

Abstract

COVID-19 in north-western Europe: learning lessons from open data

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Abstract

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has caused huge disruption to all communities and health care worldwide. This ongoing pandemic has encouraged international collaboration and cooperation, and this important activity needs to intensify further. Open Data sharing offers researchers the opportunity to compare public health and political responses and subsequent COVID-19 trends.

Methods: This project uses Open Data to summarise trends relating to COVID-19 cases, deaths and eventual engagement with vaccination campaigns for six countries in the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (i.e. Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Finland, Sweden, Norway).

Results: Countries examined fell into two groups – countries that achieved near elimination between smaller outbreaks, and those that did not. Rural areas generally experienced slower increases in COVID-19 activity than urban areas, presumably due to the lower density of population and other factors. Rural areas experienced approximately half the COVID-19 deaths when compared with more urbanised regions within the same countries. Interestingly, countries that opted for a more local approach to public health management, particularly Norway, seemed to control outbreaks more effectively than those with a more centralised approach.

Discussion: While contingent on the quality and reach of testing and reporting systems, Open Data can offer us useful insights to appraise national responses and provides context for public health-related decision making.