



A Shared Vision for
SOUTH EAST EUROPE
ELIMINATING HPV CANCERS TOGETHER
Sofia, 23 January 2025

JOINT DECLARATION 'MESSAGE ACROSS BORDERS' A Regional Call to Action to Eliminate HPV in South East Europe

Preamble

We, the undersigned, representing the countries and organisations in the South East Europe region, acknowledge the significant public health challenge posed by the human papillomavirus (HPV) and its associated cancers and other diseases. In line with the World Health Organization's global strategy to eliminate cervical cancer and the objectives of **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan**, we hereby commit to working collaboratively towards the elimination of HPV-related diseases for people of all genders in the region.

1. Strengthening Data and Monitoring Systems

We emphasise the critical importance of robust data collection and public registry systems (e.g. dashboards) as the foundation of effective HPV policies. Comprehensive, high-quality data enable evidence-based decision-making, facilitate policy implementation and cross-border collaboration, and ensure accountability. We commit to developing and maintaining population-based registries to monitor HPV prevalence, vaccination coverage, and screening outcomes, thereby informing regional and national strategies.

2. Engaging Stakeholders for Collective Action

We recognise that eliminating HPV requires collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including governments, healthcare professionals, civil society organisations, academic institutions, and international partners. We commit to building partnerships that promote awareness, drive resource mobilisation, and strengthen advocacy efforts, ensuring a cohesive approach to achieving our common objective.

3. Expanding Gender-Neutral Vaccination Coverage

HPV vaccination remains a cornerstone of prevention. We commit to scaling up vaccination programmes to achieve high coverage rates across all eligible populations, ensuring equitable access for everyone regardless of gender. Special attention will be given to promoting **gender-neutral vaccination** to protect all individuals, reaching underserved communities, and addressing barriers such as vaccine hesitancy, misinformation, and logistical challenges.

4. Enhancing Screening Programmes

Screening programmes play a vital role in the early detection of HPV-related diseases. We commit to implementing national cervical cancer screening programmes, and to strengthening and standardising screening protocols across the region, with a focus on ensuring quality assurance and accessibility. By integrating innovative screening technologies and providing training for healthcare providers, we aim to maximise the effectiveness of early intervention measures.

5. Addressing Common Challenges Together

We acknowledge the shared challenges that hinder progress, including disparities in healthcare infrastructure, resource limitations, and cross-border issues. We commit to exchanging knowledge, sharing best practices, and seeking joint solutions to overcome these obstacles. Regional cooperation will be pivotal in advancing our collective capacity to eliminate HPV-related diseases. In response to these challenges, we call upon national governments, the World Health Organization and other UN Agencies to take action on the following priorities:

- **Enhancing coordination across South East Europe** to ensure alignment in policies, strategies, and resource allocation for more effective public health initiatives.
- **Prioritising HPV vaccination and screening** as key public health objectives to drive sustained improvements in coverage rates.
- **Addressing infrastructure and vaccination capacity challenges** to ensure efficient implementation and access across all regions.
- **Expanding and strengthening national screening programmes** for HPV-related cancers, ensuring accessibility, high quality, and equity for all genders.
- **Expanding national HPV vaccination programmes for boys and girls**, and promoting equal access to life-saving prevention measures.
- **Implementing school-based HPV vaccination** initiatives to reach younger populations and promote widespread immunisation.
- **Introducing standardised HPV screening tests and self-sampling models** across Europe to enhance early detection and accessibility.
- **Ensuring specialised, long-term care and follow-up for all women** with positive HPV screening results.
- **Establishing systems for real-time data evaluation on vaccination and screening progress** to guide informed decision-making and programme improvements.
- **Empowering family doctors, general practitioners, and key healthcare providers** with comprehensive knowledge on the efficacy and safety of the gender-neutral HPV vaccination, while providing strategies to address and overcome vaccine hesitancy.
- **Enhancing general practitioners training programmes on HPV** through the integration of robust scientific evidence, recognising that healthcare providers are the most trusted resource for patients, as demonstrated by research findings.

By signing this declaration, we express our determination to eliminate HPV-related diseases in South East Europe. Through enhanced cooperation, increased vaccination and screening, and addressing the region's common challenges, we aim to create a future free from the burden of HPV, safeguarding the health of future generations.

23 January 2025

