



Europe is falling behind on vital cervical cancer screening

[FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE]

Brussels, 20 November – Each year brings with it 58,000 new cases of cervical cancer in Europe and 27,000 deaths from the disease – all the result of the human papillomavirus (HPV).

It does not have to be this way.

Europe has all it needs to put an end to cervical cancer once and for all. But vaccination and screening efforts remain uneven, resulting in thousands of women still dangerously exposed to HPV.

That's the message of a new report just released by the **European Cancer Organisation (ECO)**. The paper, [Closing the Gaps: The Status of Cervical Cancer Screening Programmes in Europe](#), provides the first Europe-wide analysis of national cervical screening programmes.

Across the region, participation in screening varies dramatically, from over 80% in some northern countries to below 50% in others. Such variation is often driven by socio-economic, geographic, and systemic barriers, with women in rural areas, those with lower incomes, disabilities, or migrant backgrounds facing the highest obstacles to access.

'This report makes one message unmistakably clear: Europe has the knowledge and the tools to eliminate cervical cancer, but progress will stall unless we close the persistent gaps in access, data, and programme quality,' said **Prof. Daniel Kelly**, co-chair of ECO's HPV & Hep B Action Network. 'By shifting to primary HPV testing, investing in robust registries, and embedding equity at every step, Member States can deliver prevention to all - not just to those easiest to reach. Achieving elimination is possible, but only if we deliver screening systems that work for every woman, in every community.'

Closing the Gaps combines policy mapping, implementation analysis, and practical recommendations, turning data into actionable guidance for national policymakers and programme leaders.

The report includes specific recommendations that support Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and its goal of screening 90% of eligible women by 2030.



- **Invitation and call-recall systems:** ensuring every eligible woman is invited for screening at regular intervals – including women from underserved or marginalised communities – by using targeted communication and addressing social and cultural barriers
- **Screening tools and intervals:** transitioning from Pap smears to primary HPV testing and introducing risk-based screening intervals and clear follow-up pathways to ensure timely treatment and continuity of care for all women
- **Registries and quality assurance:** establishing robust data systems to track participation, monitor quality, and measure outcomes. These should be interoperable, linking vaccination, screening, and treatment outcomes, and should link national registries with the European Health Data Space

‘Behind every statistic in this report is a woman who may be missed by the system - because of where she lives, her income, her disability, or the language she speaks,’ said **Prof. Margaret Stanley**, co-chair of the ECO HPV & Hep B Action Network. ‘Closing the gaps means meeting people where they are: offering self-collection, community outreach, trusted local support, and clear information in every language and format. Cervical cancer elimination will only be achieved when every woman feels seen, heard, and enabled to access the care she deserves.’

To arrange an interview with ECO policy experts about the report, please contact:

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Notes to Editors:

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus transmitted through skin-to-skin and sexual contact. Most infections clear on their own, but persistent infection with high-risk HPV variants can cause cancers of the cervix, vagina, vulva, anus, penis, and head and neck. The vast majority of cervical cancer cases are caused by highly infectious types of HPV.

Primary HPV testing is the DNA-based test now preferred for cervical cancer screening due to its higher sensitivity. It is the only test endorsed by the European Commission Initiative on Cervical Cancer.



About the European Cancer Organisation

The European Cancer Organisation (ECO) is the largest non-profit, multi-professional federation in Europe. It brings together hundreds of different professional societies and patient groups to advocate for more effective, efficient, and equitable cancer care.

More information available [here](#).