

CITIZEN SUMMARY - COVIDWATCHEU-NPA PROJECT #411

NPA COVID-19 Response Group - April, 2021

<https://core.interreg-npa.eu/>

Increasingly, Open Data approaches are being utilised by countries to ensure transparency and accountability. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused huge disruption globally, yet some countries have fared better than others, both economically and from the population health perspective. Using Open Data, and input from clinicians and non-clinicians based in the Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) Programme 2014-2020 countries, we sought to learn lessons from national responses to this virus over the past year and contribute to the public health response against COVID-19 across the region.

In this project, we formed a representative team of clinicians and policy experts from across the NPA regions and beyond and designed, delivered and launched a purpose-built interactive website updated in real-time of weekly comparative COVID-19 case, death and testing data from across EU and NPA regions: <https://covidwatchnpa-eu.shinyapps.io/covid/>

This combined clinical, technical, academic and policy expertise has allowed us to publish weekly comparative data across EU and NPA countries since the beginning of the project on our project website updated in real-time and across social media. The reach of the project in terms of the general public has averaged 50,000 per week and a total of over 700,000 across all dissemination platforms (website, Twitter, Facebook) for the 6-month lifetime of the project. In addition, we have mapped the public health responses and interventions used by different NPA regions and countries in the first wave of the COVID-19 and explored how these measures have influenced the individual pandemic curves and economic outlook of these countries.

Our project has made a significant contribution to the public health effort in terms of individual behaviour change across the NPA regions and has provided learnings and recommendations to inform countries and regions as they try to navigate their way through the next phases of the COVID-19 pandemic including the following:

- High COVID-19 cases correlate with societal restrictions, economic damage and COVID-19 deaths. When examined at a regional level, NPA designated-regions within larger countries, which tend to be more sparsely populated, experienced approximately half the COVID-19 deaths that more urbanised non-NPA regions within the same countries.
- Countries in the NPA programme can be largely based into 2 groups - countries that achieved near-elimination between smaller outbreaks, and those that did not. When

COVID-19 activity is high, which is more likely in larger and more connected countries, overall negative consequences for the region will be more severe.

- Important aspects of a country's response include the rapidity of that response, the establishment of an adequate testing and tracing system, control of borders, involvement of regional health authorities and clear communication about the ongoing pandemic to the general public.

As countries struggle to plot the best way forward, our project has provided a mechanism for transnational working and cooperation and the sharing of data and learnings from the pandemic. With a large team of partners across NPA regions we have engaged with, and fed back to, relevant health, public health and government stakeholders. Perhaps most strikingly, we have provided evidence how due to a variety of protective factors, NPA regions have often fared better in public health and economic terms during the COVID-19 pandemic. This provides much hope for the future and an opportunity to re-imagine lives and livelihoods in such rural and remote regions.