Press briefing ahead the special meeting of the European Council of 24 and 25 May 2021

The press briefing ahead of the special meeting of the European Council of 24 and 25 May 2021 will take place via video conference on **Friday 21 May 2021 at 16.00**

English and French interpretation will be available.

This briefing is “off the record”.

In order to follow the briefing and to be able to ask questions remotely, EU accredited journalists and journalists who had a EUCO accreditation from June 2019 European Council meeting or later, can register using this link

Journalists who already registered for high-level press conferences (European Councils, international summits) in 2020 or 2021 **don’t need to register again**.

Deadline: Friday 21 May, 14.00

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants approximately half an hour before the briefing.

Visit the meeting page

Media advisory – Press briefing ahead of Agriculture and Fisheries Council of 26-27 May 2021

The **press briefing** ahead of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place on **Friday, 21 May at 17.30**. This briefing will be “off the record”.

Please note that this press briefing will take place remotely.

In order to participate and ask questions, EU accredited journalists should register using this link.

Those who already registered for the previous press events of Agriculture and

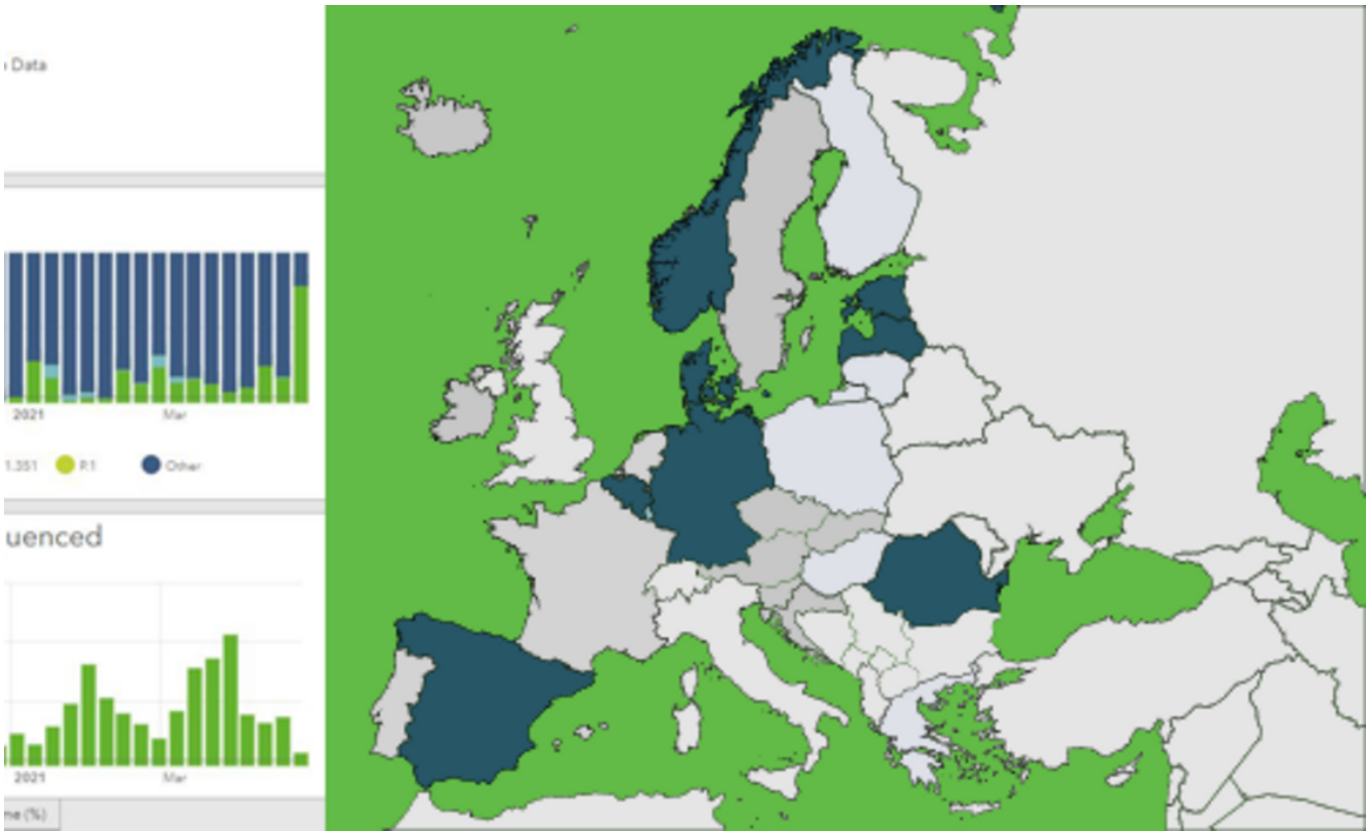
Fisheries Council do not need to do it again.

– Deadline for the registration: Friday, 21 May at 16.30

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants shortly after the deadline.

Visit the meeting page

ECDC releases new dashboard on SARS-CoV-2 variants



How to read and interpret the data

Where data for a country are available from more than one source, the default source used is the one with the highest number of sequences in the last two weeks.

Data for the most recent reporting week have been excluded, as they may be incomplete.

Categories used for sequencing volume are based on the sample selection guidance provided in ECDC's technical guidance for sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 and its guidance for representative and targeted genomic SARS-CoV-2

monitoring:

1. **≥500 or ≥10% of cases:** 500 or more, or at least 10% of all samples sequenced, by week; if samples are randomly selected, it is possible to follow trends and to estimate the distribution of variants. Higher numbers would increase the accuracy and allow the detection of variants accounting for a smaller proportion of circulating viruses.
2. **60-499:** Above 60 but below 500 sequenced samples by week. If samples are randomly selected, it is possible to detect a variant accounting for more than 2.5% of all circulating variants and to follow trends, but estimating variants distribution would be inaccurate.
3. **<60:** Under 60 selected samples by week, a specific variant would have to account for at least 5% of all circulating viruses to be detected, if sampling is performed in a random and representative manner. This means that the system will have a poor ability to detect circulating variants of concern before they have an impact on the overall epidemiological situation.

How to use the dashboard:

Select the week number to filter maps and the variant distribution graph.

Select the country to filter both graphs.

The whole dashboard can be filtered to show only data when sequencing volumes were above those recommended by ECDC (>=500 sequences or >=10% of cases sequenced in a specific week) by clicking on “configure sources manually” and using the “source” filter (top-right) to switch sources.

Limitations:

As not all generated sequences are reported, underestimates of the sequencing activities in some countries might occur. Please see the country overview report for additional limitations.

The proportion of variants is only reliable when sequencing capacity is adequate (≥500 or ≥10% of total samples). Even then, estimates must be treated with caution since they may be biased if the sequenced viruses are not representative of all cases in the country. For TESSy data, no proportion of variants has been estimated where there is no reliable denominator available.

Background information

Since the discovery of SARS-CoV-2, three variants of concern, first identified in the United Kingdom (B.1.1.7), South Africa (B.1.351), and Brazil (P.1), have been associated with higher transmissibility and severity of disease, with potential implications for acquired immunity or the effectiveness of current vaccines. In addition, SARS-CoV-2 lineages B.1.617.1, B.1.617.2, and B.1.617.3, first reported in India in December 2020, have been increasingly detected in other countries.

Media advisory – Press briefing ahead of Competitiveness Council of 27 and 28 May 2021

The **press briefing** ahead of the Competitiveness Council will take place on **Friday, 21 May at 17.00**. This briefing will be “off the record”.

Please note that this press briefing will take place remotely.

In order to participate and ask questions, EU accredited journalists should register using this link.

Those who already registered for the previous press events of Competitiveness Council do not need to do it again.

– Deadline for the registration: Friday, 21 May at 15.00

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants shortly after the deadline.

Visit the meeting page

Cities and regions must be full partners of the EU Strategy for Energy System Integration

In this interview, Gunārs Ansiņš (LV/Renew Europe) answers four questions on the transition towards a more sustainable and efficient EU energy system. The Vice-Mayor of the Latvian city of Liepāja is the rapporteur of the opinion on the EU Strategy for Energy System Integration, adopted during the 5-7 May CoR Plenary session, which calls on to the European Commission and Members States to put into place a systematic approach to involve local and regional authorities in the energy transition, in particular within the development of national energy and climate plans. Energy production and consumption account for 75% of the EU’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. An integrated energy system is therefore crucial to delivering on the European Green Deal’s objective of reaching climate neutrality by 2050.

Can the EU Strategy for Energy System Integration play a role in the economic recovery of LRAs, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Is a transition towards a more integrated energy system relevant for LRAs?

The EU Strategy for Energy System Integration has a role in the economic recovery of local and regional authorities in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. In making the transition towards a more integrated energy system, it is important to set the energy-efficiency-first objective at local and regional level, taking into account the broader context of the less developed regions and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. This is because energy efficiency reduces total investment and costs needed in relation to energy production, infrastructure and consumption. Likewise, it reduces the use of land and materials, as well as pollution and biodiversity loss. Energy system integration can help local and regional authorities achieve greater energy efficiency as the available resources would be used for the transition to more efficient energy technologies.

However, when developing any energy system, it should be assessed whether it would lead to lower costs for businesses and people. The energy-efficiency-first principle should aim to reduce the climate impact and increase the resource efficiency of integrated energy supply systems as well as improving efficiency for end-users. At the same time care must be taken to ensure that the transition does not go against the interests of consumers, namely that efforts to improve energy efficiency do not lead to higher energy tariffs or other costs for people and businesses without appropriate compensation.

Municipalities can be as lighthouses to show green light for even greener European Union.

What will be the role of each region’s existing basic infrastructure while shifting towards high-investment energy systems?

Without taking away from innovative solutions, when integrating the energy system, it is mainly necessary to strengthen each region’s existing basic infrastructure, whose strengths and advantages have been proven in practice. Given that the situations in regions vary widely in terms of climate and infrastructure, creative and smart solutions should be sought for the weak points in each region’s basic infrastructure. It would be wrong to say, therefore, that the use of electricity for heating buildings should be increased in all regions, for which heat pumps are specifically recommended. District heating is highly developed in a number of countries. In Latvia, for example, it covers more than 70% of the population, and the amount of energy supplied to customers by district heating is similar to the amount of electricity consumed in Latvia. District heating can contribute by providing energy storage and power generation and by making use of energy resources that cannot be exploited at building level.

What is the real potential of offshore renewable energy?

We should use the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future and support new offshore renewable technologies (e.g. tidal, wave and floating offshore wind and solar technologies) in a targeted manner,

while at the same time supporting the EU's economic and environmental objectives. At the same time, there is a need for a clear plan to link offshore grid and offshore wind power generation directly to a cross-border interconnector in the future. Offshore energy production combined with cross-border transmission would allow significant savings in terms of costs and use of maritime space.

At the same time, green energy and biodiversity objectives should not be pitted against each other, but practical ways should be found to achieve them, thereby making it easier to realise the offshore energy potential more quickly in practice and ensuring concrete maritime spatial planning, not only in line with the biodiversity requirements, with less disruption for marine life, but also taking into account people's desire to preserve the marine landscape, the growing potential of eco-tourism and demands to preserve the attractiveness of natural surroundings.

How can methane leaks be better assessed globally?

According to the EU strategy to reduce methane emissions, the EU accounts for only 5% of global methane emissions. It can therefore be concluded that even the most ambitious EU plans to reduce methane emissions will have little impact on reducing the planet's greenhouse gas emissions. Imports of goods into the EU's single market should only be allowed from countries (or parts thereof) that provide the same standards for greenhouse gas reduction as the EU. Only in this way it will be possible to ensure that the climate targets set by the EU will not adversely affect the competitiveness of the EU and its businesses at global level.

We should urge faster detection of methane leaks both through the Copernicus programme and through other tools where the Copernicus programme is not able to provide sufficient data. It is essential to identify areas with significant methane leaks outside the EU and to make this information public, thus enabling EU citizens to make informed choices as to whether to purchase goods produced in such locations.

Background:

The opinion 'Powering a climate-neutral economy: An EU Strategy for Energy System Integration', adopted during the 144 Plenary (5-7 May 2021) of the European Committee of the Regions is a dossier of the CoR's Green Deal Going Local (GDGL) working group. Launched in June 2020 and composed of 13 local and regional elected representatives, the GDGL working group has the objective to guarantee that EU cities and regions are directly involved in the definition, implementation and assessment of the numerous initiatives that fall under the European Green Deal, the EU's sustainable growth strategy to reach climate-neutrality by 2050.

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