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## **The menace of a second wave of COVID and the need for a common approach to crisis management**

In terms of the scale of transmission and exerted impacts, countries can be classified into three main groups: the first group has already witnessed the peak of the pandemic, the second category where cases are reaching the peak, and the third cluster is experiencing the beginning of escalation.

In countries belonging to the first category, authorities fear a potential second wave of the outbreak after easing the preventive measures put in place to control the impact of the first. These measures included lockdowns and the revoking of local, domestic and international travels. The wide range of measures and preparedness in the post-acute phase, which include social distancing, social isolation, quarantine, washing hands, lockdowns, and travel bans, have halted and interrupted the spread of the virus. However, the virus is still there: its transmission has been slowed, but not eliminated. And, as yet, there is neither an effective cure nor a vaccine available.

[In Europe](#), since the beginning of July 2020, Spain has implemented a local lockdown in the Galicia region with more than 70,000 people being quarantined, as well as in Segria county with more than [200,000 people restricted](#) to leave the area. [In Israel](#), the health minister announced on 5 July that the country was facing a second wave of the virus, with more than 977 new cases recorded that day, and officials stated that Israel is at the “height of a new corona offensive”. Hot spots are regularly recorded in Italy, Germany and other countries.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has given a strong warning about the spread of coronavirus in the [MENA region](#). Twenty-two countries are in this region, and the total of infections has passed the one million mark, with more than 25,000 deaths. The number of infections has rose drastically, with the number of cases reported in June being higher than first four months combined.

According to [Mike Ryan, WHO's Head of Emergencies](#), the second wave of the pandemic means that confirmed cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) will rise after few months of decline. MENA countries, with the exception of Iran, are still, with varying degrees, facing the first wave of the COVID 19. Egypt and Saudi Arabia are witnessing the [height of the first wave](#), while other countries began to witness decrease in the number of confirmed cases.

[Iran](#), which officially announced at the end of June a second wave of Corona virus infection, is the worst affected country in the Middle East. The number of deaths in Iran account for half of the deaths in the MENA region (13,000 deaths).



Countries facing armed conflicts in MENA region, such as Yemen, Syria, and Libya, have a different situation, in which it is difficult to assess the level of the pandemic. With the limited diagnostic capabilities of these countries, and the difficulty in accessing health care settings, the figures issued by these countries [may not be representative of the reality](#).

While countries currently experiencing the peak of the first wave in the Middle East are waiting for the numbers to decline, there are already concerns about a second wave. To avoid this wave, the World Health Organization advises these countries not to reduce completely the restrictions in place, in order to contain the economic consequences, but to reduce them gradually in conjunction with a societal commitment to social distance measures. WHO has also advised that [‘countries in this region should strengthen their healthcare systems’](#), as the passing of one million infections marked a concerning milestone.

Outside of the Euro-Mediterranean region, the situation is worsening, with many countries still dealing with the first wave. [The US](#) is still the hardest hit with more than 3.5 million infections and 137,000 deaths. [Latin America](#) has become the second most infected continent with more than 3.6 million cases reported and over 155,000 deaths. [Russia and India](#) have crossed 700,000 and 1 million infections respectively, as they struggle with the first wave of the pandemic.

As a second wave of the pandemic is likely a challenge that all governments must all brace for, and would be similar to what it was experienced in the spring of 2020, but it could be harder to control in the fall, as people in many countries resist social distancing. If lockdowns kept the first wave concentrated in the big cities, freedom of movement, including summer travel, could cause a secondary wave to sweep smaller towns and villages, where the population tends to be older and more vulnerable – and healthcare capacity per capita is lower, from GPs to intensive care beds.

Experts say that until a vaccine is found, the key to keeping infections low, without locking down everyone, is to scale up testing and contact tracing. Health authorities need to find infected people, isolate them and identify their recent contacts, so that they could be tested as well and isolated if necessary. [“Identifying who has the disease: testing, tracing and isolating. With these steps, a cluster of local infections does not inevitably have to lead to a full-blown national outbreak if it is identified and contained quickly enough”](#). Nevertheless, the system based on voluntary isolation has shown its limit in the capacity and will of positive tested people to comply with the measures.

It is important to reflect on the collective handling of the initial COVID crisis and strengthen international cooperation that would allow for a coordinated approach not only to the second wave of COVID, but also to other similar emergencies. Experience has shown that is important for emergency response coordination to go beyond political borders and alliances.



Chancellor Merkel and President Macron warned that Europe had fallen short against the coronavirus outbreak. Europe's chaotic response to the coronavirus outbreak raised questions about the EU's preparedness for pandemics. Over 170,000 Europeans have died and a Europe-wide approach is still needed. Reflecting on the European handling of the crisis, [on 10 June](#), six European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium and Poland) signed [a letter](#) to the European Commission, calling for a common European approach in handling emergencies, urging EU for a sufficient supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), medical devices, critical medicines, and vaccines.

[The proposal](#) includes a number of key elements: efficient monitoring and data sharing, improved coordination of procurement and storage of supplies, efficient division of labour inside the EU to optimise European production, collective European financing for vaccine development, diversification of supply chains to prevent shortages, and more permanent antitrust guidelines to facilitate cooperation between businesses in response to urgent situations, in order to increase the production of goods in times of crises.

It is important to recall that, in the initial stages of the pandemic, the European Commission decided to temporarily change the policy of [exporting medical equipment outside the EU](#). This move was perceived in a negative light by many EU neighbouring states, including MENA region, and particularly in the Western Balkans, as they depend on EU supply chains for such equipment. This prompted the Speakers of the Parliaments of Western Balkan countries to [write a letter](#) to the European Parliament appealing for solidarity.

It is a positive development that the new European proposal also calls to ensure open, fair and flexible global value chains and that [preventing protectionism will be key](#) for important trading partners and developing countries that rely on EU imports.

Moreover, following the call to action by the WHO, the European Commission launched a [Coronavirus Global Response](#), a fund that has already reached nearly 16 billion Euros in pledges from countries and institutions around the world to finance universal access to tests, treatments and vaccines against coronavirus and for the global recovery.

COVID 19 pandemic has put the international system to the test and highlighted that multilateralism and collective action are necessary to address challenges that affect us all.