

## Breast Cancer Inequalities in the European Union



# ITALY

Since 2021, the Italian government has instituted **13 October as National Metastatic Breast Cancer Day**. During this day, several programs and initiatives are held to raise awareness of Metastatic Breast Cancer, such as lighting up the Tower of Pisa in pink and various national campaigns by non-profit organisations <sup>1, 2, 3</sup>

TBCT welcomes the introduction of a National Metastatic Breast Cancer Day.

**Awareness is key!**

The next European Commission and European Parliament need to do more for metastatic and advanced breast cancer patients

**TBCT**

Transforming Breast  
Cancer Together

## Breast cancer mortality

**ITALY HAS THE SECOND-HIGHEST NUMBER OF BREAST CANCER DEATHS IN THE EU, AMOUNTING TO 17.33% OF CANCER MORTALITY <sup>4</sup>**

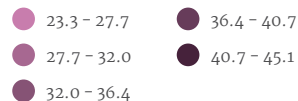
In Italy, it is estimated that

**15,455** WOMEN DIED FROM BREAST CANCER IN 2022

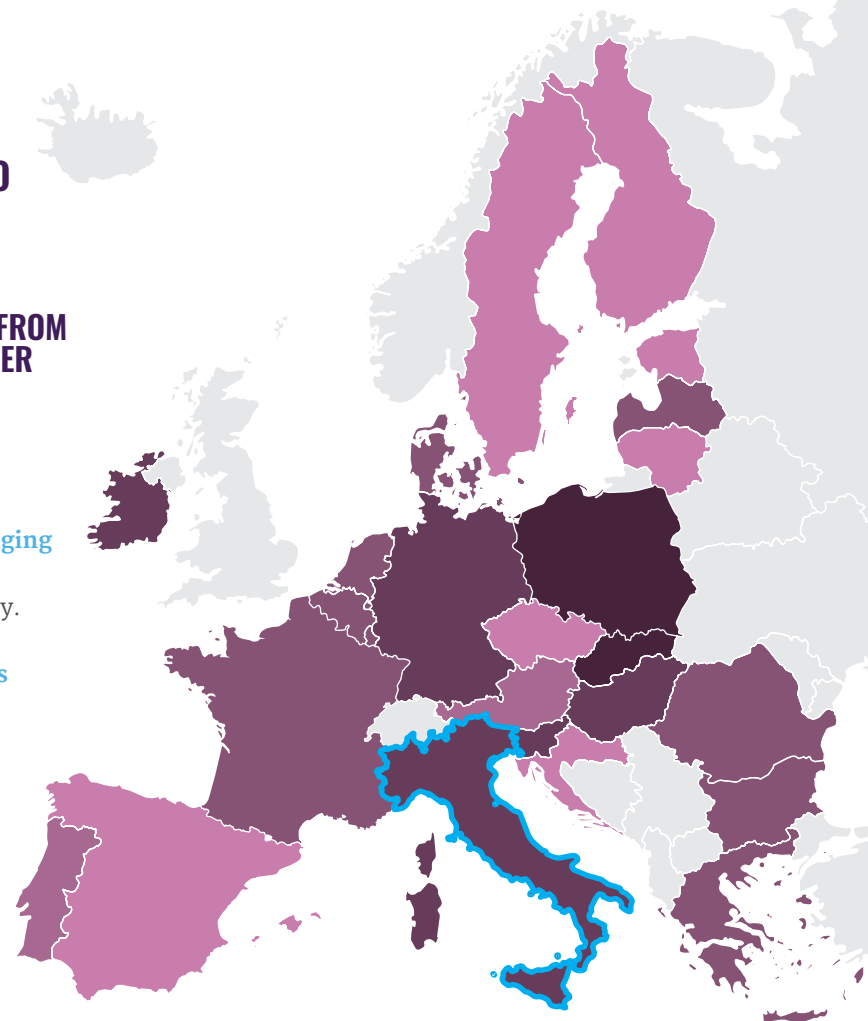
Treating breast cancer at an **early stage gives patients the best chance of managing the disease**, significantly reducing the burden on patients, families, and society. TBCT urges policymakers to **prioritise early detection and ensure equal access to timely and effective screening and treatment** across all Member States

### Mortality

per 100,000 women



EU27, Women, Breast Cancer, All Ages, Age-Standardised Rate (European Standard Population) per 100,000 (2022) <sup>5</sup>



## Did you know?

According to latest data from 2021, nearly 50% of all breast units are in Northern Italy, 28.8% in the centre and 25.6% in the South. Based on an agreement between the central government and the regions, each region has been developing a multidisciplinary breast care centre for every 250,000 inhabitants, treating at least 150 new cases per year <sup>6,7</sup>

TBCT welcomes the progress in Italy, but urges to **establish Comprehensive Cancer Centres (CCCs) to address holistic patient needs**. It is essential that these centres provide **equal levels of care and address regional disparities**

## The care journey



OF OVER 194,148 NEW CANCERS  
DIAGNOSED IN WOMEN (2022),

29,6%

57,468 - 29,6% 194,148 (2022)

ARE BREAST CANCER DETECTED BOTH IN  
THE EARLY AND ADVANCED STAGES <sup>8,9</sup>

The survival rate at 5 years  
after diagnosis is 88%

The journey to better outcomes for patients begins by ensuring that healthcare providers, policymakers, and the broader medical community have a **clear understanding of the diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment options for breast cancer at every stage**



Italy has established breast units in various hospitals, such as the breast unit at the European Institute of Oncology in Milan. These units offer integrated care through multidisciplinary teams comprising oncologists, radiologists, pathologists, and plastic surgeons, ensuring standardised treatment protocols and patient support services

While staffing CCCs across the EU is crucial, TBCT emphasises that these centres must be equipped with **sufficient, well-trained, and multi-disciplinary teams**. It is particularly important that CCCs adhere to **established quality standards and guidelines** to effectively address the unique needs of breast cancer patients, including those with advanced and metastatic breast cancer

## Inequalities in breast cancer screening

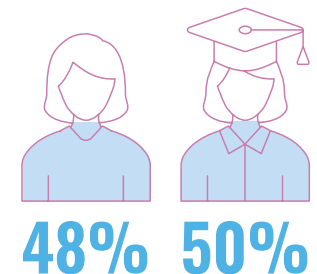


55,9%

OF ELIGIBLE WOMEN  
PARTICIPATED IN  
A BREAST CANCER  
SCREENING IN 2021 <sup>10</sup>

Implementing Europe's Beating Cancer Plan initiatives across all Member States is essential, including the European Union Cancer Screening Scheme's goal of providing **screening across all Member States to 90% of eligible EU citizens** by 2025

Italy shows a **minimal gap in breast cancer screening coverage**, with 50% of higher-educated women and 48% of women without a university education participating in screenings <sup>11</sup>



To address the inequalities in breast cancer screening, implementation of prevention strategies, and testing across the EU, TBCT strongly advocates for **policies that guarantee every patient access to high-quality care, regardless of location or socio-economic background**. It is crucial to implement measures that ensure equitable healthcare access, enabling all women to benefit from **early detection and effective treatment**

## Use of biomarker technologies in breast cancer



# TWO TYPES OF GENE BIOMARKER TESTING ARE USED IN BREAST CANCER: GENETIC & GENOMIC

## GENETIC

Genetic testing allows the identification of specific gene alterations and, therefore, informs patients of their high risk of developing breast cancer or their treatment options

TBCT calls for the launch of a **European Commission initiative** (e.g. a Communication) **on a comprehensive genetic & genomic testing strategy**

## GENOMIC

Genomic biomarker testing is performed to determine the type of cancer and guide possible personalised treatments



In Italy, although biomarker testing methods such as IHC and FISH **are available in routine clinical practice**, other genomic testing such as PCR, liquid biopsies and NGS small, **have a medium availability**, limiting patient access to the correct treatment <sup>12</sup>

To ensure that each breast cancer patient receives the right treatment at the right time, it is essential to **improve awareness, healthcare workforce understanding, infrastructure, funding and reimbursement of biomarker testing**. This is particularly critical for those living with metastatic disease

## Access to treatment - rate of availability of oncology treatment



... is the time that patients in Italy **must wait** after the central EU marketing authorisation to access an innovative oncology treatment.<sup>13</sup> **The European Union's average is 526 days**

As of January 2023, **of the 46 drugs approved by the European Medicines Agency, 37 are fully publicly available** (listed in the reimbursement list)<sup>14</sup>

TBCT supports cutting red tape to **streamline the approval and adoption of new therapies to ensure equal patient access**

## AVAILABILITY OF BIOMARKER TECHNIQUES ACROSS COUNTRIES <sup>12</sup>

|                            |                | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|----------------------------|----------------|---------|-----------------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|
|                            |                | IHC*    | FISH**<br>Lung_breast_<br>Gastric | PCR***       | NGS****<br>Small | Liquid<br>Biopsies |
| Western European Countries | Austria        | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Belgium        | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Cyprus         | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Denmark        | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Finland        | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | France         | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Germany        | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Greece         | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Ireland        | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Italy          | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Luxembourg     | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Malta          | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Netherlands    | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Norway         | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
| Portugal                   | Always         | Usually | Occasionally                      | Research     | Never            |                    |
| Spain                      | Always         | Usually | Occasionally                      | Research     | Never            |                    |
| Sweden                     | Always         | Usually | Occasionally                      | Research     | Never            |                    |
| Eastern European Countries | Bulgaria       | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Croatia        | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Czech Republic | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Estonia        | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Hungary        | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Latvia         | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Lithuania      | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Poland         | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Romania        | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
|                            | Slovakia       | Always  | Usually                           | Occasionally | Research         | Never              |
| Slovenia                   | Always         | Usually | Occasionally                      | Research     | Never            |                    |

\* IHC: Immunohistochemistry

\*\*\* PCR: polymerase chain reaction

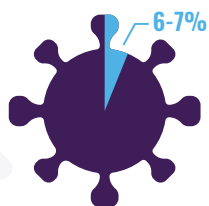
\*\* FISH: Fluorescence in situ hybridization

\*\*\*\* NGS: next-generation sequencing

## Metastatic Breast Cancer



Metastatic Breast Cancer refers to an advanced stage of breast cancer where the disease spreads to another part of the body



IT IS ESTIMATED THAT IN **6-7% OF CASES IN ITALY, BREAST CANCER IS ALREADY METASTATIC AT DIAGNOSIS**

In Italy,

**37,000** WOMEN LIVE WITH METASTATIC BREAST CANCER (2020)<sup>15</sup>



## NO STRUCTURED METASTATIC BREAST CANCER DATA IS AVAILABLE FOR ITALY

**Why does it matter?** Registries are crucial for metastatic breast cancer patients as they provide vital data on treatments, outcomes, and survival rates, enabling a better understanding of the disease and guiding treatment decisions to improve patient care and outcomes

TBCT calls on every Member State to have **harmonised breast cancer data collection, which includes metastatic and advanced breast cancer data, as well as relapse**, across the European Union to facilitate research and improve knowledge and care



1/11



## WOMEN IN THE EU-27 WILL DEVELOP BREAST CANCER BEFORE THE AGE OF 74<sup>16</sup>

**Transforming Breast Cancer Together** (TBCT) is a unique multi-stakeholder group representing patient and healthcare professional organisations, experts, and industry whose mission is to place the needs of those living with breast cancer at the heart of European policymaking. Together we can improve outcomes for breast cancer patients, survivors, and their families

Breast cancer **has an impact** on everyone

[www.tbct.eu](http://www.tbct.eu)

**TBCT**

Transforming Breast Cancer Together

### References:

<sup>1</sup>Euractiv (2021) / <sup>2</sup>turismo.pisa.it / <sup>3</sup>accademiaitaliana.com / <sup>4</sup>European Cancer Information System (2022) / <sup>5</sup>European Commission, Breast Cancer in the EU (2023) - factsheet / <sup>6</sup>Women's choices of hospital for breast cancer surgery in Italy: Quality and equity implications (2023) / <sup>7</sup>Euractiv (2021) / <sup>8</sup>European Cancer Information System / <sup>9</sup>Five-year relative survival by stage of breast and colon cancers in Italy (2021) / <sup>10</sup>Preventive cancer screenings - programme data (Eurostat) / <sup>11</sup>OECD - Beating Cancer Inequalities in the EU (2024) - p.36 / <sup>12</sup>ESMO study on the availability and accessibility of biomolecular technologies in oncology in Europe-p.938 / <sup>13</sup>EFPIA WAIT Patient Indicator - p.20 & 22 / <sup>14</sup>National registers authorised medicines / <sup>15</sup>Instituto Gentili / <sup>16</sup>Data from Europa Donna