

In 2020, about 2.7 million people in the 27 EU countries are expected to be diagnosed with cancer, and nearly 1.3 million to die from it (Joint Research Centre, 2020). Over 40% of cancer cases are preventable, and mortality can also be reduced through earlier diagnosis and the provision of more timely and effective treatments. The Europe's Beating Cancer Plan aims to reduce the cancer burden for patients, their families and health systems, and address cancer-related inequalities between and within countries, with actions to support, coordinate and complement the efforts of Member States (EC, 2020).

More men than women are expected to be diagnosed with cancer in 2020 across EU countries (54% men and 46% women). Among men, the main cancer sites are prostate cancer, which is expected to account for 23% of all new cancers diagnosed in 2020, followed by lung cancer (14%) and colorectal cancer (13%). Among women, breast cancer is the main cancer site, expected to account for 29% of all new cancer cases, followed by colorectal cancer (12%) and lung cancer (9%) (Figure 3.11).

Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium are expected to have the highest incidence rate of all cancers combined in 2020, with age-standardised rates more than 10% higher than the EU average (Figure 3.12). These variations reflect not only variations in the real number of new cancers occurring each year, but also differences in national policies regarding cancer screening to detect different types of cancer as well as differences in the quality of cancer surveillance and reporting.

Cancer is the second leading cause of mortality in the EU after cardiovascular diseases. Reflecting mainly higher incidence, mortality from cancer is greater among men than women. Overall across EU countries, about 706 000 men and 555 000 women are expected to die from cancer in 2020 (JRC, 2020).

Mortality rates from cancer are lowest in Finland, Malta, Spain, Luxembourg, and Sweden, with rates at least 15% lower than the EU average. They are highest in the Slovak Republic, Poland, Cyprus, and Hungary, with rates more than 20% higher than the EU average (Figure 3.12).

Lung cancer remains by far the most common cause of death from cancer among men and the second most common among women (after breast cancer). Over 257 000 people are expected to die from lung cancer across EU countries in 2020 (JRC, 2020). The main risk factors for lung cancer are tobacco smoking and environmental factors such as air pollution (see Chapter 2 on the impact of air pollution on health and mortality). While the survival rate after a diagnosis for lung cancer has increased over the past decade, it still remains fairly low (see indicator "Incidence, survival and mortality from lung cancer" in Chapter 6).

Colorectal cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death, with about 156 000 people expected to die from colorectal cancer in EU countries in 2020. The mortality rate from colorectal cancer is about 75% higher among men than

among women across EU countries. There are several risk factors for colorectal cancer besides age, including a diet high in fat and low in fibre, alcohol consumption, smoking and obesity. Earlier detection and better treatment have led to higher survival rates after diagnosis (see indicator "Screening, survival and mortality from colorectal cancer" in Chapter 6).

Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death among women, expected to cause about 95 000 deaths in 2020 and accounting for 17% of all female cancer deaths. While incidence rates of breast cancer have increased over the past decade, death rates have declined or stabilised, reflecting increases in survival rates due also to earlier diagnosis and better treatment (see indicator "Screening, survival and mortality for breast cancer" in Chapter 6).

The estimates of cancer incidence and mortality reported here do not reflect any effect that the COVID-19 pandemic might have on the burden of cancer as they are based on trends from previous years. At the time of writing this report, it is not clear yet what effect the COVID-19 outbreak might have on cancer incidence, mortality or survival in each country and in the EU as a whole. However, many EU countries faced significant challenges during the peak of the epidemic in maintaining cancer screening and treatment, impacting the quality of care for cancer patients and possibly also survival rates.

#### Definition and comparability

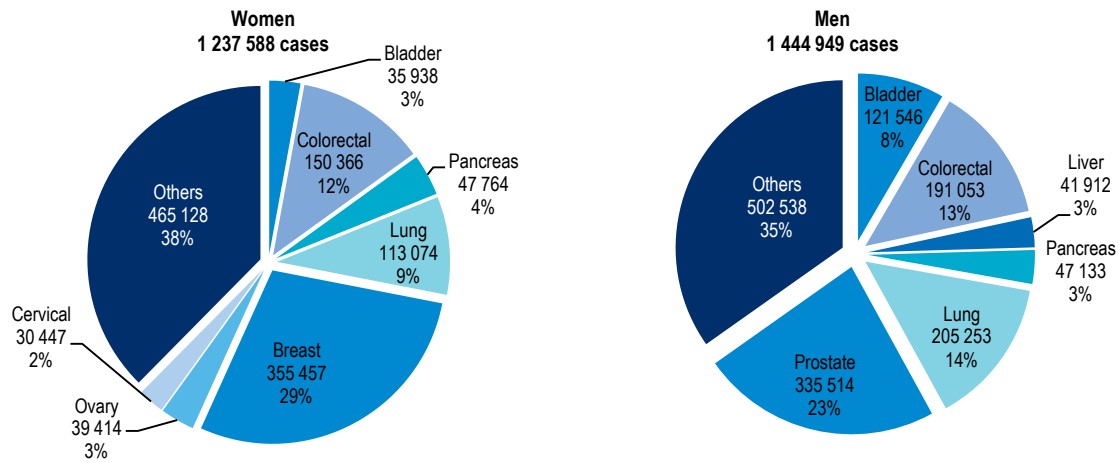
The 2020 cancer incidence and mortality estimates have been computed using the European Cancer Information System (ECIS) which is used for reporting the cancer burden in Europe. These estimates are the outcome of a collaborative project between the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and the European Network of Cancer Registries (ENCR), together with the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). The estimates are based on the cancer registries historical data on incidence and mortality. Rates have been age-standardised based on the new European Standard Population to remove variations arising from differences in age structures across countries. The estimates for 2020 may differ from national estimates due to differences in methods.

The incidence and mortality from all cancers relate to ICD-10 codes C00-C97 (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer C44).

#### References

- EC (2020), *EU Policy on Cancer*, [https://ec.europa.eu/health/non\\_communicable\\_diseases/cancer\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/health/non_communicable_diseases/cancer_en).
- Joint Research Centre (2020), *ECIS – European Cancer Information System*, <https://ecis.jrc.ec.europa.eu>.

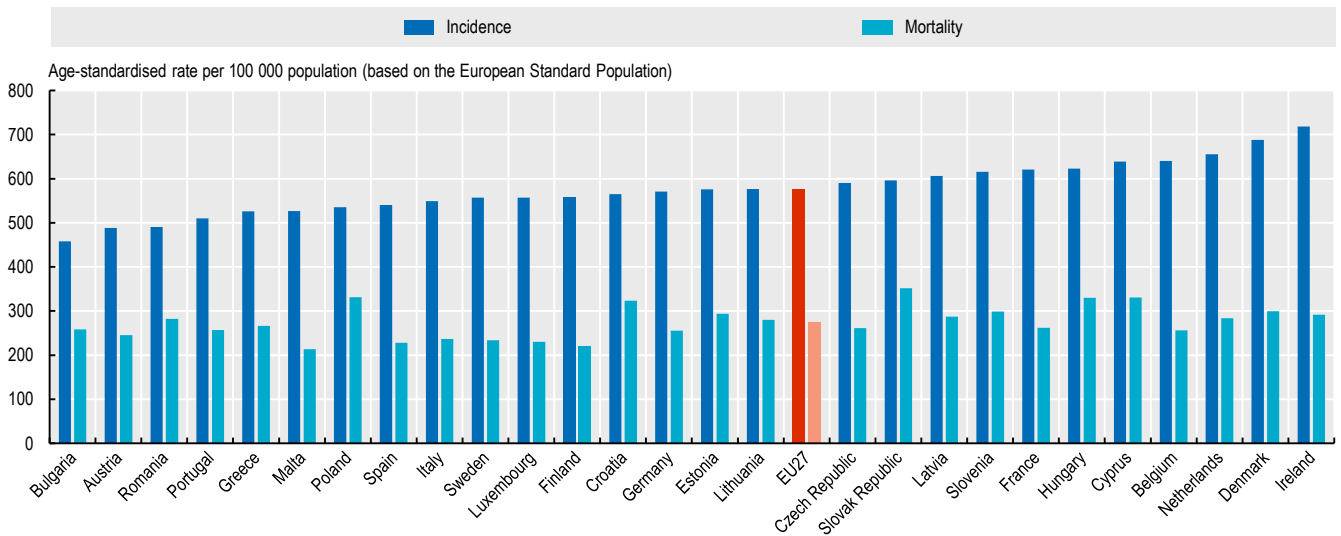
Figure 3.11. Expected cancer incidence by gender and main causes in EU countries, 2020



Note: Data include all cancer sites except non-melanoma skin cancer.  
Source: ECIS – European Cancer Information System.

StatLink <https://stat.link/lwjsmz>

Figure 3.12. Expected cancer incidence and mortality in EU countries, 2020



Note: The EU average is weighted. Data include all cancer sites except non-melanoma skin cancer.  
Source: ECIS – European Cancer Information System.

StatLink <https://stat.link/ys3jcg>



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