regional Director held a bilateral meeting with the Russian Ambassador to Denmark on the progress of the Sputnik V vaccine being included in WHO's Emergency Use Listing.

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).

19 February 2021

The Regional Director held a bilateral call with the President of the Republic of Moldova on the COVID-19 situation and priority group vaccination.

22 February 2021

WHO trains lab workers in conducting assays for single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) to detect SARS-CoV-2 VOCs.

WHO/Europe began training sessions to support countries in detecting and containing the spread of VOCs, beginning with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. WHO/Europe is helping countries to increase the detection capacity for VOCs by providing training on performing SNP assays for the detection of VOCs, programming of real-time PCR instruments and interpreting results. SNP assays allow the quick detection of single nucleotide changes within the SARS-CoV-2 genome, such as the N501Y mutation, present in all three circulating VOCs, thus making them a reliable indicator for the detection of VOCs.

Three missions deploy to Central Asia and Georgia.

WHO experts were deployed to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for laboratory monitoring and evaluation support, and to Georgia to support and assess vaccine effectiveness studies.

23 February 2021

As the pandemic continues to take a toll on mental health, a new WHO expert advisory group is convened.

The COVID-19 pandemic had taken a severe toll on mental health in the WHO European Region. In light of this, and to further support ongoing work, a WHO expert group for mental health was convened in a first meeting. At this inaugural meeting, a short documentary about psychological well-being of health care workers and other frontline responders during the pandemic was released.

24 February 2021

A new global WHO strategic preparedness and response plan for 2021 is published.

With the new year, a new strategic preparedness and response plan was published, outlining the public health measures that the international community was ready to provide to support all countries in preparing for and responding to COVID-19. WHO's actions in the European Region are in line with the plan.

26 February 2021

150 days of response in Lesvos wraps up; lab services are handed over to the Greek National Organization of Public Health.

After providing support on the Greek Island of Lesvos for 150 days, the remaining WHO partner, a GOARN rapid response mobile laboratory, wrapped up the deployment. The European Mobile Lab, run by the Bernhard Nocht Institute of Tropical Medicine in Germany, was deployed for a total of 5 months, including a two-month extension in order to facilitate transition, continuity and sustainability of the laboratory's services to ensure handover to the National Organization of Public Health. This handover included donations of goods and the training of lab technicians to ensure a smooth capacity transfer as part of the RRML exit strategy – developed jointly by the Bernhard Nocht Institute, WHO and the National Organization of Public Health. On 1 March, the lab began operating under the leadership of National Organization of Public Health, with the trained lab technicians.

February 2021 epi summary

The WHO European Region surpassed 38.7 million cases of COVID-19 (cumulative), and 862 000 reported deaths (cumulative).

For further details on the activities conducted in the WHO European Region during February 2021, including country-level activities, see the [January/February 2021 WHO European Region Operational Update](#).



MARCH 2021

1 March 2021

[The Regional Director calls for engagement in the new WHO country presence review process.](#)

WHO/Europe offices were invited to engage in the review process, with the aim of developing country presence plans for each country in the Region, producing a WHO/Europe country presence strategy, and initiating pilot projects for innovative modalities to ensure that WHO/Europe is present for its Member States and delivers as one WHO.

2 March 2021

[The Regional Director held a call with the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the three members of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency to discuss the COVID-19 situation and vaccination of priority groups.](#)

4 March 2021

[First shipment of vaccines to the European Region through the COVAX Facility arrives.](#)

The first vaccines delivered in the WHO European Region through the COVAX Facility were [deployed to the Republic of Moldova](#). This followed a readiness drill organized by the Republic of Moldova's national health authorities with support from WHO/Europe.

[Community engagement is imperative for successful COVID-19 contact tracing; WHO outlines principles for health authorities in new guidance.](#)

Contact tracing has been a key element of WHO's recommended approach to control the spread of COVID-19 by breaking the chains of human-to-human transmission. WHO/Europe published interim [guidance](#) to bolster contact tracing efforts in the Region through risk communication and community engagement. The guidance is aimed at health authorities at all levels. A series of "train the trainer" events took place in several countries over subsequent weeks..

5 March 2021

[Lab costing and quality management were the focus of WHO expert deployment to Uzbekistan.](#)

Eleven WHO experts and national laboratory mentors were deployed on a mission to the Syr Darya region of Uzbekistan. In collaboration with the WHO/Europe team for health systems strengthening, laboratory assessments and cost assessments of laboratory tests were conducted

at hospital and polyclinic laboratories included in the new model of health service delivery and financing to be piloted in Syr Darya. The mission marks the start of mentoring of identified laboratories in the region for quality management system implementation, and to coach new national mentors from Tashkent, thereby increasing the laboratory capacity in the country.

[A month-long surveillance mission deploys to Armenia.](#)

A technical expert from WHO/Europe was deployed for four weeks to support the national authorities in respect to surveillance and epidemiology, including consulting on the redesign of the Ministry of Health's national COVID-19 dashboard, and supporting the analysis of daily surveillance data, the development of an algorithm for the selection of SARS-CoV-2 samples for sequencing, and a methodology for reinfection surveillance and review of the contact tracing strategy in place. A post-introduction review was also performed of the use of RDTs for SARS-CoV-2.

9 March 2021

[As school closures continue to take effect in the Region, the TAG on safe schooling reviews key issues, with youth perspectives.](#)

By this point in the pandemic, children and adolescents in the Region had missed an average of 22 weeks of schooling due to partial and complete closures of schools. The majority of Member States had been implementing more severe measures, with some transitioning students to distance learning. In its fourth [meeting](#), the TAG reviewed emerging evidence on previously raised issues, the effect of new VOCs, and vaccine roll-out. Recommendations were published in a [report](#) issued on 24 March and disseminated widely in countries.

10 March 2021

[Sustainable recovery after COVID-19 is the focus of Europe's 2021 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.](#)

WHO/Europe participated in the forum convened by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The first part of the hybrid [plenary session](#) brought together delegates from Portugal and Romania, alongside the President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the Deputy

Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the Executive Secretary of UNECE. This was followed by a discussion on how to tackle the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and promote a sustainable recovery.

WHO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) host a joint session on intersectoral responses to COVID-19.

Over 100 participants joined a peer-learning roundtable, centred on the impact of COVID-19 on people's lives, and on strengthening health systems and social protection, as part of the UNECE 2021 [Regional Forum](#) on Sustainable Development. At this point, the WHO European Region was still seeing high rates of transmission, strain of hospitalizations on health systems and the possibility of resurgence in all countries. A wide range of partners from Albania, Georgia, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova provided case studies and shared their experiences on pandemic response.

Twenty-eighth SCRC convenes for the third time.

The [virtual meeting](#) took place on 10–11 March, included an update on the COVID-19 pandemic situation and a follow-up discussion on WHO/Europe's activities and pandemic response. Participants issued a [statement](#), expressing a continued call for international solidarity and equity.

12 March 2021

Belgian and Danish emergency medical teams (EMTs) are deployed to support patients in Slovakia.

In January 2021, Slovakia reported high hospitalization rates for COVID-19 patients. Following high levels of transmission, the Government made a request for foreign assistance to the EU and WHO. In response, clinicians from the WHO-classified EMT from Belgian First Aid and Support and the Danish Emergency Management Agency were jointly deployed to Slovakia. The missions are being facilitated by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre at the European Commission's European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations and are run in close coordination with WHO/Europe.

13 March 2021

Vaccine effectiveness studies are the focus of a mission to Georgia.

WHO/Europe deployed an expert in epidemiology for a two-week mission from 13 to 27 March to support planning and implementation of vaccine effectiveness studies to be carried out among health care workers.

15 March 2021

Emergency supply chain processes are assessed in a WHO mission to the Western Balkans.

Between 15 and 23 March 2021, health emergency logistics experts from WHO/Europe conducted missions to Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, to support rapid assessments of procurement, logistics, customs clearance and human resource capacities.

WHO/Europe Regional Director held a high-level roundtable discussion with health ministers of the Western Balkans.

The meeting focused on the sharing and discussion of lessons learned in the subregion throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHO/Europe supports countries in increasing detection capacities for variants.

Three WHO laboratory expert missions were deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina (15 March), Ukraine (16 March), and Uzbekistan (18 March). WHO is supporting laboratories in conducting whole genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 samples and transferring more accessible technologies to rapidly identify the circulation of VOCs. Further training is planned to support countries in detecting and containing the spread of VOCs.

16 March 2021

WHO carefully reviews safety concerns regarding the AstraZeneca COVID-19.

By mid-March, several countries in the EU/European Economic Area had suspended the administration of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine on a precautionary basis. The WHO Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety held virtual [meetings](#) on 16 and 19 March 2021 to review available information and data on thromboembolic events (blood clots) and thrombocytopenia (low platelets) after vaccination with the AstraZeneca

COVID-19 vaccine. On 19 March, WHO/Europe held a webinar to share the findings and statements from the Committee meetings.

18 March 2021

Member States are supported in undertaking vaccine effectiveness studies with new WHO study protocols.

In mid-March 2021, WHO/Europe published comprehensive [guidance](#) outlining the methods that could be used in countries to undertake studies of hospital-based health care workers to evaluate the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines in preventing laboratory-confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection post introduction, complimenting existing WHO unity studies. WHO/Europe has been supporting Member States in setting up vaccine effectiveness studies since late 2020.

19 March 2021

Public sharing of surveillance data is strengthened through the launch of a new ECDC–WHO/Europe bulletin.

A new joint regional report was [published](#) for the first time. This ECDC–WHO/Europe COVID-19 weekly surveillance bulletin is mainly based on weekly surveillance submissions to the European Surveillance System, ongoing since early 2020. This is predominantly automated output, which will substantially decrease the resources required for weekly reporting while increasing the amount of information shared externally. On 4 June 2021, a stand-alone [web page](#) was launched for the bulletin, showcasing the new joint report in an interactive and visual format.

WHO convenes its first high-level meeting on post-COVID conditions.

WHO/Europe held its first (virtual) [meeting](#) on post-COVID conditions, also known as long COVID. This provided an opportunity for Member States in the WHO European Region to share experiences on data, burden, management and health systems' response to post-COVID conditions. WHO/Europe stands ready to support Member States in revisiting and improving their national monitoring and evaluation capacity, to develop national guidance to manage patients with post-COVID conditions, and to support their health systems to adapt to post-COVID conditions.

22 March 2021

With vaccine roll-out expanding to more European countries, WHO/Europe creates job aids to guide health care workers on vaccine administration.

WHO/Europe published two job aids for COVID-19 vaccine administration for health care workers. One for the [Moderna vaccine](#) and another for the ChAdOx1-S [recombinant] [COVID-19 vaccine](#). These aids are intended to guide health care workers through important details of the new vaccines, including schedule of doses, storage conditions, contraindications, and communication during patient visits.

WHO/Europe team of experts is deployed to support laboratory system strengthening and reform in Uzbekistan.

From 22 March to 7 April 2021, a team of experts from WHO/Europe was deployed to Uzbekistan to assist in the ongoing reform of the laboratory system. A donation of 1 000 SNP assays was also given to the National Virology Laboratory, and training was provided for the detection of VOCs. (Read more on page 4 of the [March 2021 WHO European Region Operational Update on COVID-19](#)).

23 March 2021

Emerging mental health needs in the Region are addressed in the second meeting of the WHO expert group.

Going into the second year of the pandemic, the mental health impacts have continued to take an enormous toll on European society. The high-level [technical advisory group](#) on the mental health impacts of COVID-19 met a second time, with a broad range of participants, to identify the remaining gaps in the evidence base on the mental health impacts of COVID-19. Discussions also identified key emergent needs and their implications for developing and strengthening mental health services as an integrated component of the COVID-19 recovery in the WHO European Region.

24 March 2021

The Regional Director visits [Kyrgyzstan](#), with a focus on health system strengthening.

The visit, which took place on 24–26 March, entailed a variety of meetings and field visits, focusing on COVID-19 and the impact of the pandemic on essential health services. The Regional Director and the President discussed progress with regard to COVID-19 vaccines and the COVAX Facility, and the country's plans for public health reform. The Regional Director also conducted several [field visits](#) to learn about the reality on the ground and see innovations that had come about during the pandemic.

28 March 2021

[Donations of SNP assays, training on their use and assessment of laboratory capacities is addressed in the WHO mission to Moldova.](#)

A WHO/Europe mission was deployed to the Republic of Moldova on 29 March–2 April, to provide training in the use of real-time PCR instruments and the interpretation of results to help detect new VOCs. As part of its support to the Republic of Moldova for scaling up laboratory capacities in relation to COVID-19, WHO/Europe donated and distributed 1 000 N501Y SNP assays to the country and provided training for their use in detection of SARS-CoV-2 variants.

March 2021 epi summary

The WHO European Region reached close to 45 million cases of COVID-19 (cumulative), and 960 000 reported deaths (cumulative).

For further details on the activities conducted in the WHO European Region during March 2021, including country-level activities, see the [March 2021 WHO European Region Operational Update](#).

A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a person seen from behind, looking out through horizontal window blinds. The person's hands are resting on the blinds, and their face is partially visible in profile. The blinds create a series of horizontal light and dark stripes across the entire image.

APRIL 2021

1 April 2021

The WHO Regional Director for Europe and the WHO Director-General held a virtual call with the President of Azerbaijan to discuss the COVID-19 situation and matters related to the COVAX Facility. The Regional Director commended the President for his leadership in calling for international solidarity through the United Nations and Non-Aligned Movement.

4 April 2021

Capacities for variant detection are strengthened in laboratory missions to Armenia and Montenegro.

A WHO laboratory expert was deployed to support Montenegro (4 April) and Armenia (7–8 April) in detecting new VOCs through theoretical and hands-on training on virus evolution, principles and details of SNP assays, and SNP assay interpretation.

5 April 2021

The #DoltAll communications campaign launches to counteract the diminishing risk perception caused by vaccine roll-out.

The campaign, launched to reinforce compliance with public health and social measures and to counteract the diminishing risk perception caused by the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines, comprises messages urging everyone to continue all the protective behaviours known to work at an individual level, including avoiding crowds, physical distancing, hand hygiene, masks and ventilation, to minimize the risk of COVID-19 infection..

7 April 2021

The Regional Director visits Romania, to discuss the importance of leaving no one behind.

The visit, which took place from 7 to 9 April 2021, coincided with World Health Day. Leaving no one behind from a health perspective has taken on a greater sense of urgency during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Regional Director addressed decision-makers, highlighting the importance of equity in health. He also met with the President, and visited patients, health care workers and civil society organizations delivering health care to people who find themselves in difficult circumstances.

WHO European Region surpasses 1 million confirmed COVID-19 deaths.

8 April 2021

WHO country representatives are deployed to Abkhazia to deliver critical COVID-19 supplies.

In a coordination, planning and monitoring mission, WHO/Europe experts were deployed to the region of Abkhazia, Georgia on 8–10 April to deliver test kits, oxygen concentrators, pulse oximeters and medical gowns.

A complete database of historical subnational COVID-19 data is made public.

As only the most current data is shared in the WHO-EURO COVID19 Subnational Explorer, the historical dataset of subnational COVID-19 in the WHO European Region became an important resource.

10 April 2021

WHO begins a pilot project, empowering civil society organizations as agents of change in the COVID-19 response.

Civil society organizations have been crucial partners in reducing the impacts of COVID-19 on individuals and communities, particularly the most vulnerable. To engage and empower these organizations, WHO/Europe launched an initiative to help them contribute further to the current COVID-19 response and to countries' and communities' future readiness and preparedness by strengthening their resilience to emergencies, connecting vulnerable communities to services, and enhancing inclusive governance. This initiative invested directly in 11 selected civil society organizations in eight Member States in the WHO European Region, showing how small investments in such organizations can have a meaningful impact.

12 April 2021

WHO/Europe supports COVID-19 response in an expert mission to Albania.

WHO experts were deployed on 12–16 April to support the coordination of monitoring and surveillance for SARS-CoV-2 variants, further scaling up of laboratory detection of SARS-CoV-2, infection prevention and control, and case management. The mission included assessing what future support is needed from WHO/Europe (head office in Copenhagen, WHE Balkan hub and Country Office in Albania). (Read more on page 5 of the April 2021 WHO/Europe COVID-19 Operational update).

14 April 2021

The Regional Director visits Greece, focusing on primary health care, quality of care, mental health, migrant health and COVID-19 response.

During his visit to Greece on 14–16 April, the Regional Director made several field visits to learn more about the challenges related to COVID-19 and hopes for the future. This included the opening of the new WHO [centre of excellence](#) on quality of care and patient safety in Athens, and visits to a [mega-vaccination centre](#) and a refugee and migrant accommodation centre. The mega-vaccination centre is one of five around the country, along with more than 1 000 smaller centres, allowing for the roll-out of vaccinations to over 1 million people.

16 April 2021

The Delta (B.1.617) variant is first detected in the European Region.

In mid-April, the emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants in the Pango lineage B.1.617, initially detected in India, were detected in the European Region. By the end of April, WHO had designated this variant as a Variant of Interest (VOI), and 20 countries/territories in the European Region had reported its detection. The VOI designation means that it may have mutations that make the virus easier to spread, cause more severe disease or escape vaccine immunity.

The Regional Director meets with the Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The Assembly is an important partner for WHO/Europe. The Regional Director spoke at the Assembly's 52nd plenary [session](#), emphasizing the importance of reaching migrant populations for COVID-19 testing, treatment and disease control measures also in the context of achieving [universal health coverage](#).

19 April 2021

The Regional Director visits Serbia, focusing on vaccination efforts.

The Regional Director met with the President and Prime Minister of Serbia and visited a mass vaccination point in Belgrade, observing the country's resilience and the various solutions found in the context of solidarity and united action for

better health. The site had been repurposed from the Belgrade Fair, having previously been used as a temporary hospital to treat COVID-19 patients. Together with representatives of the Government of Serbia, the Regional Director opened cold rooms at the Torlak Institute, in which over US\$ 350 000 had been invested to secure a cold chain of COVID-19 vaccines.

WHO/Europe missions to Azerbaijan focus on scaling up sampling capacities in remote areas.

WHO/Europe carried out two missions to several conflict-affected districts in Azerbaijan, with a focus on strengthening quality assurance and biosafety during SARS-CoV-2 sample collection and transport. From 3 to 7 May, a group of WHO/Europe experts visited several sites to assess COVID-19 sample collection algorithms and quality management system and biosafety, identify respective weaknesses and capacity gaps. Short- and long-term recommendations were formulated.

A WHO mission deploys to Tajikistan to support risk communication and community engagement for a poliomyelitis outbreak in the COVID-19 context.

The WHO/Europe expert provided general communication support to the Country Office, contributed to the discussion on the risk communication and community engagement strategy for COVID-19, and coordinated with partners to consider risk communication and community engagement in the context of the application of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

21 April 2021

WHO/Europe uses the COVID-19 response as an opportunity to assess core capacities at points of entry; WHO mission is deployed to the Republic of Moldova.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been considered an opportunity to evaluate and improve the current level of the Republic of Moldova's preparedness and responsiveness. A WHO joint mission of representatives of WHO/Europe, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova, and competent authorities at PoEs conducted an assessment of IHR (2005) core capacities at four designated ground crossings, developing an action plan for immediate, medium-term and long-term interventions.

21 April 2021

The Regional Director visits Hungary, emphasizing the importance of continued public health and social measures.

The Regional Director met with the Prime Minister of Hungary and congratulated the authorities on their swift vaccination roll-out, resilience, and sharing of doses. The Regional Director also met with experts from Semmelweis University who have been supporting critical behavioural insights work. He held a high-level roundtable discussion with the health ministers of the Visegrád Four countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), as well as Croatia and Slovenia, on lessons learned from the COVID-19 response. As emphasized in a [joint press conference](#), despite the highest COVID-19 vaccine coverage in the Region, public health and social measures must continue throughout the vaccination roll-out.

22 April 2021

Laboratory capacities and training are the focus of a third laboratory deployment to Kazakhstan.

Following two previous missions in 2020 (13–27 August and 21–31 October), a WHO/Europe laboratory mission was deployed to Kazakhstan from 22 April to 13 May 2021. The WHO/Europe experts, together with country colleagues, reviewed laboratory testing capacities for COVID-19, and trained national mentors to support COVID-19 testing laboratories in quality management implementations. These efforts and more are part of the sustainable strategy for the country, aligned with WHO/Europe's 2021 objective to identify and institutionalize innovations from the COVID-19 pandemic into national and subnational health systems.

23 April 2021

COVAX helps make equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines a reality in the WHO European Region.

By 23 April, the COVAX Facility had delivered over 1 million doses of Pfizer–BioNTech and AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines to 14 participating countries in the WHO European Region. This global initiative is helping lower- and middle-income countries in the Region to deploy COVID-19 vaccines in parallel with deployment in high-income countries, thereby contributing to the goal of ensuring equitable access to this global public good.

28 April 2021

WHO/Europe gathers guidance on use of the recombinant COVID-19 vaccine and devises strategies to help Member States achieve vaccination coverage targets.

WHO/Europe convened an ad hoc meeting of the European Technical Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (ETAGE) to request advice and guidance on the use of the ChAdOx1-S [recombinant] COVID-19 vaccine in the context of reported cases of thrombosis and thrombocytopenia. In addition, guidance on setting COVID-19 vaccination coverage targets was issued for Member States in the Region, as part of planning for and setting national vaccination strategies.

April 2021 epi summary

The WHO European Region reached close to 52 million cases of COVID-19 (cumulative), and 1.1 million reported deaths (cumulative).

For further details on the activities conducted in the WHO European Region during April 2021, including country-level activities, see the [April 2021 WHO European Region Operational Update on COVID-19](#).



MAY 2021

3 May 2021

The Regional Director visited Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on COVID-19 and continued diplomacy in the Western Balkans.

The visit, which took place on 3–5 May, included discussions about the COVID-19 response and the development of the Roadmap for Health in the Western Balkans 2021–2025. The Regional Director met with the Minister of Health, the Minister of Civil Affairs and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as with the chairs of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Presidency and of the Council of Ministers. Meetings were also held with EU ambassadors, United Nations Country Team representatives and resident coordinators, development partners, primary health care staff and key stakeholders in the health sector.

4 May 2021

WHO supports countries in estimating COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness by leveraging existing surveillance systems.

WHO/Europe published [guidance](#) for conducting post-introduction vaccine studies to answer remaining questions about the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines in community settings. At this point in the pandemic, many countries in the WHO European Region were beginning or continuing vaccine distribution and administration. The approach outlined in the new guidance relies on leveraging existing surveillance systems for severe acute respiratory infection to estimate COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness in preventing such infections associated with laboratory-confirmed SARS-CoV-2.

5 May 2021

WHO/Europe launches new tools to improve handwashing practices, promoting infection prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

WHO/Europe has supported Member States in infection prevention and control throughout the pandemic through continuous technical support and other measures. On World Hygiene Day, WHO/Europe launched new [guidance](#) for health care workers, to make hand hygiene easier. Health care workers have faced intense pressure over the past year, having treated unprecedented numbers of patients during the pandemic.

WHO/Europe publishes additional modules to support Member States in preparing for and implementing COVID-19 vaccination programmes.

Despite constraints in the supply of COVID-19 vaccines, governments in the Region have faced the unprecedented challenge of immunizing the majority of their populations in the shortest time possible. WHO/Europe therefore published guidance intended for national and subnational managers responsible for COVID-19 vaccination planning and implementation.

- Operational guidance: COVID-19 immunization service delivery modalities
- Operational guidance: Health workforce and security

The Regional Director visits Montenegro, focusing on resilient health systems and diplomacy.

The visit, which took place on 5–7 May, included discussions on regional-level and country-specific health challenges, and on ongoing cooperation between WHO and the Government of Montenegro, including on strengthening governance, surveillance, diagnostics and clinical management while building digital health innovation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The Regional Director met with the Minister of Health, the Prime Minister, members of Parliament, EU ambassadors, United Nations Country Team representatives and resident coordinators, development partners, primary health care staff and key stakeholders in the health sector.

10 May 2021

A WHO mission deployed to North Macedonia to support laboratory capacities, including by offering training on SNP assay use.

12 May 2021

WHO convenes European ministers to review ongoing vaccine deployment in the Region.

The Regional Director convened a high-level ministerial [meeting](#) on COVID-19 vaccination uptake, challenges and opportunities in the WHO European Region. The scope of the meeting was to do a stocktake of progress in COVID-19 vaccine deployment and vaccination in the WHO European Region, and to discuss ways to address the current challenges, areas of influence and opportunities to optimize vaccination uptake in Member States. Areas of discussion included opportunities to

increase uptake in priority groups and plans to achieve a programme target by identifying drivers and barriers to vaccination.

A high-level meeting of Member States is convened to promote coordinated decision-making on international travel measures.

Since spring 2020, many European countries have been implementing a range of travel restriction measures in line with evolving epidemiology. WHO/Europe therefore convened 71 participants from 31 Member States to review the overall status of the pandemic and the public health and social measures taken in the Region, update on the outcomes of the 6th and 7th International Health Regulations (IHR) Emergency Committee meetings, and allow a forum for sharing experiences and updates from Member States and from partners.

14 May 2021

The Regional Director meets with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Council for Cooperation in Health.

In this meeting, which was chaired by the Minister of Health of Belarus, the Regional Director expressed appreciation for the Council's role in the coordination of joint efforts on COVID-19 response. The Regional Director offered WHO/Europe's support to the Council's working body, the CIS Coordination Council on the sanitary protection of the territories of CIS Member States, in developing a legal framework to implement the Council for Cooperation in Health's 2020 decision on priorities and actions to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.

15 May 2021

WHO/Europe publishes its 50th bulletin on health in prisons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the pandemic, WHO/Europe has been publishing regular internal, regional-level bulletins on health in prisons in the WHO European Region.

16 May 2021

From 16 May to 7 June, a WHO mission deployed to Armenia to support COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

17 May 2021

As part of initial redesign efforts under the Hospital of Tomorrow project in Italy, WHO/Europe deploys an expert in innovative hospital planning to Tuscany.

In 2020, WHO/Europe collaborated with several regions in Italy, launching the Hospital of Tomorrow project, with the aim of identifying new standards for health care facilities in the post-COVID-19 era. In May, following an assessment of the Livorno Hospital in Tuscany, WHO designed a facility with 430 acute care beds. This new hospital will be among the first constructed on the basis of project's findings. (Read more on page 3 of the [Weekly Operational Update on COVID-19 – 7 June 2021](#)).

Lessons learned during the pandemic prompt collaboration to revamp guidance on risk communication and community engagement.

For over a decade, as part of emergency preparedness efforts, WHO/Europe has built risk communication and community engagement capacity across the Region, including through the recent launch and implementation of the [Emergency risk communication 5-step capacity building package](#). This was rolled out in 19 countries and territories by the end of 2019. This package has guided WHO/Europe's response to the COVID-19 pandemic since early 2020. At the same time, a huge wealth of lessons have been learned and new evidence has emerged. To reflect these, in May 2021, WHO/Europe began to collaborate with UNICEF, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and ECDC to revamp the package and make it fit for purpose.

A laboratory follow-up mission deploys to Kyrgyzstan, and a laboratory support mission deploys to Kosovo.³

The main objectives of the mission to Kyrgyzstan were to assess laboratory performance of SARS-CoV-2 State laboratories, to follow up on implementation of SARS-CoV-2 SNP assays for variant screening in the subnational laboratory, to support the development of a laboratory contingency plan for the State sanitary and epidemiology surveillance laboratory in Osh, and to deliver 300 SNP variant screening assays to enable them to pre-screen 300 samples for the alpha variant. The laboratory mission to Kosovo³ supported the use of SNP assays in COVID-19 testing.

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).

17 May 2021

The Regional Director convenes two high-level subregional roundtable discussions.

One with the health ministers of the Baltic Countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) and the other with those from the central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), and the Russian Federation. The focus of the discussions was the ongoing country presence review, with a presentation from WHO/Europe's IMST leaders on the COVID-19 situation and recent developments in the Region.

18 May 2021

The Twenty-eighth SCRC meets to set the agenda for the 71st session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC71).

The Twenty-eighth SCRC held its fourth regular session in mid-May to finalize the agenda and documentation for RC71, including the progress report on implementation of the Action Plan on public health preparedness and response in the WHO European Region, 2018–2023. The SCRC agreed that RC71 would be held in virtual format.

WHO convenes countries to review experience thus far with the COVID-19 simulation exercises and intra-action reviews.

In 2020, WHO developed the COVID-19 simulation exercises and intra-action review tools that support countries in strengthening preparedness and response capacities during the pandemic. To reflect on and review the lessons learned so far from the use of these tools in countries, WHO organized a consultative meeting for sharing experiences, with the WHO/Europe team facilitating country presentations from the Region and moderating a discussion.

21 May 2021

Ahead of the summer season and with lockdowns lifting, WHO/Europe, together with key partners, launches the #SummerSense campaign promoting the continuation of safe practices.

With lockdowns easing in many countries across the European Region, many individuals were considering foreign travel, and attending music festivals and sporting events. Learning from the experiences of summer 2020, when COVID-19 cases surged in the autumn following a relaxation in measures in the summer, the #SummerSense

campaign was launched. This joint campaign by WHO/Europe and UNICEF Europe and Central Asia advises people on how to make the most of the warmer weather while staying protected against COVID-19.

23 May 2021

A WHO mission deploys to Georgia and Tajikistan to support COVID-19 vaccine roll-out.

Support was provided to the health ministries in Georgia and Tajikistan for COVID-19 vaccination roll-out, and targeted support was also given regarding the ongoing circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 outbreak in Tajikistan. The main impetus was to collectively review COVID-19 vaccination uptake and progress at the subnational level and devise tailored interventions to tackle the challenges identified. The nature of the visit involved high-level advocacy, policy dialogue, partner engagement and resource mobilization in relation to the vaccine response at the national and subnational levels.

24 May 2021

The Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly focuses on ending the pandemic and "building back better."

The Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly took place virtually from 24 May to 31 May 2021, on the theme of "Ending this pandemic, and preventing the next: building together a healthier, safer and fairer world". An update on implementation of Health Assembly resolution WHA 73.1 on COVID-19 response was presented. Among other agenda items, a draft resolution on strengthening WHO preparedness for and response to health emergencies was supported by many Member States from the WHO European Region.

Intra-action review is integrated with an ongoing mission in Montenegro, resulting in the first "embedded" intra-action review.

Following an exploratory scoping mission in April 2021, representatives of the WHO/Europe main office in Copenhagen, the Ministry of Health of Montenegro, the Robert Koch Institute, and the WHO Country Office in Montenegro conducted a joint COVID-19 intra-action review between 24 and 28 May 2021. The review was integrated into the response activities of an ongoing mission, allowing the team to be integrated, for the first time, into the daily routine of frontline health care workers and

experience first-hand the challenges they face. This embedded approach resulted in the identification of immediate, medium- and long-term actions to be taken to improve the current COVID-19 response and strengthen the country's preparedness and response to epidemics in general. (Read more on page 3 of the [Weekly Operational Update on COVID-19 – 31 May 2021](#)).

[Two missions deploy, one to Montenegro to address laboratory capacities, and another to Azerbaijan to support routine vaccination programmes in the context of COVID-19.](#)

25 May 2021

[The first in a series of country training programmes for spokespersons on how to prepare for and actively participate in media interviews is launched in Azerbaijan.](#)

WHO/Europe conducted online training for over 20 government officials, WHO staff and international organizations on how to strengthen capacity for working with the media as an essential partner during COVID-19. The training covered practical skills and provided examples that the spokespersons could use when communicating with various types of media, as well as key principles to consider before, during and after interviews. A question-and-answer session enabled the facilitators to hear about opportunities and challenges faced by government spokespersons when communicating about COVID-19, and to learn about country-specific aspects of the media landscape in Azerbaijan. Similar training was conducted with regional health officials and WHO/Europe staff in Ukraine, and with WHO/Europe staff in Croatia.

[A WHO vaccine coordination mission deploys to Armenia.](#)

A WHO/Europe expert was deployed to Armenia from 25 May to 8 June, to give strategic guidance with the goal of ensuring continuous governance and coordination of the national COVID-19 vaccination response.

26 May 2021

[A WHO mission deploys to Azerbaijan to provide technical support for ongoing vaccine effectiveness studies being conducted among health care workers.](#)

27 May 2021

[A WHO COVID-19 prison surveillance protocol is developed to support monitoring, reporting, and control of infections in places of detention.](#)

As cases of SARS-CoV-2 continued to spread in prisons and place of detention, WHO/Europe developed the [WHO COVID-19 Prison Surveillance Protocol](#) to support the reporting of COVID-19. The Protocol sets out the principles and definitions of a surveillance system devised by the WHO Health in Prisons Programme to monitor COVID-19 infections in prisons and other places of detention, and to report the main measures to prevent, control and manage the spread of the disease.

28 May 2021

[WHO/Europe works to keep spectators, players and communities safe as European governments restart sporting events.](#)

Across the WHO European Region, governments and event organizers were planning to [restart events](#) that would bring together large numbers of people in sometimes crowded settings. These decisions were based on progress in bringing down the number of reported cases and deaths from COVID-19. However, the pandemic was not over. To curb possible spread of the virus, WHO promoted coordinated implementation of all public health and social measures. Among an array of activities to support countries in balancing the risk in relation to sporting events, WHO/Europe published a comprehensive set of [considerations to bear in mind](#) ahead of, during and after major sporting events.

[The Regional Director and Director-General held a call with the President of Kazakhstan regarding the country's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and development of a COVID-19 vaccine.](#)

31 May 2021

WHO announces a global recommendation for using letters of the Greek Alphabet as easy-to-pronounce and non-stigmatizing labels for VOIs and VOCs.

The Regional Director visits the Russian Federation, to look at the months ahead

From 31 May to 4 June 2021, The Regional Director spent the week with representatives of the health authorities, parliamentarians, governors and international partners in Moscow and Saint Petersburg to talk about the current status of COVID-19, vaccines, drug security, health systems, and the coming months. The Regional Director also participated in the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum, in a discussion on the 78+ Target: Responding to the challenges of the pandemic and drug security at the heart of a robust health care system.

May 2021 epi summary

The WHO European Region surpassed 54.1 million cases of COVID-19 (cumulative) and 1.1 million reported deaths (cumulative). (See the Weekly Epidemiological Update on COVID-19 – 25 May 2021).

For further details on the activities conducted in the WHO European Region during May 2021, including country-level activities, see the May 2021 WHO European Region Operational Update on COVID-19.

A photograph showing an elderly woman with grey hair and glasses, wearing a white face mask and a dark blue jacket, seated in a black wheelchair. She is holding a red cup. In the foreground, a young woman with long dark hair, also wearing a pink face mask and a white hoodie, is leaning over a white table, writing on a piece of paper with a blue pen. In the background, several other people are visible, some wearing face masks, in what appears to be an outdoor public space. A blue semi-transparent banner is overlaid at the bottom of the image.

JUNE 2021

1 June 2021

After 10 months, WHO closes its COVID-19 subnational laboratory external quality assessments platform.

Since August 2020, WHO has been running a web-based platform designed for subnational laboratories to submit results, allowing for a comparison of each laboratory's testing to a source outside the laboratory (such as a reference laboratory). These assessments are a critical aspect of laboratory quality management. In the European Region, 715 laboratories from 24 countries participated. Certification of participation was distributed to laboratories that submitted to the external quality assessment platform. To ensure sustained laboratory testing quality, WHO/Europe will follow up with subnational laboratories as well as with national and regional laboratories.

4 June 2021

A WHO laboratory and COVID-19 diagnostics mission deploys to Uzbekistan to support national capacities and conduct biosafety and biosecurity training.

7 June 2021

A first WHO emergency care systems assessment is conducted in the context of COVID-19 in the Republic of Moldova.

Experts from WHO/Europe were deployed to the Republic of Moldova to conduct an emergency care systems assessment, which is one of the WHO [tools for strengthening emergency care systems](#). The mission included experts from WHO headquarters, the WHO/Europe head office in Copenhagen, the WHE Balkan hub and the WHO Country Office for Moldova, along with experts from the Ministry of Health of Israel and Red Cross Israel. The mission led to the identification of actions for strengthening Moldova's emergency care system. These actions were to feed into the revision of the five-year national plan for the health sector, and were part of WHO's ongoing efforts to help countries "build back better", while still in the midst of the pandemic response.

8 June 2021

WHO/Europe brings all partners together for the first time under the civil society organization initiative.

WHO/Europe convened the launch meeting for the WHO civil society organization initiative, which came into being in April 2021. This was the first time that all partners were gathered together, including focal points from civil society organizations and WHO country offices. This meeting fostered networking among the civil society organizations involved and introduced participants to WHO. The Regional Emergency Director delivered opening remarks. The involvement of civil society organizations means that Member States can expect an increase in community resilience, leading to a better implementation of national strategic preparedness and response plans for future emergencies.

The Regional Director held a high-level roundtable discussion with the health ministers of Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

IMST leaders presented an update with regard to the COVID-19 situation and recent developments in the Region.

10 June 2021

Participants from across the Region meet at a policy forum on behavioural and cultural insights.

Director spoke to the 50 assembled participants of the [policy forum](#) which brought together Member States to discuss the impact of the pandemic on the Region's young people; behavioural and cultural insights have shown how the pandemic has left young people behind. WHO/Europe has been facilitating the gathering of these insights.

11 June 2021

Regional collaboration, which is critical in times of emergencies, is fostered through the launch of a new WHO civil-military health collaboration project.

WHO launched an initiative to promote civilian and military health collaboration for emergency preparedness in the context of COVID-19. In mid-June, WHO/Europe organized a high-level webinar to present this project. WHO is responsible for all aspects of the collaboration and logistics. The project aims to enhance civil-military health

collaboration at the national and subregional levels through capacity mapping and the development and implementation of tools and guidance to facilitate coordinated multisectoral and intersectoral engagement for greater country health emergency preparedness, resilience and health security. Countries participating in the project include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine. The participants (Member States, partners, non-State actors and WHO/Europe representatives) emphasized that regional collaboration was of critical importance outside of disease outbreaks, and that joint action should not be ignored until it is urgently needed in times of emergency.

WHO initiates a case study series to help countries develop successful contact tracing strategies.

WHO/Europe conducted the first in a planned series of case studies on COVID-19 contact tracing, in Kosovo.² The case studies are intended to document the contact tracing operations applied by countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to capture the diversity in contact tracing operations across the Region, as well as examples of best practice. This will provide a fuller understanding of the underlying factors that may contribute to the outcomes and successes of certain techniques and strategies for contact tracing.

WHO mission teams deploy to Abkhazia, Georgia to conduct training on the use of laboratory samples registration and processing, and to support country-level coordination, planning and monitoring.

14 June 2021

Vaccine roll-out is supported through missions to the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan.

An expert from WHO/Europe deployed to Tajikistan to provide additional general support to the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out, as well as support to the response to circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2 in the country. This was followed by a mission to the Republic of Moldova (on 21 June). In both countries, the mission included field visits to review the organization and implementation of the vaccination roll-out, and a briefing for subnational decision-makers on the importance and relevance of COVID-19 vaccination and of strengthening routine immunization activities.

A WHO mission deploys to Azerbaijan.

Over three weeks, the WHE South Caucasus hub provided support to Azerbaijan to improve surveillance infection prevention and control standards through the development of sterilization pathways, as well as an assessment of infection prevention and control in COVID-19 vaccination sites and primary health care facilities.

Insights for next influenza season are simultaneously assessed in WHO COVID-19 surveillance efforts, including June missions.

Two surveillance missions related to both influenza and COVID-19 were deployed in mid-June, one to Ukraine on 14–18 June and another to Uzbekistan on 21–25 June. Both missions were conducted under the [Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework](#) umbrella and included reviews of sentinel surveillance data related to both COVID-19 and influenza, resulting in recommendations for the next influenza season.

15 June 2021

A new WHO/Europe information series highlights the transformation of primary health care during COVID-19.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, primary health care systems in the WHO European Region have met the unprecedented surge in needs, with several countries responding by accelerating long-standing reforms and showing various degrees of adaptation and transformation in primary health care. The WHO European Centre for Primary Health Care launched a new [information series](#) highlighting this transformation.

16 June 2021

WHO/Europe and ECDC launch an indicator framework to evaluate the public health effectiveness of digital proximity tracing solutions.

Digital proximity tracing – using smartphones or purpose-built devices to capture anonymized interactions between individuals and to then issue alerts – emerged during the pandemic as a new means of support for government-led contact tracing programmes. WHO, through WHO/Europe and headquarters, together with ECDC, developed an [indicator framework](#), in consultation with public health experts globally. The framework will provide countries with a standardized approach for evaluating their use of digital proximity tracing solutions.

16 June 2021

A second high-level meeting of Member States is convened to promote coordinated decision-making on international travel measures.

WHO/Europe convened 81 participants from 26 Member States for the second in a series of regional consultations focusing on available options for implementing public health and social measures and their impact on international travel to ensure better coordination throughout the next phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants shared experiences and lessons learned on the use of risk-based approaches in the implementation of international travel measures by countries, and updated on approaches to international contact tracing.

21 June 2021

A WHO surveillance and epidemiology mission deployed to Uzbekistan.

The mission involved a review of sentinel surveillance and electronic data management related to influenza and COVID-19, and proposed recommendations for the next influenza season. The mission was conducted under the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework umbrella.

Two laboratory support missions deploy.

WHO laboratory experts deployed to Kazakhstan to conduct biosafety and biosecurity training, and another deployed to Bosnia and Herzegovina to conduct sequencing training in Banja Luka.

22 June 2021

In response to concern over multi-inflammatory syndrome in children, WHO/Europe initiates an expert series for central Asian and South Caucasian countries.

Following a request from Kyrgyzstan, WHO/Europe initiated a webinar series on the topic of multi-inflammatory syndrome in children in the context of COVID-19. Experts from Imperial College London partnered with WHO/Europe to give this webinar. After a successful first session, the group of experts will deliver webinars for other interested central Asian and South Caucasian countries.

Roll-out of new WHO biosafety training package begins in countries.

In December 2020, WHO published a new WHO Laboratory Biosafety Manual, a monumental update to the manual first published in 2004. This update has reframed the way in which biosafety is approached, and has been highly relevant during the COVID-19 response. The manual encourages countries to accept and implement basic concepts in biological safety and to develop national codes of practice for the safe handling of biological agents in laboratories within their geographical borders. WHO/Europe created a training package based on the manual and began directly training countries in the WHO European Region. The first training took place in late June in Kazakhstan, with more to follow in other countries.

23 June 2021

ETAGE meets to gather advice for Member States regarding COVID-19 vaccination for adolescents.

In late June, ETAGE was convened in a virtual meeting. It requested advice from participants regarding the inclusion of adolescents aged 12–15 years in national COVID-19 vaccination programmes. In its published [interim recommendations](#) for Member States, ETAGE concurred with the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts' advice that, in the current situation of limited vaccine supply, countries should prioritize vaccination of populations at high risk of severe and fatal COVID-19 outcomes, including adolescents aged 12–15 years and those aged 16–17 years with underlying conditions and those who are in contact with vulnerable individuals.

24 June 2021

As summer Union of European Football Association (UEFA) EURO 2020 games draw crowds, an overview of the COVID-19 situation in host cities is visualized using a new interactive explorer.

As part of ongoing monitoring of UEFA events occurring in many European countries during the summer months in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO/Europe's IMST launched the [WHO European Region UEFA EURO 2020 Explorer](#). This application presents an overview of the current COVID-19 situation in the WHO European Region, with particular focus on the UEFA EURO 2020 games.

28 June 2021

With European borders reopening in the summer months, a WHO mission deploys to Armenia to assess PoEs.

A joint mission deployed from 28 June to 14 July 2021, comprising representatives of the responsible national agencies, the WHE South Caucasus hub and the WHO Country Office in Armenia. The mission conducted on-site assessments of PoEs, including an airport, a seaport, and two ground crossings, using the WHO/Europe public health checklists for controlling the spread of COVID-19. Cross-border movement of people, as well as increasing flow of summer season travel, have highlighted the need for due health emergency preparedness and well-established IHR (2005) core capacities at PoEs.

The Regional Director held the second high-level policy dialogue with Small Country Initiative countries.

The 11 countries (Andorra, Cyprus, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, San Marino and Slovenia) were convened for the second time during the pandemic and the seventh time overall. In his address, the Regional Director highlighted the unique challenges these countries have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also pointed to a strong history of collaboration.

WHO experts deploy to Uzbekistan to audit newly implemented quality management systems in mentored laboratories.

The selected laboratories had been testing for antimicrobial resistance as well as COVID-19, and had recently implemented quality management systems. Implementation of these systems affects accuracy, reliability, and timeliness of the reported test results. The analyses that quality management systems provide offer a reliable foundation for evidence-based control of disease (outbreaks), robust surveillance of public health emergencies and early treatment of patients. The expert deployed by WHO/Europe audited these new systems.

Laboratory testing strategy and training mission deploys to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From 28 June to 2 July, a WHO expert, in coordination with the Public Health Institute (PHI) in Banja Luka, facilitated a laboratory sequencing training as well as conducted a laboratory assessment of the national reference laboratory located at the PHI. The mission also entailed a discussion with the Minister of Health regarding the development of a testing strategy with the inclusion of sequencing as a pillar of national public health.

29 June 2021

A WHO mission deployed to Albania, to support operations and logistics, and provide technical support for surveillance capacities, including contact tracing training that was conducted face-to-face.

30 June 2021

Vaccine implementation is the focus of a WHO/Europe mission to Azerbaijan.

A WHO/Europe expert was deployed from 30 June to 15 July to provide strategic guidance to ensure continuous governance and coordination of the national COVID-19 vaccination response and overall support to vaccine implementation and vaccination.

The Regional Director meets with the Ministers of Health of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Together with representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and the People's Republic of China, the Regional Director participated in this high-level discussion on further strengthening coordination in the fight against COVID-19.

June 2021 epi summary

The WHO European Region reached close to 56 million cases of COVID-19 (cumulative), and more than 1.1 million reported deaths (cumulative).

For further details on the activities conducted in the WHO European Region during June 2021, including country-level activities, see the [June 2021 WHO European Region Operational Update on COVID-19](#).



JULY 2021

1 July 2021

The Regional Director warns that by August, the WHO European Region will be “Delta dominant”.

In his [statement](#), the Regional Director also warned that the Region would not be fully vaccinated (by the beginning of July, 63% of people were still waiting for their first jab); in August the WHO European Region would still be mostly restriction-free, with increasing travels and gatherings.

[WHO provides direct support for “building back better” of essential health services in the Republic of Moldova.](#)

The WHO/Europe head office in Copenhagen initiated a conversation on providing operational guidance for “building back better” with the WHO Country Office in the Republic of Moldova. This process is closely linked to ongoing work that will feed into wider health sector reform in the Republic of Moldova in the months to come. If the opportunity arises, and if other countries show an interest in this work later on, WHO/Europe will offer them support, based on the lessons learned with the Republic of Moldova.

[A technical support mission deploys to Kosovo² to enhance surveillance and contact tracing capacities.](#)

During the mission, a meeting was held with the Institute of Public Health, and a field visit was conducted to the Regional Institute of Public Health in Mitrovica and the Mitrovica Primary Health Centre.

2 July 2021

[Member States meet at the Third High-level Meeting on Schooling during the COVID-19 Pandemic.](#)

WHO/Europe, UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) hosted the Third High-level [Meeting](#) on Schooling during the COVID-19 Pandemic, with updated recommendations shared by the WHO European Technical Advisory Group.

6 July 2021

[WHO/Europe issues a call for experts to serve on new Technical Advisory Group on Behavioural and Cultural Insights \(TAG-BCI\).](#)

The [Technical Advisory Group](#) will act as an advisory body to WHO/Europe. Throughout the pandemic, WHO/Europe has provided technical guidance and expertise to countries on best practices for leveraging behavioural and cultural insights in health policy and planning. The new technical advisory group will further strengthen this support, ensuring a strong, coordinated effort.

7 July 2021

[WHO/Europe publishes updated information for health workers on the proper use of the Pfizer–BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.](#)

The updated [fact sheet](#) and [job aid](#) cover important information including vaccine schedule, efficacy, contraindications and safety.

8 July 2021

[Enhancement of Public Health Operations Centre functionality is the focus of a WHO laboratory mission to North Macedonia.](#)

A WHO/Europe expert was deployed to assist in a workshop aimed at assessing the current challenges to and gaps in the performance of the Public Health Operations Centre inaugurated in the first year of the pandemic. Supporting the workshop's principal aim of improving the Centre's functionality, representatives from the public health operations centres of Germany and Israel shared their experiences.

12 July 2021

[Various surveillance activities are supported through a WHO expert mission to Armenia.](#)

On 12–16 July, two experts reviewed sentinel surveillance for influenza and COVID-19, assessed the feasibility of conducting vaccine effectiveness and burden of disease studies (severe acute respiratory infection initiative) and proposed recommendations for the next influenza season.

12 July 2021

A WHO mission deploys to Georgia to support the implementation of seroprevalence studies.

The mission included discussions with the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health and with Lugar Centre partners. In addition to seroprevalence studies, the WHO experts provided support in conducting a quality assurance evaluation of the laboratories involved in screening for COVID-19.

13 July 2021

WHO continues supporting countries in the detection of variants, including the donation of SNP assays to Ukraine.

WHO/Europe continued to support countries in the detection of VOCs by providing training and facilitating the procurement of SNP assays. On 13 July, the WHO Country Office in Ukraine facilitated the receipt of a total of 40 VirSNIp assays for SARS-CoV-2 variant detection, which will be used to perform SNP assays using melting curve analysis (enough for approximately 4 000 samples). (Read more on page 3 of the [Weekly Operational Update on COVID-19 – 2 August 2021](#)).

Regional Director visits Slovenia, with a focus on resilient health systems and unity on vaccination.

During this official visit, which took place on 13–17 July, the Regional Director visited a community health centre and participated in the High-level Meeting of European Union Ministers of Health on 15 July in Ljubljana, during the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In high-level meetings with the Prime Minister, Minister of Health and Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Regional Director emphasized the importance of national political unity on vaccination, the continued need to fully back health care workers, and the critical need to innovate for resilient health systems.

14 July 2021

The WHO/Europe IMST participates in the 8th meeting of the IHR (2005) Emergency Committee for COVID-19.

Colleagues from the WHO/Europe IMST, on behalf of the Regional Emergency Director and Regional Director, joined this [meeting](#) convened by the Director-General.

15 July 2021

The first ECDC–WHO/Europe bi-monthly epidemic intelligence meeting is convened.

This new activity for the ongoing partnership was aimed at bringing the epidemic intelligence teams of both organizations together to discuss and coordinate on various topics, including signals of interest, updates in major epidemiological developments, data inconsistency issues, web scraping and a GitHub account.

WHO supports the Republic of Moldova in an oxygen supply assessment, the first example of this type of direct support to a Member State.

The aim of this direct support is to map existing oxygen equipment in the country. In mid-July an introductory webinar was held, which was followed by a discussion on the oxygen supply assessment tool. A national consultant is mapping all the oxygen tools in the country. While WHO/Europe had been supporting other Member States, including Azerbaijan and Ukraine, on specific matters related to oxygen, this was the first time that the WHO global tool on oxygen supply assessments was used in a Member State in the WHO European Region.

19 July 2021

Surveillance experts deploy to Kyrgyzstan to provide technical support and guidance.

The mission entailed a review of sentinel surveillance for influenza and COVID-19, assessment of feasibility of conducting vaccine effectiveness and burden of disease studies (severe acute respiratory infection initiative) and the proposal of recommendations for the next influenza season.

20 July 2021

SNP assay trainings are the focus of a WHO mission to Azerbaijan.

Two laboratory experts deployed to Azerbaijan from 20 to 28 July to provide SNP training and assess laboratories for sequencing capacity. The timely visit and training using donated SNP kits will allow Azerbaijan to get important information on the prevalence and distribution of VOCs in the country, and enable nationwide presequencing screening for the Delta VOC.

22 July 2021

Ministers and country representatives are convened at the Athens Mental Health Summit.

At this high-level Summit, which was organized jointly by WHO/Europe and the Government of Greece, ministers and country representatives from the WHO European Region sent a strong message on the importance of prioritizing mental health in the process of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. The WHO Technical Advisory Group on the mental health impacts of COVID-19 in the European Region played an important role, sharing evidence and know-how.

23 July 2021

The Delta variant is shown to be the most dominant strain in much of the WHO European Region.

WHO-ECDC [press release](#) stated clearly that Delta was overtaking the previously dominant Alpha variant across the WHO European Region. Surveillance data reported to WHO/Europe and ECDC between 28 June and 11 July 2021 showed that the Delta variant was dominant in the majority (19) of the 28 countries that had reported sufficiently complete genetic sequencing information.

25 July 2021

Special monitoring and technical support around the UEFA tournaments comes to a close after approximately two months.

Technical support was provided from 28 May to 25 July, including two additional weeks after the last game was played on 11 July 2021.

26 July 2021

A WHO mission deploys to Bosnia and Herzegovina to support the development of a new laboratory.

The mission, which took place on 26–30 July, included a basic training on biosafety and RT-PCR, as well as a joint visit, conducted with the WHO representative and national professional officer, to the national reference laboratory at the University Clinical Centre in Sarajevo. The new laboratory is to be located in the subnational centre in Mostar. Achievements and further needs for strengthening laboratory capacities were discussed, including the development of a testing strategy.

July 2021 epi summary

The WHO European Region surpassed 60.2 million cases of COVID-19 (cumulative), and 1.2 million reported deaths (cumulative).

For further details on the activities conducted in the WHO European Region, including country-level activities, during July 2021, as well as all previous months, see the [WHO European Region Operational Update archive](#).



**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.

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