

Medical Tourism: Strategies of Hospitals during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

- **Objective:** Investigate factors that contribute towards speed of recovery selected MT hospitals have achieved from the effects of the pandemic.
- Pandemic has resulted in **74% decline in global tourism in 2020** (UNWTO, 3/31/21). In 2021: only **4% rise in international tourist arrivals**. (UNTWO, 1/18/22)
- **Medical tourism** market came to a complete stand-still due to lockdowns & travel bans.
- **Hospital-specific** - Use “Structure-conduct-performance” paradigm
- **“Conduct” of hospitals** - key SS-side players in MT market, their resilience is determined by strategies they adopt during the pandemic.
- **“Performance”** - How individual country responded will determine how fast they will recover from the pandemic.
- **Methodology** - Interviewed 6 hospitals from Jordan, S. Korea, UAE, Turkey between June to Aug of 2021.

Covid-19 stat (9/11/22): S. Korea, Jordan, USA

	UAE	S. Korea	Jordan	Turkey
Total Cases	1.02 mill.	24 mill	1.74 mill	16.8 mill.
Total deaths	2,342	27,476	14,114	101,000
Case fatality rate	0.23%	0.11%	0%	0.60%
% pop fully vaccinated	99%	86.3%	44.7%	63%
Vaccine types	Pfizer, Sinopharm,	Johnson& Johnson, Moderna, Pfizer AstraZeneca,	AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Sinopharm, Sputnik V	Sinovac, Pfizer, Sputnik
First lockdown dates	March 2020	NA	3/19/2020-4/30/2020	March 2020

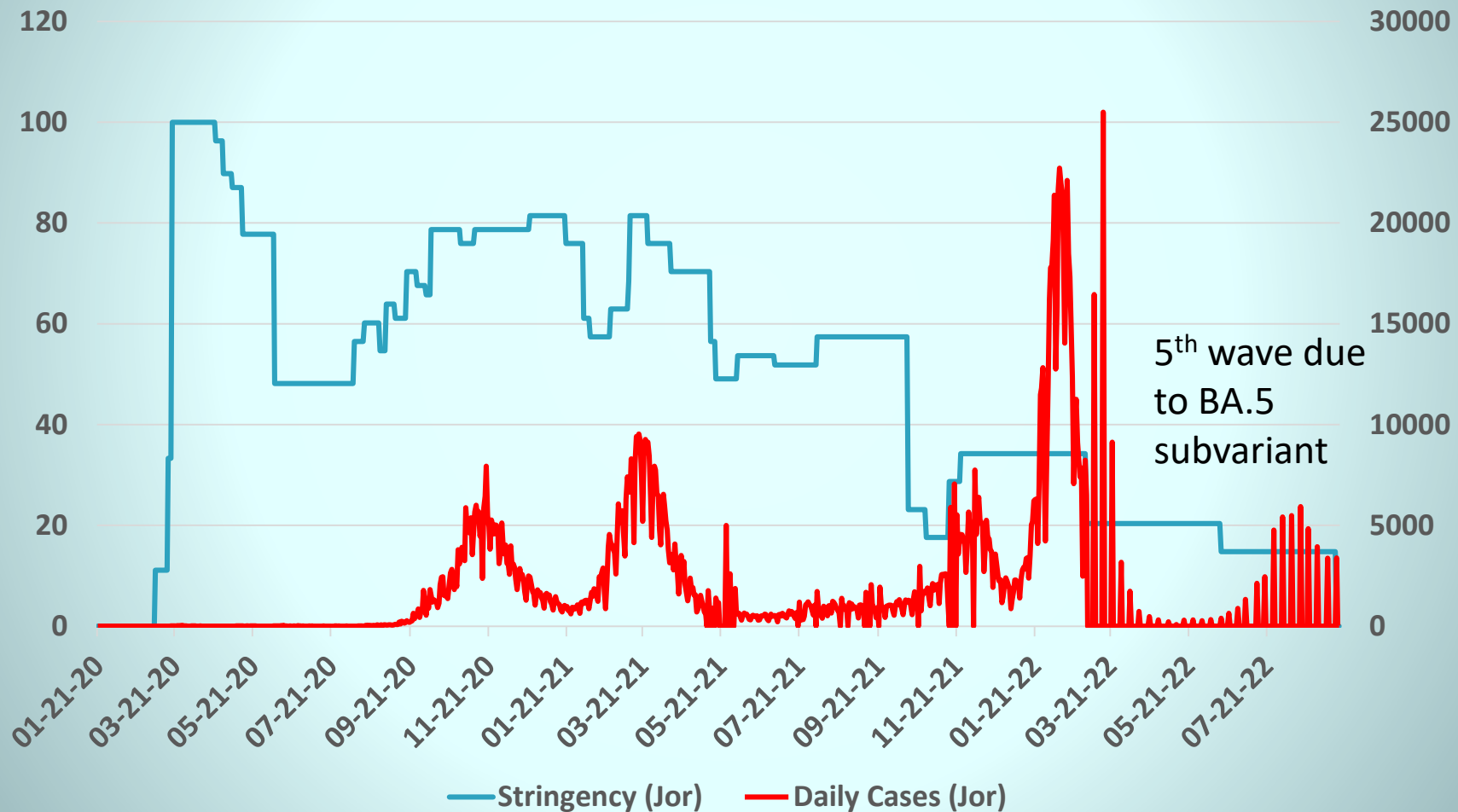
Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>



Jordan -Overview & Innovative Approaches

- **Desired treatments:** general surgery, cardiac surgery, neurosurgery, orthopedics, oncology, bone marrow transplants, IVF.
- **Clients:** Yemen, Saudi Arabia, GCC, Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Chad, Sudan
- Initially only public hospitals were allowed to treat Covid-patients.
- Later extended to [private hospitals](#) & [creating of field hospitals](#) to expand Covid-related health. (Rand, 6/20/22)
- [Use drive-through testing & drive-through clinics.](#)
- **Launched new services:** [transporting patients to hospitals, setting up hotline, home care nursing service, home delivery of drugs.](#)
- **Telemedicine:** for initial diagnosis, discussing treatment plans, follow-up; via phone/email instead of [video conferencing](#).
- Use **contact tracing mobile App (Aman)** to identify/close down areas with high Covid infection rates.
- Transparent Ministry of Health website: supply shortages, occupancy levels in ER & ICUs, Covid cases updates.
- **Mid-June 2021** - Hospitals returned to normal. Early July 2021, Jordan launched **Salamtak** online portal with 20 private hospitals to reach MT. It includes visa facilitation.

Jordan: Daily Cases vs. Stringency (09/15/22)



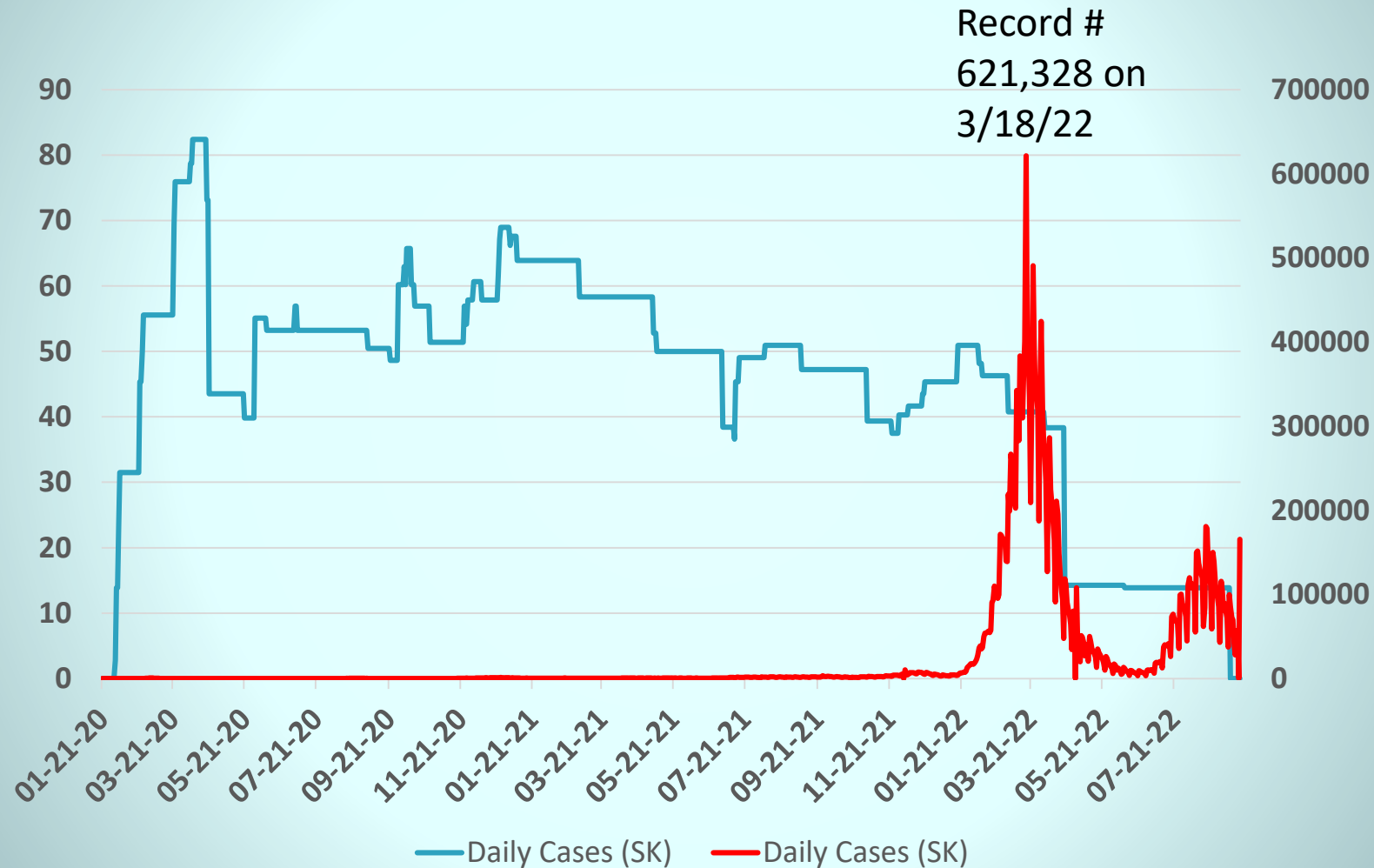
Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-cases>



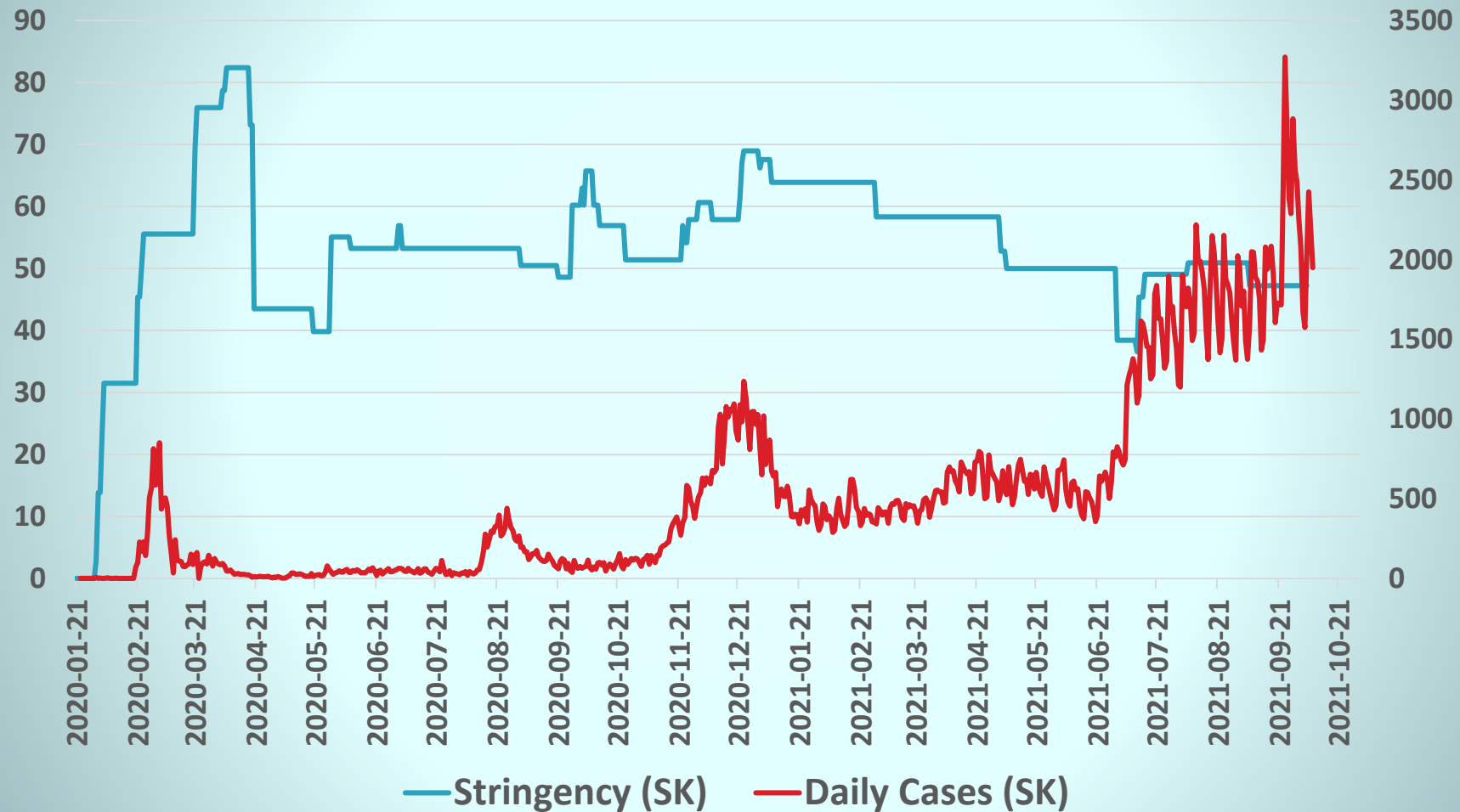
S. Korea -Overview & Innovative Approaches

- **Desired treatments:** Plastic surgery, stem-cell, anti-aging, transplants, advanced cancer.
- **Clients:** China, Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait.
- 2019-2020: Overall use of medical services dropped by 9.8%. Significant drop in foreign patients by 7x in 1 hospital. (Jin, 2021)
- Covid patients was admitted only to the general & university hospitals.
- One hospital provided care for patients having severe Covid symptoms in isolated rooms equipped with negative pressures.
- Strong co-operation b/w hospitals & gov. using technology. Hospitals shared govt. info with potential patients on entry & quarantine procedures, & location reports using Apps.
- The info is translated into multiple languages & shared via email/text message with patients who have prior appointment to visit the hospital.

S. Korea: Daily Cases vs. Stringency (09/15/22)



S. Korea: Daily Cases vs. Stringency (10/08/21)



Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-cases>



Jordan - Challenges & Opportunities

- Jordan's high unemployment rate: 2020: 18.4%; 2021: 19.3%; mostly among youths (age 15-24).
- Faced **shortage of PPEs, beds, & ventilators**.
- **Insufficient blood in the national blood bank** during full lockdown.
- **Nurses shortage** - Govt hospitals that treat Covid patients mobilized healthcare staff from private hospitals during Covid wave.
- Local nursing syndicate **banned private hospitals from hiring international nurses**. (Manneh, 6/8/21)
- Recruited graduate nurses & retired doctors.
- Hospitals switched to using **Facebook, Instagram, Twitter** to reach potential & existing patients during pandemic.
- Monthly "free medical day" – doctors visit patients, give free services & medications. Sent staff to universities to **educate on hygiene practice & social distancing**.



S. Korea: Challenges & Opportunities

- GDP contracted by 1% in 2020, did better than other advanced economies. 2021: GDP improved significantly by 10%. (World Bank)
- **Telemedicine illegal.** In 2020, govt temporarily allowed telemedicine, 300,000 services were provided. (Jin, 2021)
- Change in entry regulation: required medical visa (C-3) that can take > 3 weeks of processing
- 2-wk quarantine at a designated facility upon arrival a hurdle for foreign patients → requires taking longer vacation for a medical trip.
- Access of personal data for contact tracing → Balance b/w use of data & rights to privacy.
- S. Korea improved her medical brand during pandemic, \$200,000 set aside for the purpose.(Jin, 2021)
- S. Korea approved its first homemade Covid vaccine for age 18+ in June 2022. (AP, 6/29/22)



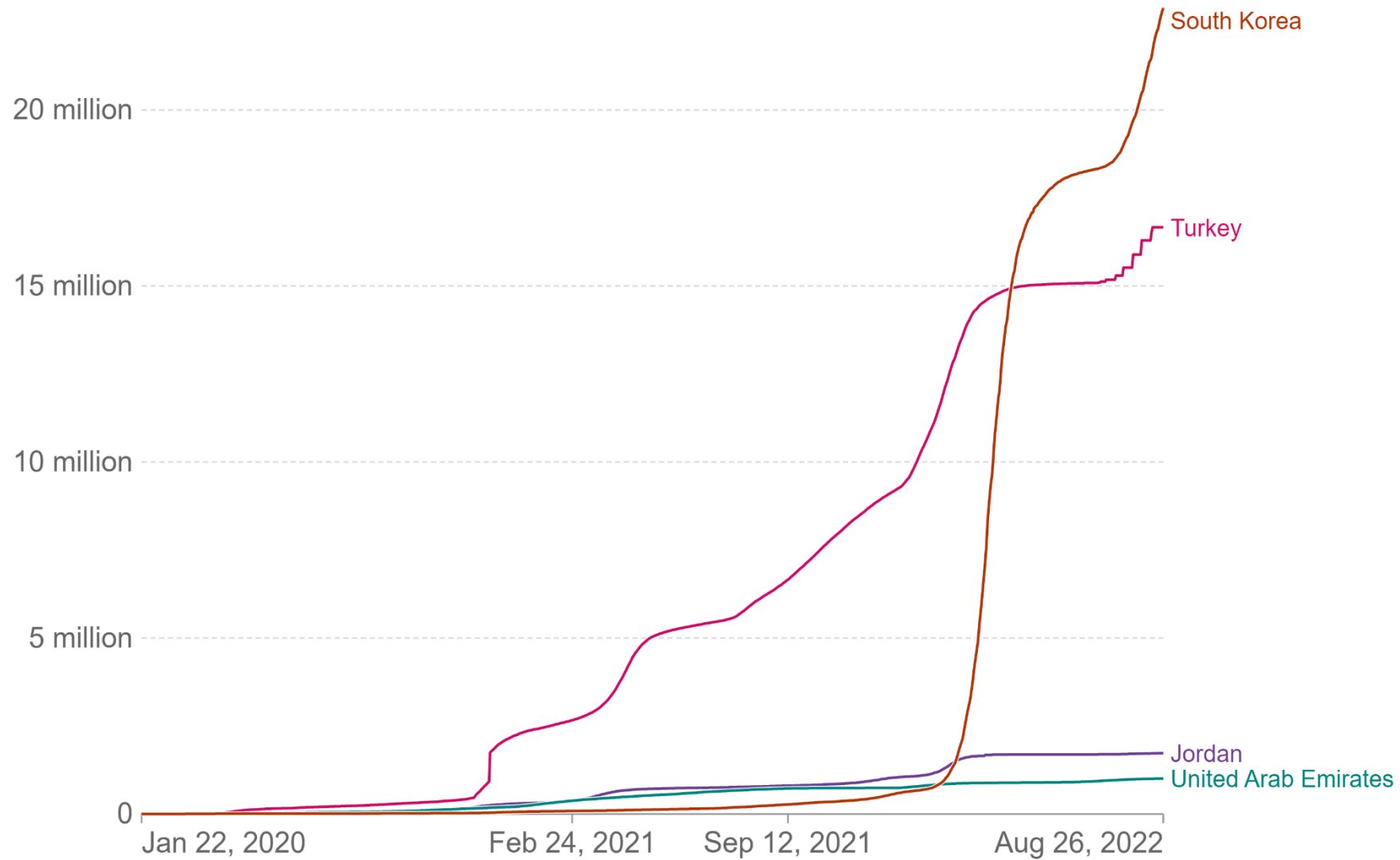
Jordan - Conclusion

- Jordan was lauded as having **the most stringent lockdowns & curfews** among MENA region -> contributed towards its faster recovery from Covid in the region.
- Gov's Initial strict lockdown has paid off. Jordan has been quick to recover even without mandating vaccination (except for healthcare workers).
- Since Sep 8, 2020, already resumed flights to & from countries with low infection risks.
- Hospitals are **quick to adapt** to **more proactive & innovative approaches** during the pandemic.
- The **partnership b/w public & private sectors to boost MT** during the pandemic are essential (e.g. Salamtak platform).
- **Jan 2021**, began 1st Covid-19 vaccination program → equitable access for all including 1.4 million refugees
- As of 9/11/2022, 44% of population has been fully vaccinated (**Vaccine hesitation** a problem), the cumulative # of confirmed cases has been **flattening** since around Feb 2022.
- It has indeed built a **resilient & sustainable regional MT** industry, a lesson that many countries can draw from.

Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 cases

Our World
in Data

Due to limited testing, the number of confirmed cases is lower than the true number of infections.



Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data

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S. Korea - Conclusion

- Factors to quick recovery: Accurate & prompt disclosure of info via **contact tracing & quarantine**; Effective vaccine policies - **focus on elderly & high-risk persons**.
- **Widespread testing** prevents further spread. Lately, includes rapid antigen tests.
- **Prompt cooperation** of people with mask wearing, quarantine & infection prevention rules initially.
- **Widespread Internet environment** (use of smartphones & Apps) for all ages.
- Despite record no. of cases, **SK has seen no significant increase in hospitalizations or deaths.**
- One of the few countries that did not impose strict nationwide lockdown or closure of businesses.
- Despite late vaccine rollout (2/28/21), today widespread of vaccination **(88%)** to limit deaths & critical cases; scaled back its once aggressive tracing & containment efforts (Reuters, 4/15/22).