

BREAST CANCER: *A disease with many faces*

Over the past few decades, increased awareness, screening, early detection, and treatment advances have led to significant improvements in the overall prognosis of breast cancer patients in Europe.^{1,2} But breast cancer is still far from defeated.³ It remains the most common cancer for women in Europe, with the incidence and mortality still rising in some European Union member states.⁴

INCIDENCE AND MORTALITY WITHIN EUROPE

The risk of breast cancer increases with age; Europe has an ageing population and as a result, the incidence of breast cancer is rising.^{5,6}

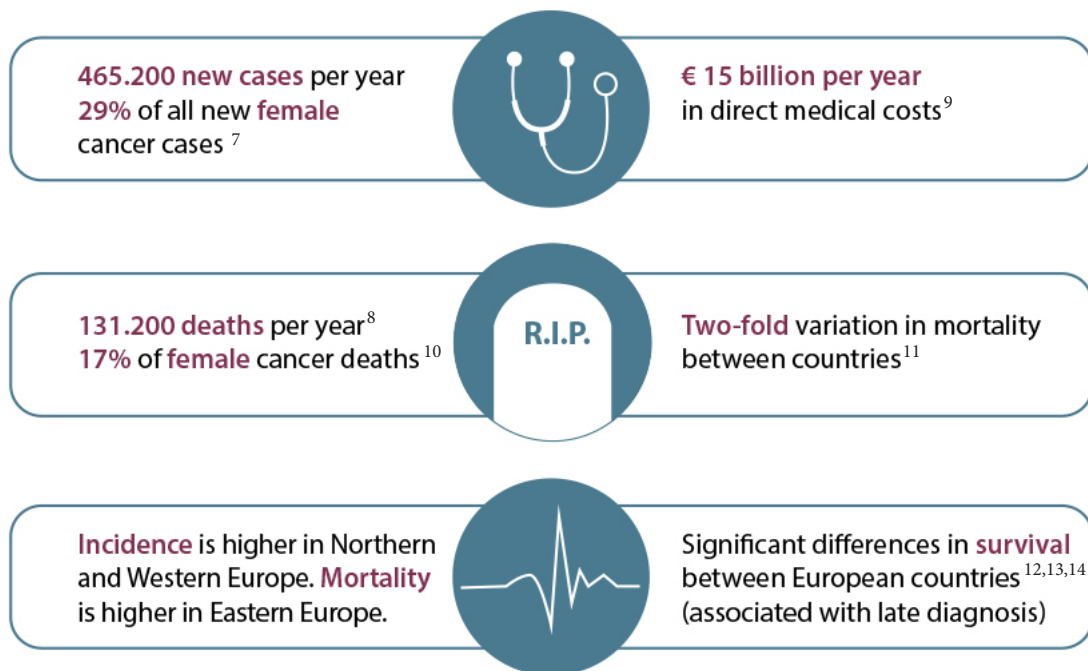


Figure 1: Key facts and figures on the burden of breast cancer in Europe

INCIDENCE

Within Europe, incidence is highest in the West and North,¹⁵ but is increasing rapidly in some Southern and Eastern countries due to the 'Westernisation' effect¹⁶:

- changes in the average age of women having their first child
- fewer children
- growing adoption of sedentary lifestyles

MORTALITY

As a result of improved public awareness, screening¹⁷ and advances in treatment,¹⁸ mortality has seen a general decline over the past decade, particularly in Western and Northern Europe. However rates are still increasing in some Eastern European countries.

SURVIVAL

Survival rates also vary considerably across Europe. Lower survival rates are usually associated with a greater proportion of cases being diagnosed at a later stage.¹⁹

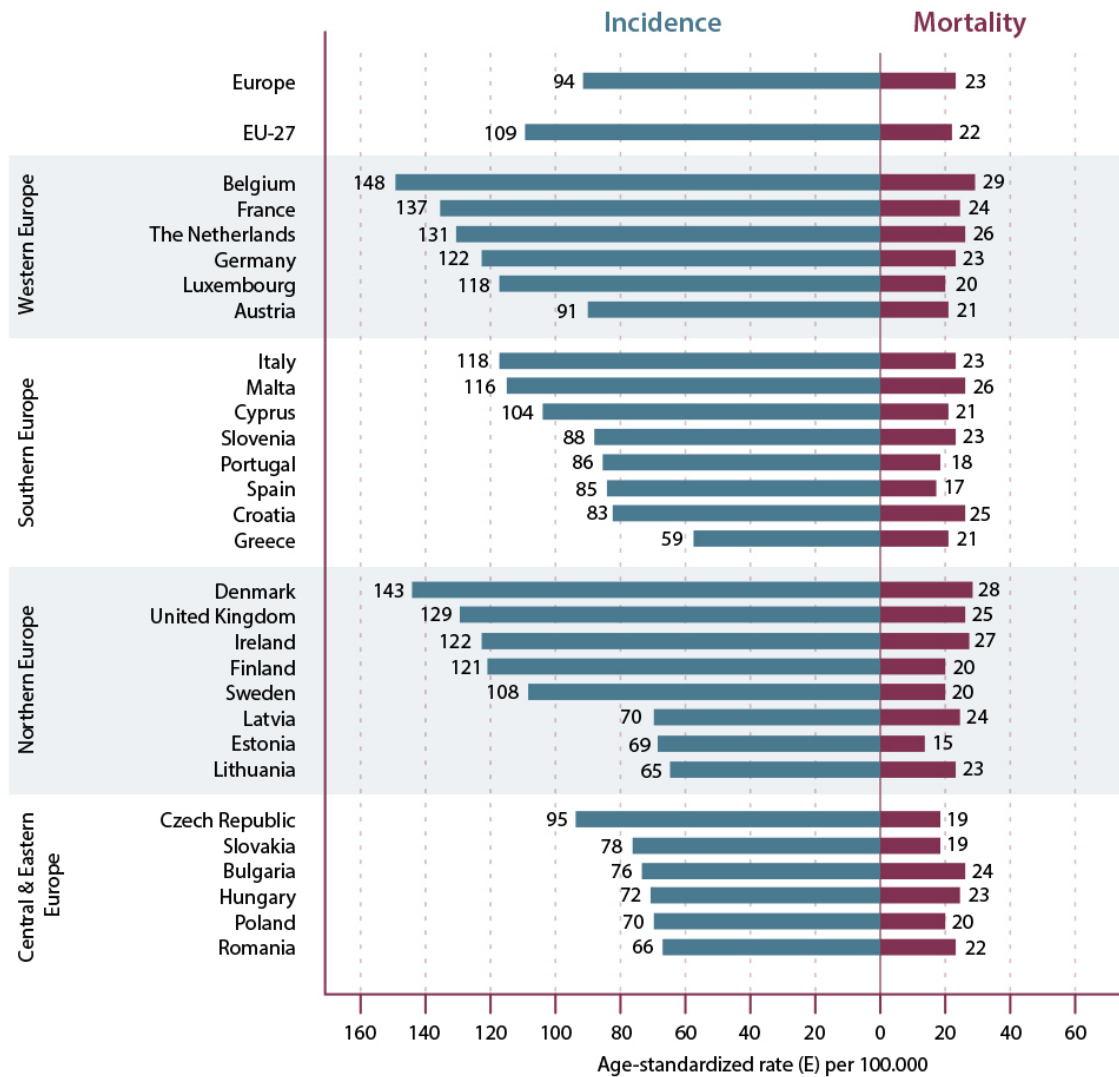


Figure 2: Age-standardised incidence and mortality by country (2012)

AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIETAL BURDEN

Breast cancer is the second most expensive cancer in Europe, costing society €15 billion per year.²⁰ The impact of breast cancer on annual productivity loss due to premature death was estimated at €3.25 billion in the European Union.²¹

Costs associated with the disease will continue to increase as incidence rises with the ageing population.

ONE NAME, MANY DISEASES

Breast cancer is caused by a malignant tumour in the breast.²² What many people do not realise, is that it is not just one disease, but a group of diseases characterised by different molecular subtypes.

Breast cancer is staged from 0 to IV, with stage I indicating early stage breast cancer and stage IV metastatic or advanced breast cancer. The stage increases (and prognosis worsens) as the cancer spreads throughout the body.²³

Both the clinical staging and the presence of certain receptors are important predictors of survival.^{24,25} They can have a considerable impact on a woman's prognosis and available treatment options.²⁶

However, an early diagnosis does not guarantee a cure. Even if women are diagnosed early, there is still a risk their cancer will return - nearly 30% of women diagnosed with early breast cancer will eventually be diagnosed with advanced disease.²⁷

	Stages	Definition
Early breast cancer	Stage 0	non-invasive, carcinoma in situ
	Stage I	Tumor < 2cm and no evidence of metastases
	Stage II	Tumor still in the breast or extended only to nearby lymph nodes
Advanced breast cancer	Locally advanced breast cancer Stage III	Cancer extended to beyond immediate lymph nodes but not to distant organs
	Metastatic breast cancer Stage IV	Cancer spread to distant organs (metastases)

Figure 3: Stages of breast cancer Source: Breastcancer.org⁴

TACKLING BREAST CANCER

Over the past few decades, public perceptions of breast cancer have been transformed by a myriad of advocacy and awareness activities. Examples include^{28,29}: the important 'pink ribbon' movement, and consequent strong media attention and coverage, the wide-ranging educational campaigns, and the significant investment in breast cancer research (amounting to billions of Euros).

Thanks to these significant advances, there is much progress to celebrate. Breast cancer has become a familiar disease, and for early stage breast cancer, the outcomes have been transformed and survival rates have steadily risen.

While many battles have been won, the fight against breast cancer is far from over.

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