



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE
الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

PAM UPDATE on the Second Wave of COVID-19 in the Euro-Mediterranean region

Latest Trends

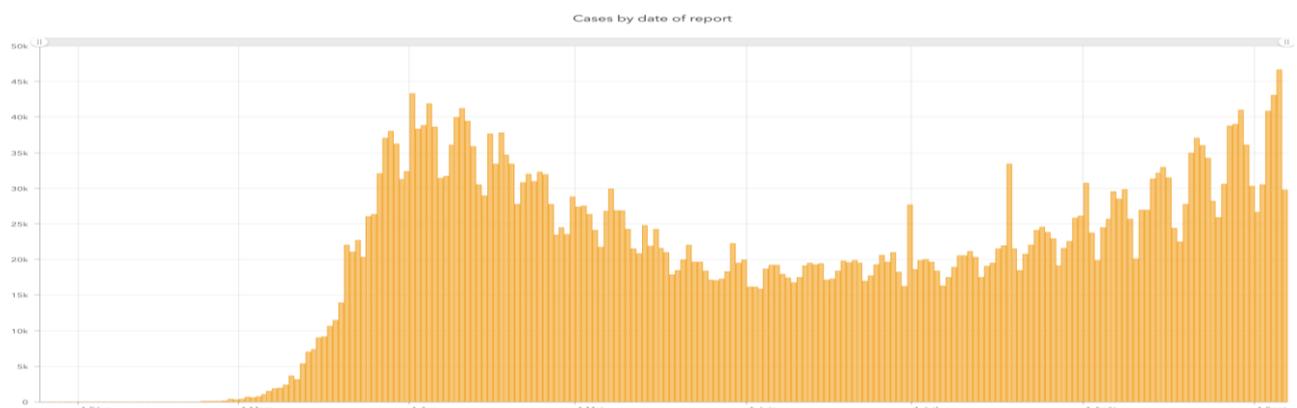
In the past weeks, immediately after summer vacations, the Euro-Mediterranean region has started facing the impact and consequences of the second wave of COVID-19. In Europe, while the number of new infections detected per day in mid-July was around 20 000 cases, the data has now risen to 50 000 during the first half September. For instance, Spain and France alone are experiencing an alarming growth in the number of new cases, rising to some 200,000 new cases during the first half of September.ⁱ In Italy, confirmed new Covid-19 cases per day returned to the worrying level recorded at the end of April.ⁱⁱ

The situation is slightly different in the Southern Mediterranean since the trends are not as uniform as in Europe. In the Southern shore, some countries are detecting relatively few cases of new COVID-19 infection and the pandemic appears to be slowing its spread. In Algeria, for example, the current weekly confirmed positive cases are 1843, less than half of those recorded in mid-July when the toll was 3996.ⁱⁱⁱ

However, other countries are experiencing the highest growth of infections since the beginning of the pandemics and are re-introducing restrictive measures. During the first half of September, Morocco has detected an alarming 25 613 new cases, growing by 35% compared to the second half of August. During the same period, Libya has counted 9549 positive tests, an alarming growth compared to the second half of the previous month (+77%).^{iv}

Meanwhile, Israel has announced a new lockdown until 9 October, as hospitals are at the limit of their capacity and gatherings were expected for the Jewish Holiday Season. This decision makes Israel the first country to reimpose such severe restrictions after the partial re-opening of the past months.^v

The recent massive explosion in Beirut further aggravated the emergency in the hospitals of the Lebanese capital, where structures that were already facing difficulties due to Covid-19 found themselves crowded by people injured by the explosion.^{vi}



Number of cases each day in Europe (World Health Organization)^{vii}.

Latest Safety Measures

States all over the world have implemented policies to counter the spread of the pandemic, while trying to avoid negative side effects for societies and economies. For example, the vast majority of Governments made the use of masks in indoor public spaces mandatory. In France, Italy, Spain and Belgium, wearing a mask is compulsory in restaurants, cinemas and pubs. Additionally, some countries like Turkey and UAE, have imposed mask wearing outdoors in their biggest cities in a bid to avoid the reversal of the easing of lockdown measures ^{viii}.

This agenda seems to be shared in most countries of the Mediterranean, where a new total lockdown appears not to be yet an option. Instead, Governments prefer using *local strategies*, eventually setting up local lockdown when the situation calls for it. Indeed, local strategies are often preferable rather than national lockdowns which could cause considerable economic impact^{ix}.

Accordingly, European countries, are leaving open the possibility for local administrations to adopt stricter policies when needed. In Germany, for example, the Länder are limiting the size of gatherings in private and public spaces and banned public events until at least the end of October. The same happened in France where Bordeaux administration, facing a local cluster of cases, has restricted family gatherings and forbids visits to local retirement homes ^x.

Travel and tourism have been significantly reduced during the summer holiday season due to the COVID crisis. One of the most hit countries has been Spain, where the number of foreign tourists visiting the country plummeted by 75% in July compared to the previous year, slashing tens of billions of euros off the nation's income^{xi}. To counter the recession, most European countries chose not to close the borders with other members of the Union. Accordingly, measures like testing or quarantine were established for travelers coming from non-European countries, as prescribed by the European Commission^{xii}.

However, the European Commission decided to leave enough freedom of action to Member States, even for travels within the Union^{xiii}. For instance, Italy declared that individuals who had traveled across Croatia, Greece, Malta or Spain had to present a negative PCR test taken 72 hours before their arrival or undertake a test upon arrival and quarantine while waiting for results. Outside the European Union, Governments imposed tougher restrictions, as in Morocco, which has reopened its borders since mid-July for citizens, residents, and their families, but not for tourism. Moreover, to get into the territory, individuals have to follow different steps such as present negative PCR tests, and everyone must undergo a clinical examination^{xiv}.

Testing is key in reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission and managing the crisis. However, no coordinated approaches at a supranational level have been set up. Each state designs its own testing policy, with the freedom to choose to follow recommendations from international bodies. To enhance a coordinated approach, the Italian Ministry of Health has announced that negotiations are underway with other European countries to establish reciprocal testing on citizens traveling within the Schengen Area^{xv}.

Furthermore, a fostered coordination, at the supranational level, would also be crucial for common policies on the duration of quarantine for confirmed COVID-19 patients. Indeed, France has already shortened the isolation period to 7 days, while other countries prefer to remain cautious, as experts warned on the risks of such a decision^{xvi}. Ms. Andrea Ammon, Head of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), recently told EU lawmakers that her team was working to

provide evidence to decision makers on what kind of risk they would take if quarantine periods were shorter than 14 days^{xvii}.

Accordingly, the World Health Organization has called for the respect of its guidelines on the treatment of COVID-19, which prescribe 14-days isolation. In the same sense, Mr. David Nabarro, the WHO Special Envoy on COVID-19, raised awareness on the impact of a second wave while he recently reaffirmed that "the world is just at the beginning of the pandemic"^{xviii}

In light of the re-opening of schools after the summer, there is a concern of a stronger second wave of COVID-19 infections. Notably, most governments are waiting to test the efficacy of school-related safety measures to reduce the risks of shorter isolation. The measures for schools are quite similar within the European Union, with only a few discrepancies. For example, in Italy, pupils older than six will be asked to wear facemasks and to maintain a distance of 1 meter among each other, while in Spain the safety distance has been set at 1.5 meters.^{xix}

For what regards North African countries, the situation is different. Some countries, like Tunisia, have decided to reopen school with smaller classes and imposing shifts in the attendance of lessons, meaning that pupils will go to school once every 2 days.^{xx} Others, as Morocco, have canceled the opening of schools in parts of the country that are still very affected by COVID-19 and decided to continue with remote learning^{xxi}.

Also, face masks will be compulsory at workplaces in many countries. In France for example, as of the first of September, they will be required in all shared, enclosed workspaces, including open-plan or shared offices, corridors, meeting rooms, and changing rooms, according to the new rules. The French Government also recommended that employees continue to work from home when possible^{xxii}.

Economic Recovery

To address the economic crisis, the European Union leaders have determined a significant recovery plan. This plan is unique in the world, disbursing 1,1 trillion euros for the 2021-2027 period. In the short term, EUR 750 billion will be available for the Union, EUR 360 billion of which is directly given to Member States^{xxiii}. This plan is based on three points. First, it aims to support states to recover, repair and emerge stronger from this crisis. This budget allocated for this purpose will be shared between the recovery of each economy and provide support for the green transition. Second, it aims to kick start the economy and help private investment by easing and financing investment within the Union. Lastly, the plan aspires to help Europe with future health crises, especially in setting up a new health program and strengthening the civil protection mechanism.

In the Southern Mediterranean the economic crisis will also require a strong intervention to support investments and youth employment. A recent report by the World Food Program highlights the alarming impact that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on several sectors, as tourism, youth and children's rights protection^{xxiv}. Moreover, the economic backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic risks to block and reverse the fast-growing development of the sub-region, recorded during the last years. The international community should reinforce the technical and financial support to countries in need, in order to prevent major damages to their economies and societies, which would affect the wellbeing of the whole region.

Vaccine Development

The European Commission has also signed a contract with the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca on 27 August. The purpose of this contract is to find an effective vaccine against Covid-19 for all EU Member States. Through this agreement, Member States will be able to purchase 300 million doses of the vaccine with the option for a further 100 million doses to be distributed among their populations on a population-based rate^{xxv}. Additional doses could be also donated to non-European lower-income countries. Since the vaccines are still in the testing phases, the European Commission is trying to find other agreements with different pharmaceutical companies such as Sanofi-GSK^{xxvi} or Johnson & Johnson^{xxvii}. However, achieving a safe vaccine could take longer than thought before. For instance, AstraZeneca had to suspend trials for five days, at the beginning of September, due to a violent reaction from one patient.^{xxviii}

According to World Health Organization and national agencies for pharmaceuticals, vaccines must follow a rigorous specific process due to the dangerous side effects they might cause. The guidelines for the development of vaccines have recently raised debates about the efficacy of the vaccine announced by Russia in August^{xxix}. This vaccine was criticized because of the lack of scientific data proving that it would be effective, in contrast with international guidelines. Although it has been proved that this vaccine could trigger a strong and effective immune response, scientists remain cautious since it would require large-scale trials to be declared effective^{xxx}.

As already stressed in the PAM brief on COVID-19 vaccination, the first generation of vaccines is likely to be only 50-70 percent effective. Moreover, 60-70 percent of the population would need to be effectively vaccinated in order to provide protection to society. There are also growing numbers of people who plan to resist vaccinations due to their potential side effects. Moreover, the logistics of coordinating such a large-scale public health project are very challenging. All of this poses a unique and difficult task for policy makers and MPs to address the issue of vaccination in the coming months.

PAM Parliaments in Countering the Second Wave

The COVID-19 pandemic response requires enhanced cooperation among all levels of society and various stakeholders. As our region begins to deal with the second wave of COVID, national parliaments have a crucial role in shaping their national response to the pandemic, through legislative, policymaking, oversight and advocacy roles.

Moreover, due to the global nature of the crises, and the deep interconnectedness of Euro-Mediterranean societies and economies, close cooperation on an international and regional level is needed for an effective and coordinated approach rooted in solidarity and mutual support.

Since the onset of the pandemic, PAM has been committed to providing dedicated support to its member parliaments to address the pandemic. In addition to issuing a number of special reports on issues ranging from food security to vaccine policy, PAM has also organized a number of parliamentary debates on economic recovery, the role of human rights in pandemic response, and assessing the terrorist threat in the context of the pandemic.

As a next key step, PAM is finalizing a program on global public health and governance in times of COVID. The program, composed of 5 seminars, is led by PAM Senior Medical Advisor Professor Dr. Mukesh Kapila, and it is aimed at providing an even more focused support, based on verified information, as the pandemic moves into its next stages. The program is designed to help MPs, officers of national parliaments and local administrations, and colleagues of partner organizations understand how the globalized world works through the lens of global public health at times of

COVID and to analyze the different legal administrative and health factors that shape decisions at the difference levels in our societies.

-
- ⁱ <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/france?country=~FRA>
- ⁱⁱ <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/italy?country=~ITA>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/algeria?country=~DZA>
- ^{iv} <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-cases#weekly-and-biweekly-cases-where-are-confirmed-cases-increasing-or-falling>
- ^v <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/13/israeli-government-set-to-vote-on-second-covid-19-national-lockdown>
- ^{vi} <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-08-08/COVID-19-Global-Roundup-An-explosion-over-layers-of-crisis-in-Lebanon-SN6FsGdaxy/index.html>
- ^{vii} <https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/ead3c6475654481ca51c248d52ab9c61>
- ^{viii}
- ^{ix} <https://www.leparisien.fr/societe/coronavirus-emmanuel-macron-ne-veut-plus-d-un-confinement-general-20-08-2020-8370426.php>
- ^x <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/15/world/europe/coronavirus-europe.html?referringSource=articleShare>
- ^{xi} <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/01/global-report-schools-across-europe-reopen-covid-cases-grow>
- ^{xii} <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/coronavirus-advice-for-foreign-nationals-in-france/>
- ^{xiii} <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/eu-countries-increase-covid-19-travel-measures/>
- ^{xiv} <https://www.worldnomads.com/travel-safety/north-africa/morocco/travel-alerts>
- ^{xv} https://www.corriere.it/cronache/20_agosto_30/coronavirus-tamponi-frontiera-italia-francia-l-intesa-vicina-2e53a5ee-ea9a-11ea-916c-ce1c13f63bba.shtml
- ^{xvi} <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/dai-sette-giorni-francia-tre-settimane-shanghai-tutte-ricette-durata-quarantena-ADjPc1o> ; https://www.adnkronos.com/fatti/politica/2020/09/17/covid-speranza-ridurre-quarantena-aumenta-rischio_6wtM4jabA4Ycygy4yple3L.html?refresh_ce
- ^{xvii} <https://www.euractiv.com/section/coronavirus/news/eu-health-body-warns-against-shortening-covid-quarantine-as-cases-spike/>
- ^{xviii} <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/coronavirus-second-wave-news-europe-who-covid-19-b448055.html>
- ^{xix} <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53892357>
- ^{xx} <https://fr.africanews.com/2020/09/15/tunisie-une-rentree-sur-fond-de-coronavirus/>
- ^{xxi} <https://www.ouest-france.fr/sante/virus/coronavirus/coronavirus-a-casablanca-les-ecoles-sont-fermees-pour-la-rentree-et-la-ville-est-verrouillee-6963797>
- ^{xxii} <https://www.euronews.com/2020/08/18/france-makes-wearing-face-masks-at-work-compulsory-from-next-month>
- ^{xxiii} https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/recovery-plan-europe_en
- ^{xxiv} <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WFP-0000119040.pdf>
- ^{xxv} https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1524
- ^{xxvi} https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1439
- ^{xxvii} https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1438
- ^{xxviii} <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshuacohen/2020/09/15/astrazeneca-restarts-phase-3-trial-of-covid-19-vaccine-in-uk-multiple-challenges-remain/>
- ^{xxix} <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/08/11/putin-announces-worlds-first-coronavirus-vaccine-a71112>
- ^{xxx} [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31866-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31866-3/fulltext)