

COVID-19: How Wikipedia helps us through uncertain times







Dear readers,

Which sources of information do you trust most during these times? False information and narratives based on conspiracy theories are currently booming, while Internet platforms are trying to contain them. What we can see now with great clarity: **Transparent, neutral and reliable information is invaluable** for us human beings – which is even more apparent in times of uncertainty.

Everywhere in the world, the Wikimedia projects provide millions of people with **well-documented and vital information about the Covid-19 pandemic.**

In this policy brief, you'll find out how the global community of volunteers joins **forces in times of crisis.** You will see why Wikipedia is in a **better position than a good many other structures to counteract disinformation.** During these times, two principles of Wikipedians shine most brightly: **collaboration and trust.**

Our requests to you:

We would like to see that you as policymakers **value and appreciate online volunteering as a civic engagement of crucial importance.** Please use your influence to enable volunteers who work digitally to gain access to **high-quality contents that are reliable and easily verifiable** – for example from public authorities at a national, regional and local level or from public service broadcasting. This content must be **available to be reused freely and marked accordingly to create legal certainty.** Please help us keep disproportionately restrictive platform regulations away from free knowledge projects. We look forward to working with you on these goals.

Enjoy reading our news and stay safe and healthy!

Abraham Taherivand
Executive Director
Wikimedia Deutschland e. V.

Wikipedia and COVID-19: Online volunteering at full speed



Two experienced volunteers use their video format “Unboxing Wikipedia” to explain how the community is working on information related to COVID-19.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, all over the world Wikipedia has become the first point of contact for medical and health information around COVID-19. A global network of more than 200,000 volunteers writes, updates and translates Wikipedia articles relating to the pandemic. Thanks to the work of this network, it has been possible to create more than 5,000 Wikipedia articles in over 160 languages about COVID-19. Globally, these articles have been viewed more than 240 million times.

As early as January, the range of topics became wider, for example to include articles on how the virus spread in specific locations, as well as sociopolitical aspects such as racist attacks and incidents triggered by the pandemic. Diagrams for illustration, statistics and explainer videos, informing the public about how the virus is transmitted and how we can protect ourselves, were immediately accessible worldwide and free to reuse, for example to prepare classroom materials or to carry out a scientific comparison of different sources.

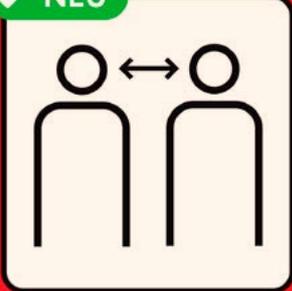
Wikipedia also disseminates information from official sources that come with a free licence or fall into the public domain as official publications.

Neues Coronavirus Aktualisiert am 5.3.2020

SO SCHÜTZEN WIR UNS.



✓ NEU



Abstand halten.

Zum Beispiel:

- Ältere Menschen durch genügend Abstand schützen.
- Beim Anstehen Abstand halten.
- Bei Sitzungen Abstand halten.

WEITERHIN WICHTIG:

✓



Gründlich Hände waschen.

✓



Hände schütteln vermeiden.

✓



In Taschentuch oder Armbeuge husten und niesen.

✓



Bei Fieber und Husten zu Hause bleiben.

✓



Nur nach telefonischer Anmeldung in Arztpraxis oder Notfallstation.

www.bag-coronavirus.ch



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Bundesamt für Gesundheit BAG
Office fédéral de la santé publique OFSP
Ufficio federale della sanità pubblica UFSP
Uffizi federal da sanadad publica UFSP



Scan for translation

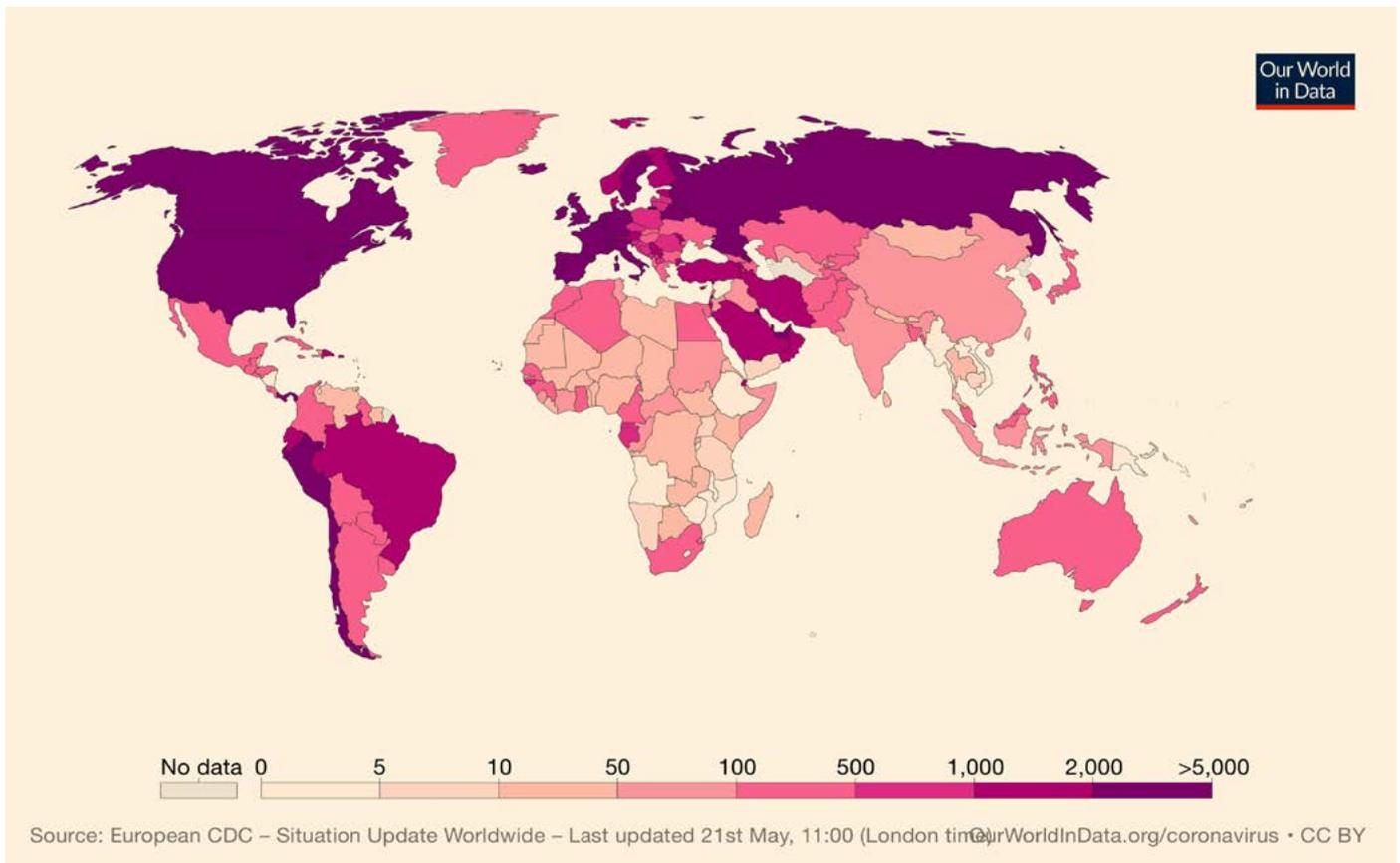
Facts

- 5,029 new articles on COVID-19
- 175 languages featuring COVID-19 articles
- 708,403 revisions in total in COVID-19 articles
- 382,376,921 page views of COVID-19 articles from all over the world
- 58,317 editors have contributed to COVID-19 articles



Total confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people, May 21, 2020

The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of total cases. The main reason for this is limited testing.



Reliable health information Example: WikiProject Medicine



The Canadian emergency physician and long-term Wikipediaian Dr. James Heilman is working together with several hundred other volunteers on medical and health-related topics.

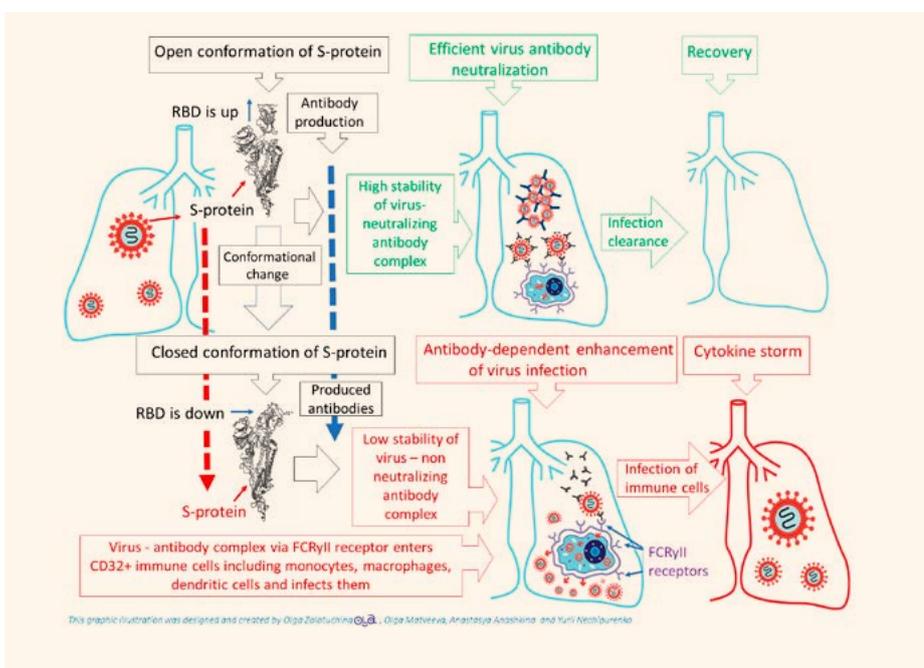
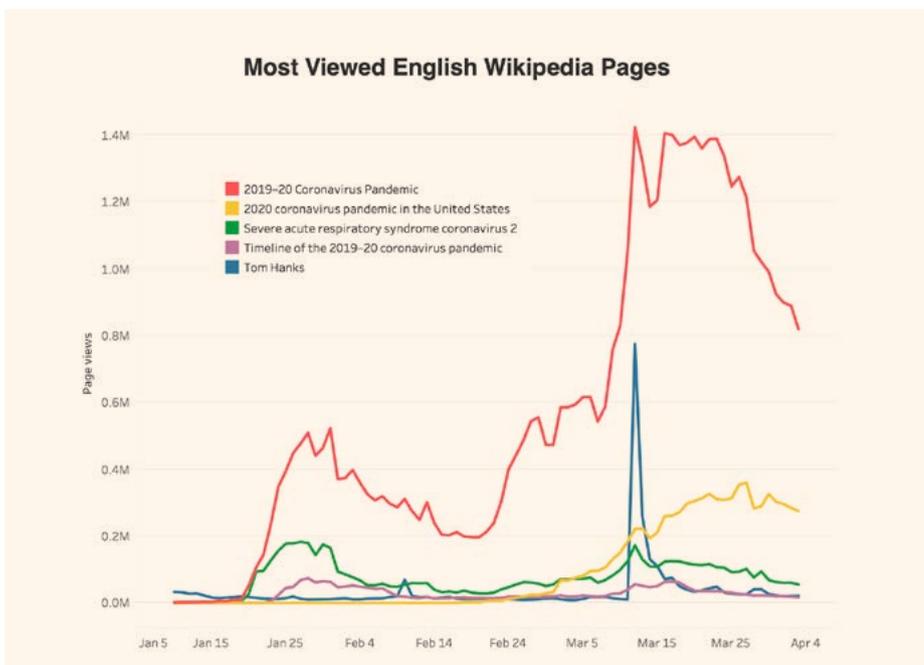
Thousands of volunteers are now investing even more time than before to provide trustworthy and up-to-date information on Wikipedia. Authors form groups – also called WikiProjects – that focus on a specific topic, for example in the ‘Portal:Medizin’ on the German-language edition of Wikipedia, or in the WikiProject Medicine on the English-language edition of Wikipedia.

Over the past weeks and months, all revisions on the subject of COVID-19 have been checked with exceptional care and diligence. It is a consequence of the large number of page views and very frequent updates. All medical data and information have to be proofed by a peer review. Only reliable health data from public authorities are used for the statistics.

Many of the volunteer authors who write, review and correct Wikipedia articles about COVID-19 have specialist medical knowledge, work or do research in the health sector. Wikipediaian Dr. James Heilman states: “At the moment, the only tool available to us to fight this virus is to inform people about how it spreads. Knowledge can stop this disease.”

Wikipedia shows what's happening in the world

Views of Wikipedia articles often reflect significant developments. On 12 March 2020, the day after the World Health Organization categorized Covid-19 as a pandemic, the most important English-language Wikipedia article about the pandemic was viewed more than 1.4 million times, an increase of 73 percent compared to the day before the WHO's announcement.



Complex scientific diagram in the category "Diagrams on the Covid-19 pandemic" by Wikimedia Commons

Trust in information: Why doesn't Wikipedia face major disinformation problems?



Wikipedia "Edit-a-thon" in Kowloon, Hongkong

Soon, Wikipedia will reach the age of 20. Yet its first decade was frequently marked by scepticism: If everybody can contribute content, can this really generate quality? During the second decade, this view changed fundamentally. Nowadays, it is apparent that Wikipedia's complete openness and transparency are the very reasons why the accuracy of information is going from strength to strength compared to other media platforms.

Large Internet platforms are facing enormous challenges in terms of curbing false information, hate speech and targeted disinformation campaigns. Self-governance enables the different Wikipedia communities all over the world to react more quickly and flexibly – and they are less susceptible to errors than the centralized teams of “cleaners” at large platforms.

Policymakers are looking for adequate, balanced regulatory measures to tackle the issues, yet they are under time pressure.

“Although the German article ‘COVID-19-Pandemie’ is read more than 150,000 times per day, there is hardly any vandalism,” states Wikipedia author “Gerbil”, who has been writing for the platform for 14 years, in conversation with heise.online¹. He regularly works on articles covering topics such as the Spanish flu or H5N1 avian flu.

Another reason why Wikipedia does not face the same problems as other platforms and social media is because its underlying model is different:

It is not about a randomly chosen contribution, but about verified information. For a piece of information to be published on Wikipedia, it has to be backed up by a reliable source. Both can be checked by other Wikipedia authors and the general public at any time.

¹
<https://www.heise.de/newsticker/meldung/Hochzeiten-fuer-Wikipedia-Dauerhafte-Coronavirus-Updates-4689416.htm>

“Everywhere in the world, Wikipedia feels committed to scientific diligence and human rights such as the freedom of opinion and expression.”

Katherine Maher, Executive Director of the Wikimedia Foundation

Wikipedia is particularly robust in these times of crisis because the community of volunteers complies with already established rules: to adopt a neutral point of view and to use reliable sources. In a world where people are looking for information from sources with a traceable origin, trust in Wikipedia continues to grow.

- **Complete openness and transparency**
- **Every single revision – as minor as it may be – is stored in the system forever and can always be viewed by everyone via the page history of the articles**
- **Looking at the discussion pages provides insights into internal discussions Wikipedia authors have about the respective topic**

Reliable information needs good data sources



Student studying with protective mask on

In order to continue to be a reliable source of information even in times of crisis, Wikipedia volunteers need good working conditions.

These include free access to qualitatively robust information that is free to reuse. In terms of policies, secure and interoperable data infrastructures and improved access to data of public authorities can be pivotal in this context.

Data collaborations between open data communities and public institutions can show the way towards data policies that serve the public interest: the Linked Open Data project Wikidata with over 86 million data sets (as of May 2020) is the largest open and freely editable data structure of its kind.

Wikipedia's sister project already serves as an important model for many other projects and applications that are sources of reliable data, particularly during the pandemic. Machine-readable and interconnected knowledge available in this format can be used by urban neighbourhood initiatives as well as by disaster management organizations. It is also suitable to prepare educational and training materials, can help to facilitate research projects, and much more.

How can policy provide support?



Young people at Jugend hackt de x re:coded 2018

Wherever possible, parliaments as well as governments should encourage and support digital voluntary work by expressing appreciation for the efforts of the volunteers. Also, politicians can lead by example and actively support digital volunteering by implementing funding programmes and awarding prizes.

Public authorities ought to provide access to publicly funded data from administrative bodies, public institutions, research as well as educational content available through public service broadcasting in freely accessible and editable formats. A secure legal framework is vital in this context. It needs to be clear when publications of public authorities are official works, therefore in the public domain and not subject to copyright. We suggest a legal presumption in copyright law, according to which publications of public authorities are to be seen as free-of-copyright official works unless indicated otherwise.

From the perspective of fundamental legislative initiatives such as the EU copyright reform or the upcoming EU Digital Services Act, digital voluntary projects such as Wikipedia rely on policymakers – and in this context particularly members of parliament – as their allies. Regulating online platforms requires an evidence-based approach and it should not be an unnecessary strain on projects developed by volunteers.

To take this further, we are looking forward to a more detailed exchange with you.

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Screenshot YouTubeformat „Unboxing Wikipedia“
COVID-19 articles illustration. HDothiduc (WMF) / CC BY-SA (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

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Total confirmed cases of COVID-19 per million people,
Our World in Data / CC BY <https://wikimediafoundation.org/covid19/data/>

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James Heilman, image from a video feature by CBS news.
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-rise-of-wikipedia-as-a-source-of-medical-information/>

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Most viewed English Wikipedia articles. CC BY-SA 4.0 Dennis Bratland

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<https://aaa.org.hk/en/programmes/programmes/artfeminism-wikipedia-edit-a-thon-2020>, Standbild aus einem Videobeitrag von CBS News: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-rise-of-wikipedia-as-a-source-of-medical-information/>

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Neighborhood graph of the COVID-19 disease Daniel Mietchen / CC0

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Oa.coello / CC BY-SA (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

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Jugend hackt DE x re:coded 2018, CC BY 4.0 Jugend hackt, Foto:
Leonard Wolf

About Wikimedia Deutschland

Wikimedia Deutschland is a non-profit organization that promotes Free Knowledge with around 80,000 members. Since it was founded in 2004, the association has supported a number of different Wikimedia projects – with a main focus on Wikipedia.

The association promotes access to Free Knowledge and is therefore committed to education as a human right. Like other sister projects, Wikipedia is independent and without advertising, which is why it can only exist with the work of volunteers and donations.

Website of the association:
<https://wikimedia.de/>

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