



ESAAANZ

European Studies Association Australia and New Zealand

European Studies Association Australia and New Zealand (ESAAANZ)

Blog Series

Volume 1, Issue 8

Nach dem Lockdown ist vor dem Lockdown (After lockdown is before lockdown)

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This phrase (or variations of it) has been circulating in German language media for some time now. It captures Europeans' apprehension about the possibility of a significant rise in COVID-19 numbers following the easing of restrictions, resulting in a wave of infections and leading to another round of restrictions on everyday life.

A recent survey by the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* indicated that a significant majority of respondents (82%) expected a re-introduction of restrictions. A sizeable number of these respondents, 42%, expected the restrictions to be more severe than during the initial lockdown while 30% of respondents expected the restrictions to be less severe than during the first lockdown. Only 27% expected the restrictions to be similar to the first lockdown.

This apprehension is not without foundation. Easing of restrictions, after a significant decrease in cases as a result of a variety of restrictions imposed in most European countries, has –not unexpectedly– led to a rise in case numbers. While still lower than at the peak of outbreak in Europe in March/April, case numbers have been rising across Europe. According to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control's (ECDC) *Rapid Risk Assessment: Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the EU/EEA and the UK – eleventh update: resurgence of cases (10 August)*, rising trends have been observed in recent weeks across 26 European countries. Twelve countries reported increases of more than 10%, and Poland and Romania exceeded their previous peak case numbers. Other countries which saw rapid considerable increases

include Luxembourg, Spain, Iceland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Other countries which have seen an increase but at a less rapid pace include France, Italy and Germany. In Greece, one of a number of countries able to contain the spread of the initial outbreak well, a health expert advised the Guardian newspaper that the country was in a second wave of the pandemic.

According to the ECDC, there is not only considerable variation across the various European countries but also sub-nationally. Highly varied rates of increases in case numbers have been observed at regional levels. The two regions most severely affected in Spain, Catalonia and the community of Madrid, have more than four times the number of cases compared to the rest of the country. But the variability of case numbers is not only geographically bounded. COVID-19 clusters in the community have been associated with particular settings, occupations, or events which in some instances have been drivers of community transmission.

It is important to recognise that number of cases notified to the authorities is dependent upon a number of factors one of which is the stability/variability of the testing rate. The substantial increase in case numbers observed in Luxembourg, for instance, is partly related to the fact that the country ramped up its testing regime which now also includes the screening of asymptomatic people. On the other hand, if as in the case of Bulgaria, Czechia, Romania, but also Luxembourg, the recently reported rise in cases, is accompanied by increasing trends in hospitalisation, there is a strong indication that the rise in case numbers is not only driven by an increase in testing.

Local, regional or national increases in cases numbers coupled with indicators such as hospitalisation trends and mortality rates are pointers whether the extent of relaxation of measures is still adequate or no longer able to keep the effective reproduction rate to below 1.0, in turn indicates a high risk of further increases of COVID-19 cases unless appropriate control measures are reintroduced/reinforced. The ECDC's advice to countries observing rising COVID-19 case numbers is to consider a phased re-introduction of measures, using a localised approach, taking into consideration the epidemiological situation, local services and information on the impact of the previous measures.

Thus, it seems likely that for some the phrase "Nach dem Lockdown ist vor dem Lockdown" will prove accurate, and indeed it already has for the inhabitants of some cities and regions such as Catalonia and Aragón in Spain; Gütersloh and Warendorf in North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany, and Leicester and Aberdeen in the UK. And while the situation in Europe is fluid and regulations, travel warnings, and quarantine measures keep evolving and changing in line with the changing COVID-19 numbers, blanket lockdowns as seen during the first wave of the pandemic seem unlikely.

Maren Klein originally trained as a secondary teacher in Germany, she has worked as a teacher and lecturer, in education policy development, and a in higher education regulation. Her PhD explored mobility in the Global North. Her current research interests include the European Union as a global actor, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, governance, and transnational education.

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