Policy challenges and research questions in the European Region – the case of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic

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The main policy challenge during the pandemic:

- Weak evidence to help decision makers choose and prioritise control measures
- Lack of consensus on interpretation of available evidence on effects of measures
- Wide variation across countries in choice of public health and social measures during the pandemic
School closures, 12 March 2020
School closures, 13 May 2020

[Map showing school closures across Europe, with different colors indicating partially open, closed due to COVID-19, fully open, and academic break.]
Mask requirements, 3 August 2020

- Red: Required in public nationwide
- Beige: Required in certain spaces or regions
- Blue: Recommended or not required
Mask requirements in 2023: still no consensus!

- Mandatory to wear a medical or FFP2-mask on public transport in Germany and Spain until February 2023
- Other European countries (e.g. Nordics) ended face mask mandates more than a year earlier (and rarely recommended FFP2-masks)
Research question: *How effective are these for reducing transmission in the community?*
Coronavirus: Germany improves ventilation to chase away Covid

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The German government is investing €500m (£452m; $488m) in improving ventilation systems in public buildings to help stop the spread of coronavirus.
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A paradox

- The weak evidence base for infection control measures was a big problem for decision makers during the COVID-19 pandemic,
- Still, very few trials of such measures have been conducted (10 or 20, vs. 1000 or 2000 trials of pharma-interventions!)
Too difficult to do?

- Not *all* trials are difficult to carry out
  
  and

- We *could* and *should* make it easier to carry out trials
Too difficult?

● Not all trials are difficult to carry out and
● We could and should make it easier