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# Bridging Gaps in HPV Prevention: The HPV Prevention Policy Atlas as a Vital Communication Tool



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**The HPV Prevention Policy Atlas provides invaluable insights into the state of HPV prevention across the European region: it evaluates countries' policies in primary prevention (vaccination), secondary prevention (screening), and online information dissemination; and serves as a crucial means of communication, calling for action where needed.**

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On June 22, 2023, the second edition of the **HPV Prevention Policy Atlas**<sup>1</sup> was launched at the Romanian Parliament. This innovative visual communication tool, led by the **European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF)** and supported by the **European Cancer Organisation (ECO)**, provides invaluable insights into the state of HPV prevention policies across the European region. It not only benchmarks and evaluates countries' performance in three critical areas - primary prevention (vaccination), secondary prevention (screening), and online information dissemination - but also serves as a crucial means of communication, calling for action where needed.

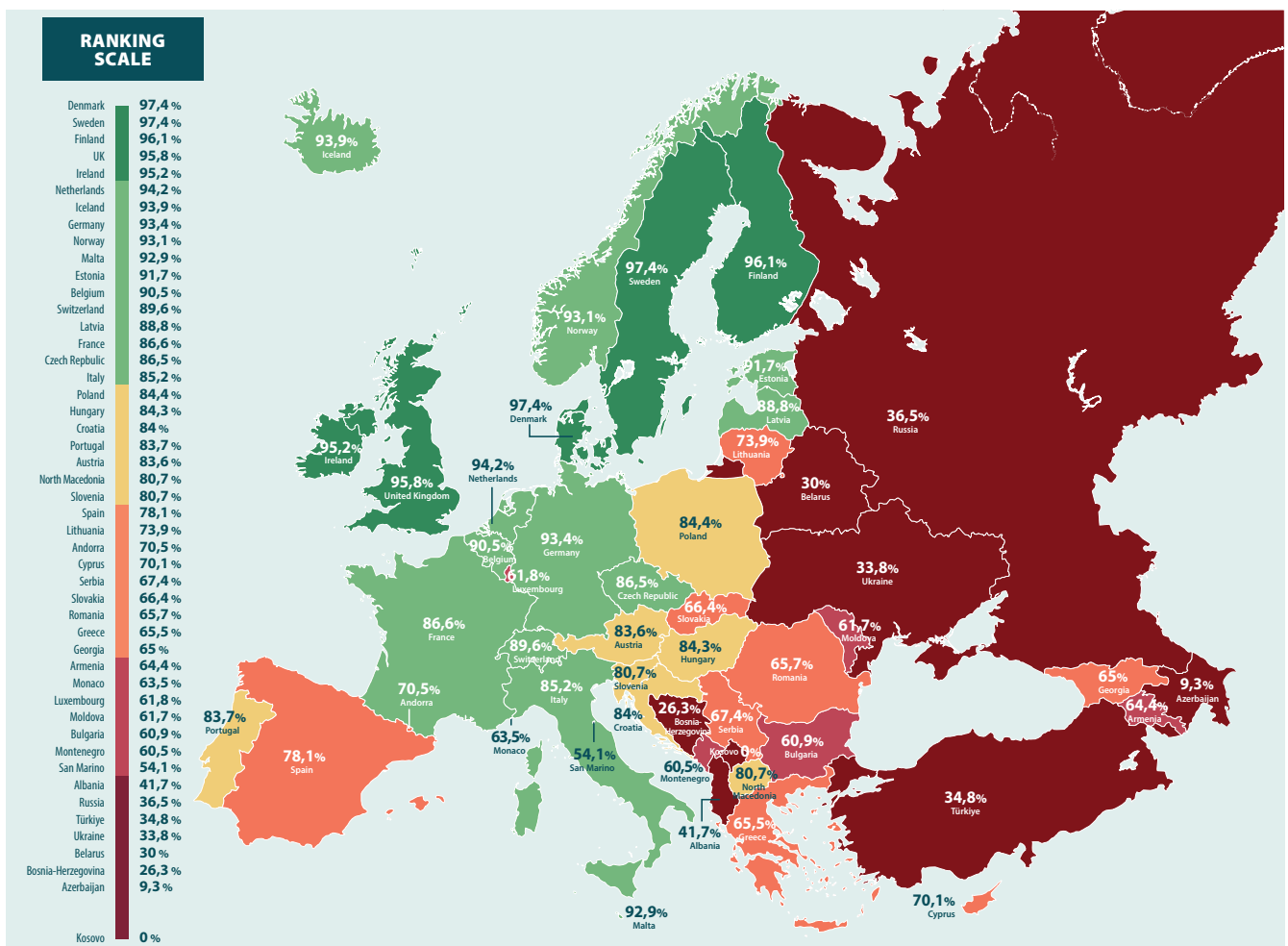
### A Varied Landscape

The HPV Prevention Policy Atlas reveals a significant disparity in HPV prevention policies across Europe. While some nations have made commendable progress, others lag behind (Figure 1).

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Figure 1

HPV Prevention Policy Atlas 2023<sup>1</sup>. Available at: <https://www.epfweb.org/node/552>

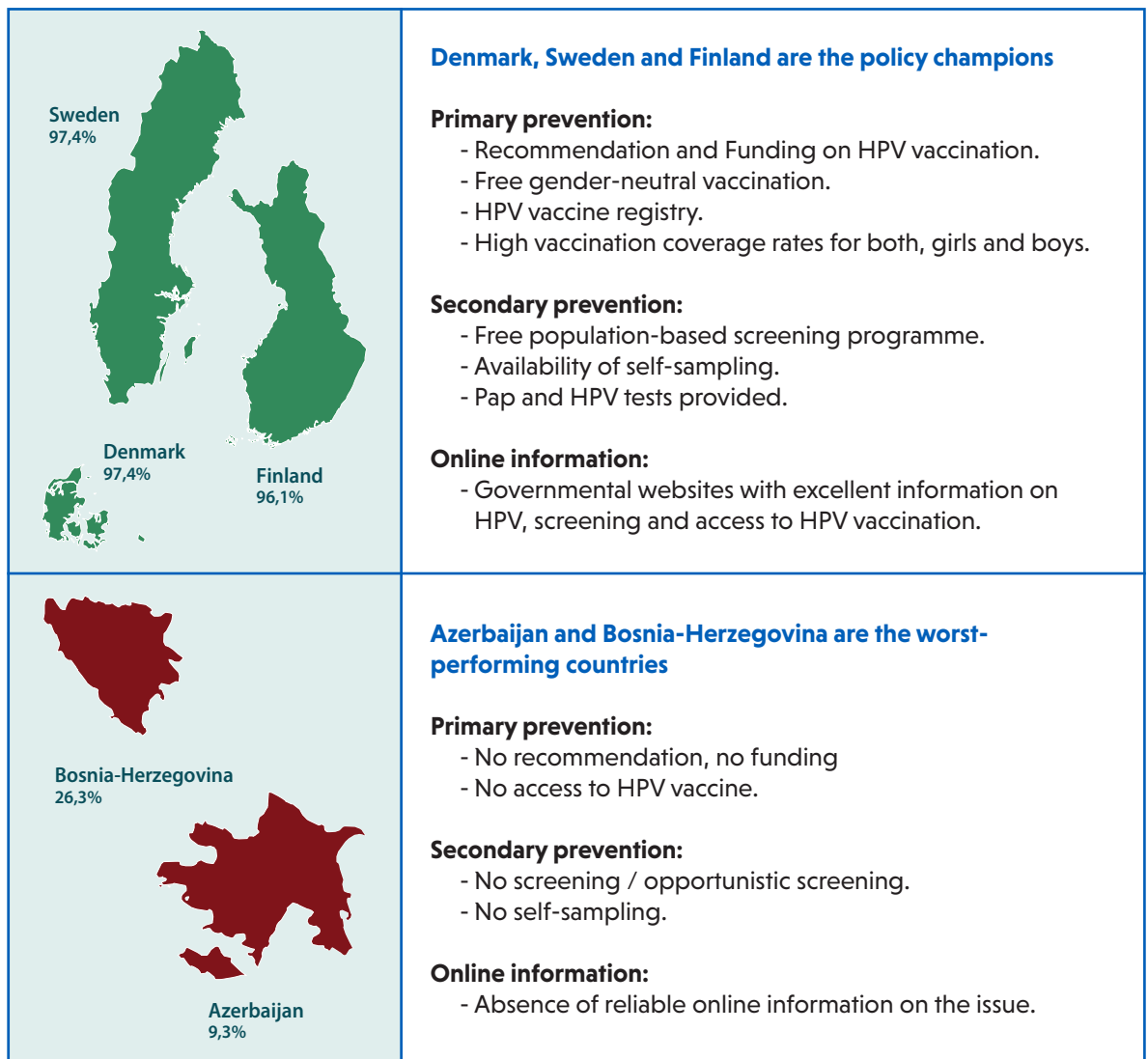


The best-performing countries (Figure 2) include Denmark, Sweden, Finland, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. These countries have implemented best-practice policies, including gender-neutral and freely available national vaccination programmes, leading to high vaccination rates. They also offer free HPV screening for adults and

provide accessible, accurate information through government-hosted websites. In contrast, Azerbaijan and Bosnia-Herzegovina find themselves at the bottom of the rankings (Figure 2) as they lack primary and secondary prevention policies and reliable, evidence-based information on HPV prevention.

Figure 2

Policy champions and worst performing countries<sup>1</sup>.



**Cervical and other cancers caused by HPV remain an important health challenge in Europe. HPV is responsible for approximately 90,000 cancer cases each year in Europe, all of which are preventable through vaccination, screening, and public health campaigns.**

### Europe's HPV Challenge

Cervical and other cancers caused by HPV remain an important health challenge in Europe. HPV is responsible for approximately 90,000 cancer cases each year in Europe, all of which are preventable through vaccination, screening, and public health campaigns. Inequalities persist in both their incidence and mortality rates. [Europe's Beating Cancer Plan](#) and the [World Health Organization's](#) roadmap on cervical cancer elimination outline clear steps regarding vaccination and screening, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated action. The Beating Cancer Plan is also committed to tackling all the non-cervical cancers caused by HPV.

### A Call to Action through Communication

The Atlas aims to bring together a diverse group, including Members of Parliament, government

officials, academia, and civil society to mobilize collective efforts to enhance policies related to HPV vaccinations, screenings, and information coverage in Europe. It also underscores the importance of implementing the goals of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan concerning HPV cancer prevention.

### Key Findings

Out of 48 countries in geographical Europe:

- 39 countries (83%) offer a national routine vaccination programme.
- 30 countries (64%) provide gender-neutral vaccination.
- 23 countries (49%) maintain an HPV vaccination registry.
- 25 countries (53%) offer easy-to-find, government-hosted websites with good or excellent information on HPV prevention.

**HPV Prevention Policy Atlas (...) serves as a call to action, a reminder that the battle against HPV-related cancers is far from over, and that concerted efforts are needed to ensure that all European citizens receive the level of protection currently available in only a minority of countries.**

### Recommendations

The release of the HPV Prevention Policy Atlas's second edition shines a spotlight on the disparities in HPV prevention policies across Europe. It serves as a call to action, a reminder that the battle against HPV-related cancers is far from over and that concerted efforts are needed to ensure that all European citizens receive the level of protection currently available in only a minority of countries. HPV remains a significant public health concern worldwide, but there are several key recommendations that can help states establish

effective control programmes, based on scientific evidence and best practices ([Table 1](#)).

By adopting these recommendations, States can take significant steps toward reducing the burden of HPV-related cancers, saving lives, and promoting the overall health and well-being of their populations. These measures underscore the importance of a comprehensive approach to HPV control that encompasses both vaccination and screening initiatives. ■

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### DISCLOSURE

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Table 1

Summary of the HPV Prevention Policy Atlas recommendations<sup>1</sup>.



- **Include HPV vaccination in routine State schedules:** States should incorporate HPV vaccination into their routine vaccination schedules. This proactive approach ensures that young individuals are protected against HPV-related diseases early in life.
- **Establish gender-neutral vaccination:** To maximise protection for both genders, states should include boys in HPV vaccination coverage. This not only safeguards boys but also contributes to the overall reduction of HPV transmission and disease burden amongst girls.
- **Offer free HPV vaccination:** To ensure equitable access, states should provide HPV vaccines free of charge. This removes financial barriers and promotes higher vaccination rates.
- **Implement mature population-based screening programmes:** States should prioritize the development of mature population-based screening programmes. These programmes are essential to reach the entire population effectively and save women's lives by detecting HPV-related diseases early.
- **Provide free screening services:** Just as with vaccination, screening for HPV-related diseases should be offered free of charge. This encourages individuals to participate in regular screenings and promotes early detection.
- **Increase vaccination and screening rates:** States must work toward significantly increasing vaccination coverage rates and screening levels. Making these services publicly available through various healthcare providers and facilities is crucial in achieving this goal.
- **Utilize HPV testing and self-sampling:** Offer screening using HPV testing methods and self-sampling options. These approaches can increase screening participation, especially among underserved populations.
- **Provide evidence-based information:** States should actively educate their citizens by providing reliable, evidence-based information about HPV screening and vaccination. This information should include where to access these services, emphasising their importance for individual and public health.
- **Enhance data collection:** To monitor the effectiveness of their HPV control programmes, States should invest in better data collection methods. This includes tracking HPV screening rates and vaccination coverage rates, enabling continuous improvement and targeted interventions.

#### REFERENCES:

1. European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and European Cancer Organisation. HPV Prevention Policy Atlas. June 2023. Available at: <https://www.epfweb.org/node/552>

### EXPERT GROUP:

The below group of experts in HPV cancer supported EPF in designing the questions and structures for the HPV Prevention Policy Atlas:

- Peter Baker, HPV Action Network. Consultant, European Cancer Organisation.
- Dr. Murat Gultekin, Hacettepe University. Head of ESGO Prevention Committee and ENGAGE, Ankara, Türkiye.
- Professor Daniel Kelly, Co-Chair of the European Cancer Organisation's HPV Action Network.
- Menia Koukougiani, Co-founder of NGO KARKINAKI, Awareness for Childhood and Adolescent Cancer, Greece.
- Federica Marra, Communications. Coordinator Think Young.
- Dr. Margaret Stanley, Emeritus Professor of Epithelial Biology, University of Cambridge.
- Cătălin Teniță, Member of the Romanian Parliament (Chamber of Deputies).
- Project Coordinators: Marina Davidashvili and Leonidas Galeridis.

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