Breast Cancer Inequalities
in the European Union

SWEDEN

In the 1980s, the Swedish population-based breast cancer screening program was launched. The program now covers all women registered as Swedish residents between the ages of 40 and 74, with a suggested screening interval of 18 to 24 months. There is no cost attached to the screening for breast cancer. As a result, Sweden has a high breast cancer survival rate and is one of the EU Member States with the lowest breast cancer mortality rates in the EU [1]

TBCT supports the extension of the age range for screening in the EU recommendations. Sweden's positive results prove the importance of screening and early detection of breast cancer for better patient outcomes. It is essential that the EU institutions work together to ensure that all EU Member States follow this good practice and that European citizens have equal access to screening

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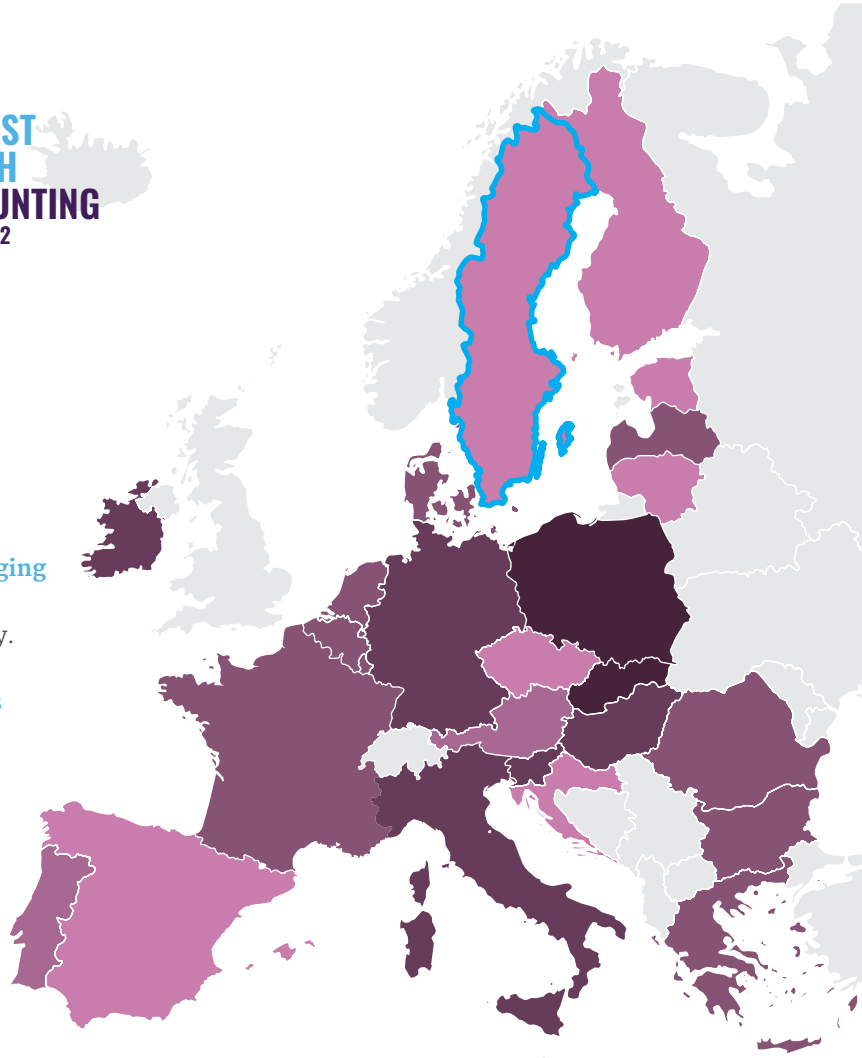
Breast cancer mortality

BREAST CANCER IS THE THIRD MOST COMMON CAUSE OF CANCER DEATH AMONGST SWEDISH WOMEN, AMOUNTING TO 12,5% OF CANCER MORTALITY [2]

In Sweden, it is estimated that

1,535 WOMEN DIED FROM BREAST CANCER IN 2022 [2]

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



EU27, Women, Breast Cancer, All Ages, Age-Standardised Rate (European Standard Population) per 100,000 (2022) [3]

Did you know?

In April 2024, a project focusing on the potential for Artificial Intelligence (AI) to estimate breast cancer risk was launched in Sweden. 70,000 women between 40 and 74 years old will undergo breast cancer screening, with 35,000 women checked every two years. Another 35,000 women will receive the same screening with the addition of risk assessments using the developed AI model. This program aims to find structural patterns in images of women's mammography and detect cancer at an early stage [4]

TBCT supports the implementation of digital technologies that help identify breast cancer at an early stage

The care journey

OF OVER 28,136 NEW CANCERS DIAGNOSED IN WOMEN (2022),

26,5%

ARE BREAST CANCER DETECTED BOTH IN THE EARLY AND ADVANCED STAGES [5]

The number of women diagnosed with primary breast cancer is increasing [6]

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**

Sweden emphasises multidisciplinary breast cancer care through specialised Breast Cancer Centers, such as the Skåne University Hospital in Lund. These centres provide comprehensive services, including genetic counselling, surgery, radiation therapy, and psychosocial support, with a focus on patient-centred care and shared decision-making

While staffing Comprehensive Cancer Centres (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

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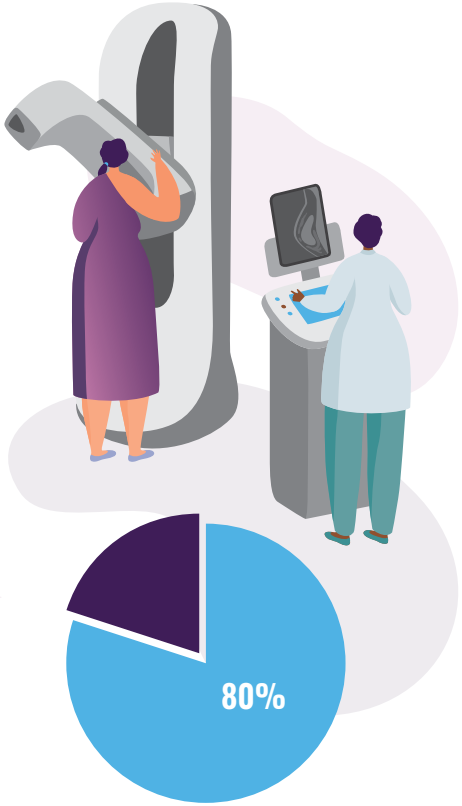
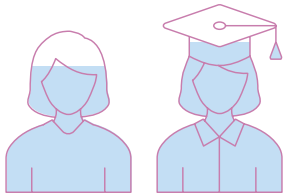


80%

OF ELIGIBLE WOMEN IN SWEDEN PARTICIPATED IN A CANCER SCREENING IN 2021 [7]

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

Sweden showed a **gap in screening coverage,** with 95% of higher-educated women undergoing screenings compared to only 78% of women who did not attend university [8]



78% 95%

To address the significant 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 Sweden, although biomarker testing methods such as IHC and FISH **are usually 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 [9]

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 patients in Sweden **must wait** after the central EU authorisation to access an oncology treatment.[10] **The European Union's average is 526 days**

As of January 2023, **of the 46 drugs approved by the European Medicines Agency, 30 are fully publicly available** (listed in the reimbursement list) [11]

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

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AVAILABILITY OF BIOMARKER TECHNIQUES ACROSS COUNTRIES [9]

Always	Usually	Occasionnaly	Research	Never

		IHC*	FISH** Lung_breast_ Gastric	PCR***	NGS**** Small	Liquid Biopsies
Western European Countries	Austria					
	Belgium					
	Cyprus					
	Denmark					
	Finland					
	France					
	Germany					
	Greece					
	Ireland					
	Italy					
	Luxembourg					
	Malta					
	Netherlands					
	Norway					
	Portugal					
	Spain					
	Sweden					
Eastern European Countries	Bulgaria					
	Croatia					
	Czech Republic					
	Estonia					
	Hungary					
	Latvia					
	Lithuania					
	Poland					
	Romania					
	Slovakia					
	Slovenia					

* IHC: Immunohistochemistry
** FISH: Fluorescence in situ hybridization
*** PCR: polymerase chain reaction
**** NGS: next-generation sequencing

Metastatic Breast Cancer (MBC)

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

15,000

NEWLY DIAGNOSED BREAST CANCER PATIENTS IN SWEDEN WERE FOUND TO HAVE MBC (2024) [6]

Around **5,500 women live with Metastatic Breast Cancer** in Sweden

2/5

ARE STILL ALIVE FIVE YEARS AFTER DIAGNOSED WITH MBC [6]

NO STRUCTURED METASTATIC BREAST CANCER DATA IS AVAILABLE FOR SWEDEN

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

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WOMEN IN THE EU-27 WILL DEVELOP BREAST CANCER BEFORE THE AGE OF 74 [12]

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

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References:
[1] OECD – EU Country Cancer Profile: Sweden (2023) – p.10 / [2] European Cancer Information System (2022) / [3] European Commission, Breast Cancer in the EU (2023) – factsheet / [4] Euractiv (2023) / [5] European Cancer Information System / [6] MD, PhD, and Ass. Professor in Oncology, Henrik Lindman at Uppsala University / [7] Preventive cancer screenings – programme data (Eurostat) / [8] OECD – Beating Cancer Inequalities in the EU (2024) – p.36 / [9] ESMO study on the availability and accessibility of biomolecular technologies in oncology in Europe–p.938 / [10] EFPIA WAIT Patient Indicator–p.20 & 22 / [11] National registers authorised medicines / [12] Data from Europa Donna