

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

WHO joint webinar on Research Capacity Building for Health Emergencies on 18 July 2023, organised by WHO HQ (WKC, HSP/DRR), EMRO, EURO

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# The main policy challenge during the pandemic:

- Weak evidence to help decision makers choose and prioritise control measures

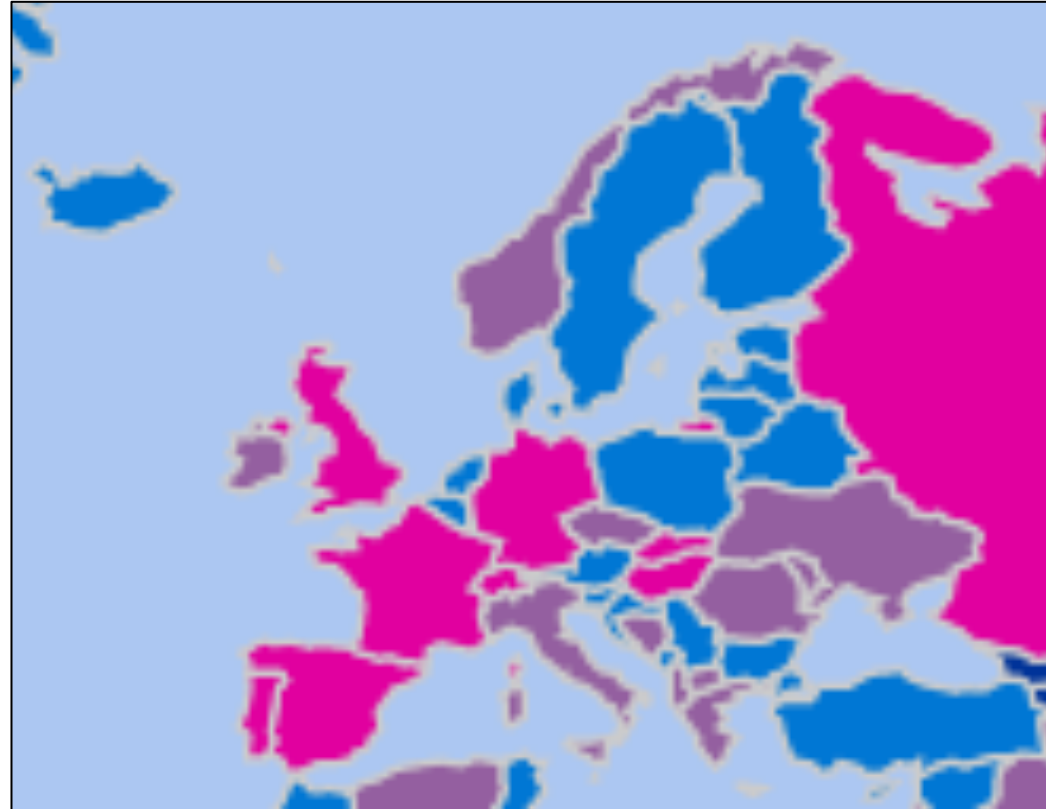


- Lack of consensus on interpretation of available evidence on effects of measures



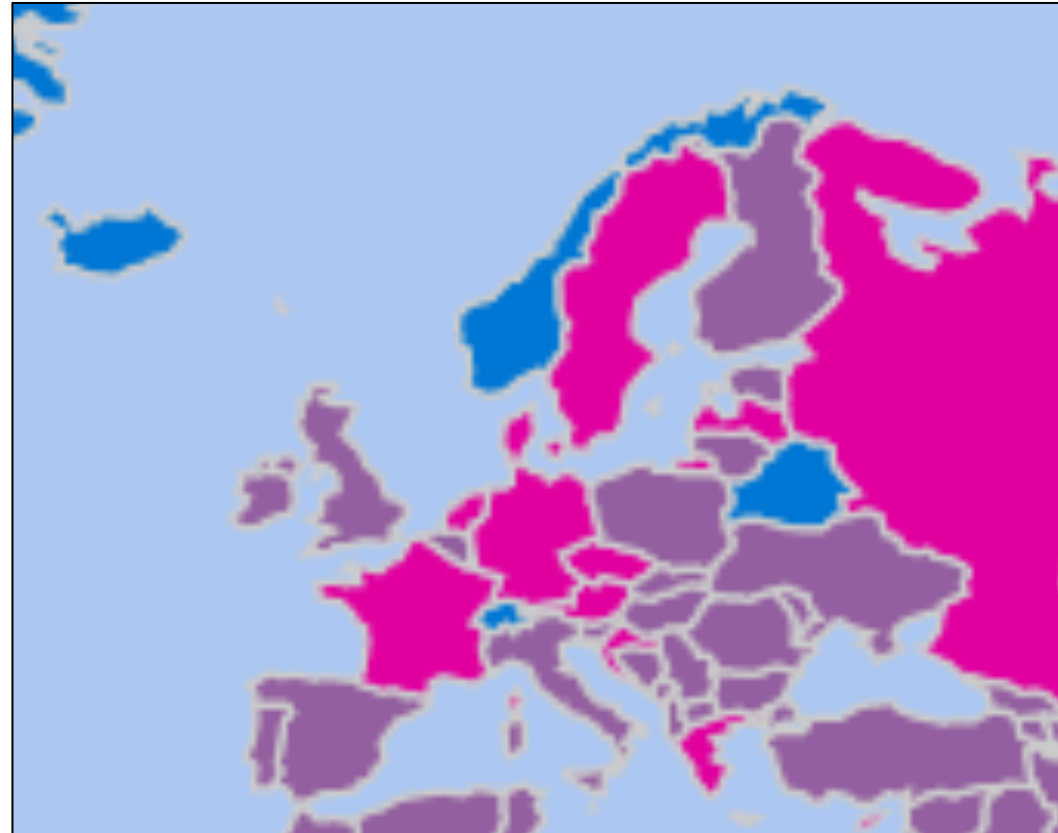
- Wide variation across countries in choice of public health and social measures during the pandemic

# School closures, 12 March 2020



● Partially open   ● Closed due to COVID-19   ● Fully open   ● Academic break

# School closures, 13 May 2020



● Partially open    ● Closed due to COVID-19    ● Fully open    ● Academic break

# Mask requirements, 3 August 2020



● Required in public nationwide   ● Required in certain spaces or regions   ● 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

19 Oct 2020 | Europe

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



Research question: *How effective is improving air quality for reducing transmission of respiratory viruses?*

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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 *easy* and
- We *could* and *should*

WHO Guidance on  
Research Methods for  
Health Emergency and  
Disaster Risk Management

